

Even with the Best of *Intentions*: Paternal Involvement and the Theory of Planned Behavior

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Implicit in much of the fatherhood discourse is the assumption that if fathers want to take an active role in their children's lives, they could and would do so. While research has highlighted the factors associated with fathers' involvement, very few, if any, of these studies have been guided by a theory that accounts for both fathers' involvement intentions and their ability to follow through on those intentions. The theory of planned behavior and its emphasis on attitudes, the beliefs of significant others, and whether one has control over engaging in behavior is a conceptual fit to respond to questions related to the complex nature of paternal involvement. Using data from the Fragile Families and Child Well-being Study, the purpose of this study was to test the utility of the theory of planned behavior in predicting fathers' involvement intentions and reports of involvement. The results revealed that the theory of planned behavior can be useful in examining paternal involvement and should be used in future research to enhance the fatherhood literature.

Keywords: Father; Fatherhood; Paternal Involvement; Theory of Planned Behavior; Fragile Families

Fam Proc 52:179–192, 2013

INTRODUCTION & LITERATURE REVIEW

In public discourse and family science, many assume that if fathers had a desire to be actively engaged in their children's lives, they could and would do so. The assumption that active and sustained involvement is within the volitional control of fathers without considering the circumstances surrounding their parenting is erroneous and contributes to the false dichotomy wherein involved fathers are good and those who cannot or do not sustain their involvement are characterized as deadbeats. In response, this study examines the theory of planned behavior (TPB) and its usefulness in explaining and predicting the intended and reported engagement of low-income fathers participating in the Fragile Families and Child Well-being Study.

Interest in fathers' involvement in the lives of their children has grown in the last 30 years. From a policy standpoint, much of this interest has been related to nonresident fathers and their willingness or ability to pay child support (Ellis, 2005; Plotnick, Garfinkel, McLanahan, & Ku, 2004). However, owing to shifts in the broader society related to women's increased participation in the labor market and public policies and initiatives promoting "responsible fatherhood," fathers are being encouraged to take more active

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roles in their children's affective growth and development (Lamb & Tamis-Lemonda, 2004). Specifically, there is more interest in aspects of fatherhood such as the quantity and quality of time spent in caregiving activities, the impact of fathers' involvement on children's socialization, and their ability or willingness to effectively coparent with their children's mothers (Burton & Hardaway, 2012; Gaskin-Butler, Engert, Markievitz, Swenson, & McHale, 2012; Marsiglio, Amato, Day, & Lamb, 2000; McHale & Waller, 2012). A by-product of this increased interest in fatherhood and the roles of fathers is that the fatherhood literature has been significantly bolstered. In addition to research findings that support the notion that there is an association between children and families with higher levels of paternal involvement and positive outcomes (Jackson, Choi, & Franke, 2009; Marsiglio et al., 2000; Roggman, Boyce, Cook, Christiansen, & Jones, 2004), several studies have highlighted the factors that serve to facilitate or truncate fathers' involvement. Specifically, on an intrapersonal level, researchers have found that the ability to contribute to children's financial well-being (Krishnakumar & Black, 2003), being more androgynous (Sanderson & Sanders-Thompson, 2002), and reporting higher levels of religiosity (Roggman, Boyce, Cook, & Cook, 2002) have been associated with higher levels of paternal involvement. On the other hand, having been previously incarcerated (Perry & Bright, 2012), being underemployed or unemployed (Bloomers, Sipe, & Ruedt, 2002; Meyer, Ha, & Hu, 2008), or having low parenting self-efficacy (Coles, 2009; Magill-Evans, Harrison, Benzies, Gierl, & Kimak, 2007) have been associated with lower levels of paternal involvement. On an interpersonal level, researchers have found that coresiding with children (Carlson, McLanahan, & Brooks-Gunn, 2008) and having a positive relationship with the child's mother (Dunn, 2004; Fagan & Palkovitz, 2007; Hamer, 1998) are associated with higher levels of paternal involvement. However, having a strained relationship with the child's mother in which she serves as a gatekeeper (Arditti, Smock, & Parkman, 2005; Laakso & Adams, 2006; Roy & Dyson, 2005; Waller, 2012) and fathers receiving low levels of support from the paternal extended family (Perry, 2009) have been associated with lower levels of paternal involvement. On an environmental level, public and private initiatives and campaigns aimed at raising awareness of the importance of involved fathers have been linked with increases in paternal involvement (Bronte-Tinkew, Bowie, & Moore, 2007). Contrarily, macroeconomic issues such as the decreasing availability of low- and semi-skilled manufacturing jobs (Roy, 2006) and punitive public policies that enforce child support collection (Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2007; Hall, Livingston, Henderson, Fisher, & Hines, 2007) much more aggressively than noncustodial parents' visitation rights (Perry, 2006) have been found to make involved fathering more difficult for many men. Despite the contributions of these studies in advancing the fatherhood literature, two salient questions remain largely unanswered. First, to what extent are fathers able to follow through on their desire to be actively involved in the lives of their children? Second, what theory provides a framework that is useful in guiding empirical examinations of these questions? In response to these questions, the purpose of this study was to examine the TPB and test its utility in the context of paternal involvement.

Paternal Involvement and Theory

In our review of the literature, we found that researchers had used numerous theories to guide their examinations of paternal involvement. Theories such as the identity theory (Dyer, 2005; Fox & Bruce, 2001; Kost, 2001; Roy, 2006), the paternal investment theory (Doherty, Kouneski, & Erickson, 1998; Fox & Bruce, 2001), the theoretical model of father involvement (Lamb, Pleck, Charnov, & Levine, 1987), the conceptual model of responsible fathering (Doherty et al., 1998), the theoretical model of nonresidential father involvement (Ibinger-Tallman, Pasley, & Buehler, 1993), social capital theory, ecological theory

(Pleck, 2007), role theory (Christmon, 1990; Letie & McKenry, 2006), and social exchange theory (Laakso & Adams, 2006) have all been used in research related to paternal involvement. Each of these theories has merit and has advanced our knowledge about the factors influencing paternal involvement. However, they have limited applicability with regard to explaining and predicting paternal involvement. The limited applicability is due to the erroneous implicit assumption that fathers' will and desire to be and remain actively involved with their children is enough to ensure that active involvement.

Role theory and identity theory espouse that fathers have multiple roles and identities and that the tasks associated with each of the roles and identities are ranked hierarchically based on fathers' priorities. Thus, fathers act on or engage in activities associated with the roles or identities that they prioritize. Social exchange and paternal investment theory maintain that fathers make decisions about the time, effort, and energy that they are willing to expend in fathering based on an internal cost-benefit analysis that weighs the costs of fathering activities against the potential benefits or rewards derived from engaging in those activities or the relative attractiveness of alternative uses of their efforts. Social capital theory is concerned with the extent to which fathers receive the benefits and advantages associated with their social relationships or can pass them onto their children, while ecological theory posits that fathers can contribute to their children's development at various "system" levels including the micro-, mezzo-, exo-, and macrosystems. Moreover, the theoretical model of father involvement, the conceptual model of responsible fathering, and the theoretical model of nonresidential father involvement are more descriptive than they are prescriptive. In other words, their utility lies in their ability to paint a picture of what involved fathering looks like, rather than explaining and predicting the factors associated with that involvement or the lack thereof.

The fact that these theories do not account for the extent to which becoming and remaining involved is within fathers' control severely limits their utility in explaining and predicting paternal involvement. This is because the contention that simply having a desire to be and remain involved is sufficient to initiate and sustain paternal involvement suggests that fathers who are or become disengaged do so because of a lack of interest or parental commitment. This oversimplification fails to take into consideration the complex and dynamic nature of paternal involvement, particularly for unmarried, low-income, or nonresident fathers in "fragile families" who may have limited access to their children.

Paternal Involvement and the Theory of Planned Behavior

The theory of planned behavior is offered as a viable theoretical lens for examining paternal involvement. Conceptually, TPB is versatile enough to account for the dynamic and complex nature of paternal engagement. TPB was developed by Ajzen (1985) as an extension of the theory of reasoned action (TRA), both of which focus on what motivates an individual to implement a particular behavior (Montano & Kasprzyk, 2008). TRA was initially created by Fishbein (1967) to study the connection between an individual's attitudes regarding a behavior, intention to perform the behavior, and the actual performance of the behavior. In studying the relationships between these three factors, Fishbein found that one's attitude toward a behavior was a reliable predictor of performing that behavior (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Like other theories that have been used in an attempt to predict and explain paternal involvement, the TRA assumes that the behavior to be performed is within an individual's volitional control or that the individual has control over performing the specific behavior (Montano & Kasprzyk, 2008). However, as with many social and health issues, this is not always the case. Therefore, Ajzen (1991) extended the TRA to account for those behaviors that may be outside of an individual's volitional control. As a result, TPB suggests that behavior is not only a function of the intention to perform the behavior, but it is also a function of the individual's ability to perform the behavior

(Montano & Kasprzyk, 2008). Although it has been most often applied to explain health behaviors including sleep patterns (Kor & Mullan, 2011), binge drinking (French & Cooke, 2012), smoking (Ben, Golube, & Shamrai, 2010), and contraceptive use (Suvivuo, Tossavainen, & Kontula, 2009), it may also be appropriate for examining paternal engagement. The theory proposes that human behavior is largely determined by intention and that there are three determinants of intention: attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. Attitudes are a product of the individual's behavioral beliefs about the outcomes of performing a behavior and the evaluation of those behavioral outcomes. Subjective norms are a product of whether an individual believes other meaningful people approve or disapprove of the behavior and their motivation to comply with those people. Lastly, perceived behavioral control is determined by an individual's control beliefs (i.e., whether there are barriers to their control over the behaviors) and the perceived power the individual feels they have over these barriers to perform the behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Accounting for perceived behavioral control is important as Ajzen (1988) states, "The theory assumes that perceived behavioral control has motivational implications for intentions. People who believe that they have neither the resources, nor the opportunities to perform a certain behavior are unlikely to form strong behavioral intentions to engage in it even if they hold favorable attitudes toward the behavior and believe that important others would approve of their performing the behavior" (p. 133). Thus, TPB is an appropriate theoretical lens for examining paternal involvement because it accounts for the dynamic nature of paternal involvement by addressing the intrapersonal (e.g., attitudes and beliefs), interpersonal (e.g., subjective norms or the thoughts of significant others), and the environmental (e.g., external resources or constraints influencing perceptions about volitional control) factors that shape men's intentions related to their involvement, as well as their ability to act on those intentions.

In other TPB studies, French and Cooke (2012) recruited college students into their study on binge drinking as they entered a sports bar. They found that students who intended to and subsequently drank heavily were more likely to view binge drinking favorably, believe that their friends and favorite sports teams would approve, and had enough disposable income to purchase large amounts of alcohol. Moreover, in their study examining pregnant women's smoking cessation efforts, Ben et al. (2010) found that the women who were successful were those with negative attitudes toward smoking while pregnant and those who had significant others including spouses, family, and primary physicians, who felt they should stop smoking while pregnant. However, according to the authors, "The major factor affecting women's intention to smoke while pregnant is their feeling of being able to overcome the barriers to quitting smoking while pregnant (perceived control)" (Ben et al., 2010, p. 392). Therefore, it stands to reason that to accurately explain and predict paternal involvement, one must take into account fathers' attitude toward being involved in the lives of their children, the extent to which significant others support their involvement and their ability to control life circumstances affecting their intended involvement. Thus, the theory of planned behavior provides us with the opportunity to study paternal involvement as a voluntary action with variations of volitional control and the ability to measure that control. Figure 1 displays the theoretical model hypothesizing the relationship between the constructs of TPB, fathers' engagement intentions, and other demographic and control variables and fathers' reported level of engagement with their children.

METHODS

Data Source

The data for this study were drawn from a sample of the Fragile Families and Child Well-being Study (hereafter "Fragile Families"), a national study that followed a cohort of

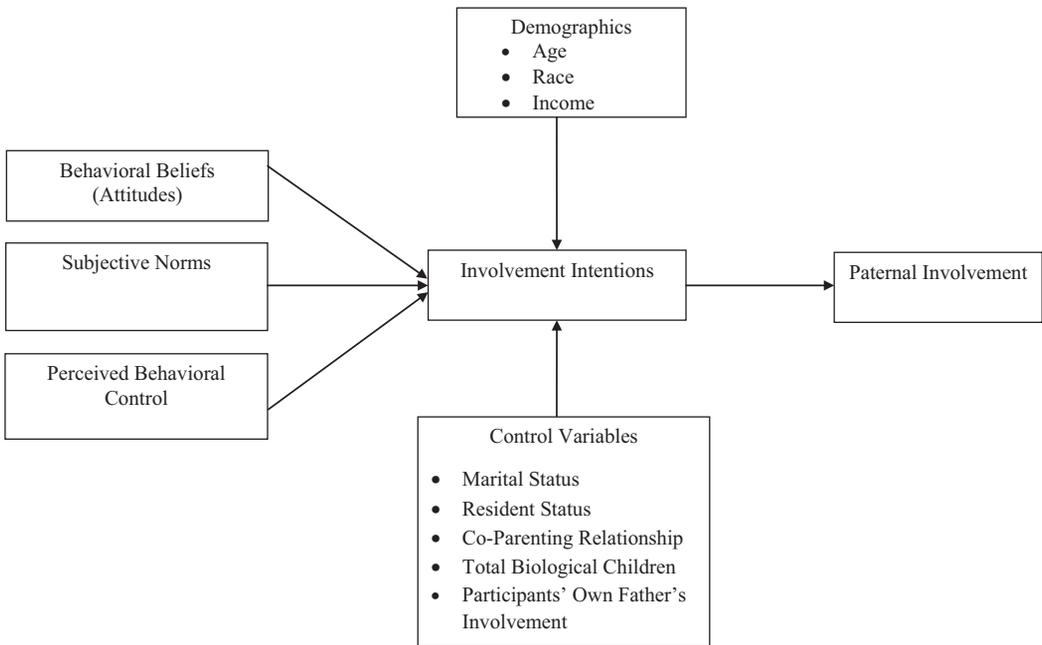


FIGURE 1. Conceptual Model for the Theory of Planned Behavior and Paternal Involvement

low-income married and unmarried parents and their young children living in twenty U.S. cities with populations over 200,000. The Fragile Families Study was designed primarily to investigate the conditions of low-income and unmarried families, how children born into these families fare, and how local policies and environmental circumstances affect families (Center for Research on Child Well-being, 2008). Baseline data were collected between 1998 and 2000. Fathers were also interviewed in the hospital when possible and contacted in other locations if they were not present at the birth (Reichman, Teitler, Garfinkel, & McLanahan, 2001). Parents were re-interviewed for 1-, 3-, and 5-year follow-up data collection interviews (Center for Research on Child Well-being, 2008). Given that the focus of this study was related to fathers' initial involvement intentions and subsequent involvement, data from the baseline and 1-year follow-up data collection waves were analyzed.

The decision to analyze data from the Fragile Families Study was based on its emphasis on low-income, unwed, and nonresident families and the fathers in those families. The collection of data directly from these fathers and not from proxies is one of the major strengths of the dataset that represents an improvement over other national survey datasets including the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, the National Survey of Families and Households, and the Panel Study of Income Dynamics. Specifically, the Fragile Families Study collects data not only on the extent to which fathers are engaged in one-on-one interactions with their child, but also data on their relationship with their child's mother, the extended family, both mothers' and fathers' current partners, as well as fathers' physical and mental health, education, and employment status. In other words, "The Fragile Families and Child Well-being Study is providing the most complete data on unwed fathers to date and is doing so for a nationally representative sample during a period of unprecedented welfare and child support reform" (Reichman et al., 2001, p. 307).

TABLE 1
Sample Descriptive Statistics N = 3,830

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Age	27.95	7.27
Perceived Behavioral Control	3.11	1.32
Coparenting Relationship	9.40	1.19
Total Kids	2.91	1.37
Behavioral Beliefs	11.16	1.29
Paternal Engagement	35.03	12.54

TABLE 2
Sample Frequency Distributions

	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Race		
White	1,117	29.1
Black	1,870	48.8
Other	521	13.6
American Indian	144	3.7
Asian	103	2.7
Income		
0–14,999	1,477	38.5
15,000–34,999	1,257	35.8
35,000+	697	18.2
Engagement Intention		
No	7	0.0
Yes	2,727	71.2
Marital Status		
Married	1,076	28.1
Unmarried	2,754	71.9
Resident Status		
Nonresident	1,077	28.1
Resident	2,753	71.9
Subjective Norm		
No	22	0.1
Yes	2,670	69.7
Participants' Own Fathers' Involvement		
Very Involved	1,570	40.9
Somewhat Involved	1,084	28.3
Not Very Involved	895	23.4
Never Knew Father	259	0.7

Sample

The sample for this study included 3,830 fathers participating in the baseline data collection wave of the Fragile Families Study. Participants in this study ranged in age from 17 to 71 years with a mean age of 27.95 years with 2.91 children. With regard to race, 1,870 (48.8%) participants self-identified as being Black or African American, 1,117 (29.1%) self-identified as White, 144 (3.7%) self-identified as American Indian, 103 (2.7%) self-identified as Asian, and 521 (13.6%) were listed as “other” in the dataset. One thousand and seventy-six (28.1%) of the fathers reported being married to their child’s mother and 2,753 (71.9%) reported coresiding with their child. Tables 1 and 2 display the frequency distributions and descriptive statistics for all the variables under examination in this study.

Measures

Paternal engagement

Paternal engagement was measured using a scale developed by Mathematica Policy Research (2002). The items were originally developed for a U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Early Head Start program evaluation study (OMB# 09070-0143). The items were designed to measure the number and frequency of care giving, social, cognitive, and physical activities parents participated in with their children. The items have internal consistency scores ranging from .72 to .84. In the Fragile Families questionnaire, there were eight items (e.g., "How many days per week do you play inside with the child?") that had responses ranging from 0 to 7 days per week. The internal consistency of these items with the current sample was .97.

Coparenting relationship

The quality of the parental relationship was measured using a scale from the Fragile Families questionnaire. The scale included five items (e.g., "Baby's mother is fair and willing to compromise?") with responses ranging from 1 = *often* to 3 = *always*. The internal consistency for these items with the current sample was .67.

Parental engagement intention

Paternal engagement intention was measured using a single item from the Fragile Families questionnaire. This item's (e.g., "Do you want to be involved in raising your child (ren) in upcoming years?") responses ranged from 1 = *yes* to 2 = *no*.

Attitudes/Behavioral beliefs

Attitudes/behavioral beliefs were measured using a scale from the Fragile Families questionnaire. The scale included three items (e.g., "Being a father is one of the most fulfilling experiences for a man?") with responses ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 4 = *strongly agree*. The internal consistency score for these items with the current sample was .73.

Perceived behavioral control

Perceived behavioral control was measured by combining the responses to two items from the Fragile Families questionnaire. These items (e.g., "If baby's father provides financial support, should he have right to see the child regularly?" and "If baby's father cannot afford to provide financial support, should he have the right to see the child regularly?") had responses ranging from 1 = *yes* to 2 = *no*.

Subjective Norms

Subjective norms were measured using a single item from the Fragile Families questionnaire. This item's (e.g., "Does baby's mother want you to be involved in raising the child(ren) in the coming years?") responses ranged from 1 = *yes* to 2 = *no*.

RESULTS

Data analysis included two multiple regression analyses. The outcome for the first regression analysis was fathers' paternal engagement intentions and the second analysis focused on fathers' reported engagement with their child. Table 3 displays the coefficients for fathers' engagement intentions. When only the demographic and control variables were examined, participants' own father's involvement ($\beta = -.036$), marital status ($\beta = .049$), and the quality of the parental relationship ($\beta = .053$) were significant

TABLE 3
Multiple Regression Model for Paternal Engagement Intentions

	Model 1			Model 2		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SEB</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SEB</i>	β
Demographic/Control Variables						
Race	0.001	0.001	.014	0.001	0.001	.012
Age	0.000	0.000	.000	0.002	0.001	.000
Income	-0.002	0.001	-.031	-0.002	0.001	-.029
Participants' Own Fathers' Involvement	-0.001	0.001	-.036*	-0.001	0.001	-.029
Marital Status	0.002	0.001	.049**	0.003	0.001	.048
Total Number of Children	-0.001	0.001	-.012	0.000	0.001	-.010
Coparenting Relationship	-0.002	0.001	.053**	-0.002	0.001	-.049**
Resident Status	0.001	0.001	.033	0.002	0.001	.032
Theory of Planned Behavior Variables						
Attitudes/Behavioral Beliefs				0.002	0.001	.050**
Subjective Norms				0.087	0.009	.153***
Perceived Behavioral Control				0.001	0.001	.001
R^2	0.031			0.034		
Change in R^2				0.003		

Note. Missing data replaced with means.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

predictors of fathers' intention to engage with their child. When the TPB variables were added to the model, behavioral beliefs/attitudes ($\beta = .050$) and subjective norms ($\beta = .153$) both were significant predictors of intentions to engage, while perceived behavioral control was not. The quality of the coparenting relationship ($\beta = -.049$) remained a significant predictor, while the participants' own father's involvement and marital status were no longer significant predictors. The direction of the coefficients in the full model indicated that more positive mother-father relationships were associated with fathers' higher intentions to engage with their child. With regard to the TPB constructs, more positive attitudes toward paternal involvement were associated with fathers' increased intentions to engage with their child. This was also true for subjective norms as fathers who believed that their child's mother wanted them to be involved were associated with higher reports of fathers' intentions to engage with that child. The variables included in the full model accounted for 3.4% of the variance explained in fathers' intentions to engage with their child.

Table 4 displays the coefficients for fathers' reported paternal engagement. When only the demographic and control variables were examined, race ($\beta = -.035$), marital status ($\beta = .068$), the quality of the coparenting relationship ($\beta = -.060$), and fathers' resident status ($\beta = .146$) were significant predictors of fathers' reported paternal engagement. When the TPB variables were added to the model, behavioral beliefs/attitudes ($\beta = .061$) was found to be a significant predictor of fathers' reported paternal engagement. Race ($\beta = -.032$), marital status ($\beta = .079$), the quality of the coparenting relationship ($\beta = -.054$), and resident status ($\beta = .142$) remained significant predictors of fathers' reported paternal engagement. The direction of the coefficients in the full model indicated that fathers who did not self-identify as an ethnic minority, were married to their child's mother, had more positive attitudes toward engagement, had more positive relationships with their children's mothers, and coresided with their children were associated with higher reports of paternal engagement. The variables included in the full model accounted for 3.8% of the variance explained in fathers' reported engagement with their children.

TABLE 4
Multiple Regression Model for Paternal Engagement

	Model 1			Model 2		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SEB</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SEB</i>	β
Demographic/Control Variables						
Race	-0.509	0.228	-.035*	-0.466	0.229	-.032*
Age	-0.032	0.024	.023	-0.030	0.025	-.020
Income	-0.360	0.240	-.028	-0.417	0.241	-.030
Participants' Own Father's Involvement	0.310	0.164	.031	0.312	0.165	.029
Marital Status	1.981	0.171	.068**	1.924	0.175	.079***
Total Number of Children	-0.161	0.055	-.012	-0.141	0.153	-.014
Coparenting Relationship	-0.520	0.134	.060**	-0.469	0.135	-.054**
Resident Status	1.862	0.217	.146***	1.922	0.232	.142***
Theory of Planned Behavior Variables						
Engagement Intentions				0.329	3.678	.001
Attitudes/Behavioral Beliefs				0.482	0.122	.061**
Subjective Norms				0.991	2.078	.007
Perceived Behavioral Control				0.033	0.119	.004
R^2	0.034			0.038		
Change in R^2				0.004		

Note. Missing data replaced with means.
 * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the theory of planned behavior and test its utility in explaining and predicting the factors associated with paternal involvement. To do this, a series of regression analyses was conducted. The results of these analyses revealed that in the full, multivariate model for paternal engagement intentions, more positive coparenting relationships, fathers believing that their child's mother wanted them to be involved with their child, and fathers' more positive attitudes and beliefs toward involvement were all significant predictors. In the full multivariate model for fathers' reported engagement, the results revealed that not self-identifying as a racial minority, being married to the child's mother, reporting a positive coparenting relationship with the child's mother, coresiding with the child, and having positive attitudes and beliefs about being involved with their child were all significant predictors of increased levels of reported paternal engagement. Given that White fathers are more likely to be married to their child's mother and less likely to be nonresident (Taylor, 2002), all of the significant predictors for both paternal engagement intentions and reported paternal engagement have been associated with increased paternal involvement in other studies (Cabrera, Fagan, & Farrie, 2008; Carlson et al., 2008; Dunn, 2004). Therefore, the results of this study provide additional support for the findings of previous research.

More importantly, the results of this study, although preliminary, provide some support for the notion that TPB is a viable lens through which paternal involvement can be potentially better understood. Two of three TPB variables were significant predictors of fathers' paternal engagement intentions, and one of three TPB variables was a significant predictor of fathers' reported paternal engagement. Among all the variables included in the model, fathers' attitudes and beliefs and subjective norms were the two strongest predictors of engagement intentions, while fathers' attitudes and beliefs was the third strongest predictor of their reported engagement. Although these findings were modest, these

findings also point to TPB's potential explanatory power with regard to paternal involvement. To our knowledge, the current study is the first attempt in the literature to apply TPB to paternal involvement. Therefore, subsequent studies building on this work analyzing original data that are collected with TPB in mind are likely to yield more powerful results with significant implications for research, family policy, and fatherhood practitioners. In other words, the results of this preliminary study are important for two reasons. Specifically, the results provide empirical support for the notion that TPB is somewhat useful in guiding investigations into the factors predicting paternal involvement and they also set the stage for future, theory-driven examinations of responsible and engaged fatherhood, an area receiving increased attention in the research literature and public discourse in recent years.

A priori, we operationalized perceived behavioral control using items that represented fathers' thoughts about the extent to which financial matters should impact their ability to maintain a relationship with their child. However, it stands to reason that whether or not a father is married to his child's mother, has a functional coparenting relationship with his child's mother, and coresides with his child are all issues related to fathers' access to children which can be a proxy for the extent to which fathers perceive they have control over their level of involvement. In other words, the extent to which fathers have access to their children is likely to influence their perceptions of the level of control they have over engaging in fathering activities with their children. These perceived control or access issues cannot be overstated considering the barriers faced by many fathers in "fragile families" and that mothers are most often children's primary caregivers and can serve as either "gatekeepers" or "gateways" to involvement (Herzog, Umana-Taylor, Madden-Derdich, & Leonard, 2007; McBride et al., 2005; Roy & Dyson, 2005; Schoppe-Sullivan, Cannon, Brown, & Mangelsdorf, 2008).

Implications

Although the findings of this study are very modest and should be considered preliminary, they have implications for researchers and clinicians. Specifically, researchers interested in paternal involvement should consider framing their studies in the context of TPB, so that they can not only account for men's intentions to become and remain involved with their child, but also their *ability to act* on their intentions. For example, Bronte-Tinkew, Horowitz, and Metz (2008) published a report on the evaluations of "model" fatherhood programs. However, Perry's (2011) review of this report revealed that only one of the eight programs collected data on parenting capacity (i.e., the extent to which an individual has or can secure the human and financial resources necessary to fulfill the role of parent) and instead limited their program evaluations to examining the gains that fathers made in parenting knowledge, skill, and child support payments. It is our assertion that evaluations such as these would be more informative if they accounted for the extent to which fathers had or could secure the resources necessary to fulfill their roles as parents. By doing so, not only could that help determine the efficacy of the programs, but it would also provide some insight into how much control the fathers had over achieving the goals prescribed by the program. Therefore, future fatherhood research should account for fathers' level of perceived behavioral control regarding their ability to establish and maintain active involvement in their children's lives. This is particularly important for fathers in unmarried, low-income, fragile families. For example, a recent special issue was dedicated to examining the influence of the coparenting relationship on various family and child development outcomes (Cabrera, Scott, Fagan, Steward-Streng, & Chien, 2012; Waller, 2012) and interventions to improve coparenting relationships (McHale, Waller, & Pearson, 2012). In the future, these types of studies will become more instructive and

explanatory by employing TPB and accounting for the extent to which fathers perceive that those coparenting relationships, as well as other environmental factors, impact their ability to act on their intended level of involvement. It will be these types of studies that can advance the fatherhood literature and ultimately impact the field by helping us more fully understand the nuanced dynamics that serve to either encourage or discourage fathers taking more active roles in the lives of their children.

Further, the finding that fathers' attitudes toward involvement predicted intentions to engage and actual engagement suggests that it is important for clinicians to help fathers, particularly new fathers, establish positive attitudes and beliefs surrounding fatherhood as a way of promoting fathers' engagement with their children. The finding that subjective norms predicted fathers' engagement intentions suggests that clinicians and practitioners should not only account for fathers' attitudes toward being actively involved in their children's lives, but also the extent to which they feel significant others such as the child's mother want them to be involved. This is important because others' feelings about the salience of fathers' involvement are a subjective norm that is likely to influence his involvement intentions. This notion is supported by research which has concluded that for many fathers, their child's mothers' and the child's maternal relatives' perception of the fathers' importance have been more predictive of fathers' involvement than even the father's own perception of his importance (Herzog et al., 2007).

Further, the findings from this study suggest that increasing the quality of the coparenting relationship may also be one of the most efficient ways to increase fathers' intentions to become involved with their children. Focusing on improving the coparenting relationship should be central to clinicians' treatment approaches given that many men, especially those who do not reside with their children, view their roles as fathers and their roles as spouses, boyfriends, or partners as interconnected (Baum, 2006).

Limitations

There are a number of limitations in this study that should be considered. Perhaps the largest limitation was that the analyses of the current study were conducted using secondary data. The Fragile Families Study and its data collection protocol were not designed with TPB in mind. Therefore, the questions and survey measurement tools used were not ideal for capturing data representing the constructs in the TPB. For example, paternal engagement intentions and perceived behavioral control items were measured using dichotomous yes or no responses. Moreover, perceived behavioral control was operationalized as a direct measure of intention. However, other studies have measured perceived behavioral control indirectly through perceived power and control beliefs (Ajzen, 2002). This may be an important factor for future researchers to consider when using TPB because it has been noted that one's perception of his or her control over behavior combined with intention should have a direct effect on behavior, particularly when perceived control is an accurate assessment of actual control over the behavior (Montano & Kasprzyk, 2008). It is possible that an indirect measure of perceived behavioral control may have been more appropriate for this particular study or that the measure of perceived behavioral control for this particular study (two aggregated, direct measure items) did not capture perceived behavioral control as intended. There were also limitations with measure of paternal engagement. Specifically, the measure omits several important activities that an involved father would likely participate in such as bathing or changing diapers. Moreover, the measure focuses solely on the frequency of fathers' engagement with no regard to the quality of that engagement.

Another limitation was the reliance on self-report data. Given that the data were collected via self-report, some of the fathers may have provided what they thought were socially acceptable responses, rather than responses that represented their true beliefs or

levels of involvement. It is unknown whether or how this influenced the study's results but this limitation may explain why there was very little variability in the participants' report of their engagement intentions and beliefs about whether or not their child's mother wanted them to be involved in raising their child.

Finally, the variables included in the regression models explained very little of variance in fathers' engagement intentions and their reported levels of engagement. This may have been due to the lack of variability in some of the measures or the fact that these variables were not designed in the context of TPB. Regardless, this means that there are other variables that were not accounted for that could have potentially contributed to the analyses such as the myriad environmental and structural impediments that discourage fathers' involvement.

CONCLUSION

In the past 25–30 years, researchers, practitioners, and policy makers have been faced with more and more questions about fathers' involvement with their children. In response, there has been a significant increase in research on fathers. The result has been the development of a growing body of literature examining paternal involvement and its impact on families. Despite its limitations, the findings from this study make a contribution to the fatherhood literature. Specifically, it fills a gap in the literature by providing some insight into the factors that facilitate or truncate fathers' ability to act on their intentions to take active roles in their children's lives and provides empirical support for a theory that may inform future fatherhood studies and interventions. By addressing this study's limitations, future research can impact the field by enhancing our knowledge base and informing interventions and policies that not only aim to increase fathers' interests in their children's growth and development, but also position them to manifest those interests and intentions.

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