

How Fathers' Religiosity Influences Early Childhood Behavior

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Recent studies have increasingly focused on the role that fathers play in their children's lives and factors that lead fathers to become more or less involved in family life. Studies have found that resident status, the co-parenting relationship with the mother, employment status, and attitudes about parenting all influence the degree to which fathers are involved in their children's lives (Lamb 1997; Amato and Rivera 1999; Sobolewski and King 2005). Research also suggests that having an engaged father is beneficial to children; youth who reside and/or interact frequently with their birth father are more likely to experience fewer behavioral and psychological problems, higher educational attainment, and higher well-being (Lamb 1997; Amato and Gilbreth 1999; Amato and Rivera 1999; Pleck 2007; Sarkadi et al. 2007).

Within the fatherhood literature, numerous studies suggest that religion may be one important factor that leads men to become more involved in their children's lives. Being actively involved in a religious community may be beneficial to family life by providing opportunities for families to interact with one another, resources for building and maintaining healthy relationships, parenting guidance and support, and a moral community that helps to enhance one's feeling of connectedness with others (Alwin 1986; Abbott, Berry, and Meridith 1990; Wilcox 2004; Edgell 2006). Indeed, recent research suggests that men increase their religious involvement after the birth of a child (Petts 2007). Religious participation also appears to strengthen co-parenting relationships and encourage fathers to be more involved in their children's lives, both of which are beneficial to children's development (Call and Heaton 1997; Bartkowski and Xu 2000; King 2003; Mahoney et al. 2003; Wilcox and Wolfinger 2008).

Although studies have linked father's religiosity to positive outcomes for adolescents (Wilcox 2002; Regnerus 2003; King 2003; Smith and Denton 2005), little is known about how

father's religious beliefs and practices may influence early child development. One recent study provides some evidence that fathers' religious attendance is associated with greater self-control, interpersonal skills, and fewer externalizing and internalizing behavior problems (Bartkowski, Xu, and Levin 2008). However, this study is constrained by the use of cross-sectional data.

The aim of this study is to use longitudinal data to provide a more comprehensive examination of the relationship between fathers' religiosity and early childhood outcomes. Specifically, this study focuses on three research questions. First, do fathers increase their religious involvement after the birth of a child and maintain this higher rate of religious participation as their children get older? Second, how do fathers' religious involvement, affiliation, and beliefs influence the behavior of their young children? Third, does fathers' religiosity moderate the relationships between paternal involvement, family structure, co-parenting relationship quality, mothers' religiosity, and early childhood behavior? It is possible that paternal religiosity directly influences children's behavior; religious fathers may receive greater social support and control and higher levels of well-being than nonreligious fathers, perhaps making them better able to provide their children with the support and guidance they need to develop in positive ways. Alternatively, religion may influence children's development by enhancing other family characteristics; religious fathers may be more involved in their children's lives, have stronger bonds with the child's mother, and be more likely to be married to the child's mother than nonreligious fathers, all of which are associated with positive outcomes for young children.

Four waves of data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study are used for this study. These data are useful in that fathers were interviewed shortly after the birth of their children and then again when the child was one, three, and five years old, allowing for an

analysis of (a) how fathers' religious involvement may change over the first five years of their children's lives, and (b) whether fathers' religiosity influences children's behavior at age 5.

Fathers' Religious Participation

Having a child is an important milestone in life that often causes men to reevaluate their priorities, search for parenting support and guidance, and become more committed to their families (Snarey 1993; Marsiglio 1998; Wilcox 2002). As part of this transition, many men turn to religion to provide a sense of meaning, direction, and purpose for this life event (Petts 2007). In addition, religious organizations often provide child-rearing and parenting guidelines, as well as resources and support networks to help parents raise their children (Alwin 1986; Ellison and Sherkat 1993; Ellison et al. 1996; Wilcox 1998). Although guidelines may differ between religious denominations, most religions place a strong emphasis on family life as well as teachings, values, and support for families (Wilcox, Chaves, and Franz 2004; Edgell 2006). Indeed, entering into a traditional family and having children at conventional ages is associated with increased religious participation (Chaves, 1991; Stolzenberg, Blair-Loy, & Waite, 1995; Eggebeen & Knoester, 2001).

New fathers may also increase their involvement in a religious community so that their children can have the opportunity to participate in rituals such as baptisms (Wilcox 2004). Even men who were not religious prior to becoming a parent often feel a desire to expose their children to religious teachings and beliefs (Berman 1968; Abbott et al. 1990). Therefore, fathers may become more active in a religious community when they have a new child to benefit themselves as parents as well as their children.

The current study builds on this research by exploring whether fathers maintain a higher level of religious involvement as their children grow older. If fathers become more involved in

religious communities to provide their children with a religious background, it is reasonable to expect that they will remain religiously active so that their children can have access to religious youth activities. I hypothesize that *fathers will increase their religious participation after the birth of a child and maintain this higher rate of religious participation five years after their children are born.*

Fathers' Religiosity and Child Behavior

Religion may provide a number of benefits to men making the transition to parenthood, but fathers who increase their religious activity likely do so, at least in part, to improve their child's well-being. However, research on the relationship between parental religion and young children's well-being is scarce; only two studies have focuses specifically on whether parental religiosity influences early child development. Strayhorn, Weidman, and Larson (1990) find that parental religiosity was associated with positive parenting practices and parents' well-being, but unrelated to children's behavior. In contrast, Bartkowski et al. (2008) find that parental religious participation, religious homogamy, and family discussions about religion are each associated with positive outcomes for young children. Given the lack of research on parental religiosity and child development and the contradictory findings in the Strayhorn et al. (1990) and Bartkowski et al. (2008) studies, it is important to examine whether (and what aspects of) parental religion, and specifically fathers' religiosity, may influence early childhood behavior.

Involvement in a religious community may help men become better fathers. Religion provides individuals with social support and control as well as a set of teachings and guidelines for how to live one's life, providing men with a sense of connectedness as well as deterring men from engaging in risky behaviors (Ellison and Levin 1998). Religion may also provide men with a sense of purpose and meaning in life, increasing men's well-being and life satisfaction (Ellison

1991; Ellison and Levin 1998). Moreover, religion may provide a framework for understanding life's difficulties, allowing men to cope more easily with life struggles and reduce stress (Ellison and Levin 1998). By being involved in a community that provides purpose in life, resources to cope with struggles, and deters involvement in problem behaviors, religious men may be more prepared for the challenges of parenthood and better equipped to promote positive development among their children than nonreligious fathers.

Involvement in a religious community may also encourage men to be more active and involved in their family life. Most religious institutions place a high level of importance on the family and promote strong family bonds (Bartkowski and Xu 2000; Wilcox 2002; King 2003; Edgell 2006). Fathers who attend religious services frequently may be more likely to internalize these beliefs and be committed to their families. Religion may also enhance family relationships; religious parents may place a higher level of significance and meaning on family relationships, and feel more connected to their families (Mahoney et al. 2003; Pearce and Haynie 2004). By adhering to religious teachings and messages about the value of family relationships, religious fathers may place a higher level of importance on family life, leading them to be more engaged in their children's lives (Dollahite 1998; Wilcox 2002; Bollinter and Palkovitz 2003).

Furthermore, fathers who are religiously active are enmeshed in a social network that may provide parenting support and guidance as well as activities that encourage family interaction (Abbott et al. 1990; Edgell 2006). Religious communities may also act as agents of social control, reinforcing parents' messages and promoting positive behavior among children (Myers 1996; Pearce and Axinn 1998; Smith and Denton 2005). By being enmeshed within a moral community, placing greater meaning on family relationships, and being more committed to family life, religious fathers may be better equipped to provide their children with the support

and guidance needed to promote positive development than non-religious fathers. Thus, I expect that *more frequent religious participation and a greater importance placed on religion among fathers will be associated with fewer behavior problems for young children.*

Although religious involvement may be beneficial to both fathers and children (Alwin 1986; Bollinter and Palkovitz 2003), certain religious denominations may be more likely to promote family commitments among fathers. Specifically, research suggests that evangelical Protestants place a greater emphasis on active parenting, child discipline, and traditional family structures than other religious groups (Wilcox 2002; 2004). Even though most religious traditions value family life, conservative theology places a particular emphasis on active fathering (Ellison et al. 1996; Wilcox 1998; Bartkowski and Xu 2000). As a result, evangelical Protestant fathers are more likely to be warm and expressive towards their children and more likely to hug and praise their children than fathers of other religious denominations (Wilcox 1998; Bartkowski and Xu 2000; Wilcox 2004). Thus, I hypothesize that *children raised by evangelical Protestant fathers will experience the fewest behavior problems, whereas children raised by fathers with no religious affiliation will experience the most behavior problems.*

Moderating Factors

Young children may receive direct benefits from being raised by a religiously active father, resulting in fewer behavior problems. However, it is also possible that fathers' religiosity may moderate the influence of paternal engagement with children, relationship quality with the birth mother, mothers' religiosity, and family structure on early childhood behavior. For example, religion may enhance family relationships. Specifically, religion may help to 'sanctify' relationships, leading fathers to place more meaning and significance on their relationship with their child (Mahoney et al. 2003). Research suggests that religiously active fathers report higher

levels of involvement with young children, increased parental supervision, and greater relationship quality with children, as well as participate more in youth-related activities, than less religious fathers (Bartkowski and Xu 2000; Roggman, Boyce, Cook, and Cook 2002; Wilcox 2002; King 2003). Furthermore, positive paternal engagement is associated with fewer behavior and psychological problems among children, higher educational attainment, and greater social and material capital (Lamb 1997; Amato and Rivera 1999; Pleck 2007; Sarkadi et al. 2007). Thus, I expect that *frequent involvement by religious fathers may be more likely to increase positive behavior among children than frequent involvement by nonreligious fathers because there is greater meaning and significance placed on these interactions.*

Religion may also help to sanctify fathers' relationships with the mother of their child, leading fathers to place more importance on their relationship with the birth mother (Mahoney et al. 2003). Relationship quality with the birth mother is important to consider because the frequency and quality of contact that fathers (especially nonresident fathers) have with children is often influenced by the effectiveness of the co-parenting relationship. Stronger co-parenting relationships, or relationships in which parents agree and support one another on how children should be raised, can lead fathers to become more active in their children's lives and consequently improve their children's well-being (McHale 1995; Sobolewski and King 2005; Schoppe-Sullivan et al. 2008). Fathers who are religious may be more likely to work together with the mother to develop effective strategies for raising their child than nonreligious fathers. Indeed, studies suggest that religious involvement is associated with lower relationship conflict and higher marital happiness and stability (Call and Heaton 1997; Curtis and Ellison 2002; Wolfinger and Wilcox 2008; Lichter and Carmalt 2009). Therefore, I expect that *fathers'*

religiosity may increase relationship quality with the birth mother, resulting in fewer problem behaviors among young children.

Fathers' religiosity may also moderate the relationship between family structure and early childhood behavior. Young children are less likely to experience problem behaviors when residing with two parents, and may benefit from residing in a stable family structure throughout their childhood (Cavanagh and Huston 2006). Fathers who are actively involved in a religious community are more likely to be resident, married fathers and less likely to divorce than nonreligious fathers (McCarthy 1979; Larson and Golz 1989). Furthermore, certain religious traditions (such as evangelical Protestantism) tend to stress the importance of traditional values such as an opposition to premarital sex and a belief in the sanctity of marriage (Hunter 1983; Petersen and Donnerwerth 1997), both of which may increase the likelihood that religious fathers remain married to the birth mother and children are raised in a stable, intact family. Thus, I expect that *children raised by married, resident fathers who are religious will display fewer problem behaviors than children raised by married, resident fathers who are not religious.*

Young children may also benefit from residing in a household in which parents have similar beliefs. Children are more likely to internalize the values of their parents when their parents are providing a consistent message (Nelsen 1990). Thus, fathers' religiosity may be more likely to promote positive development among young children when mothers are also religiously active. Religious homogamy between parents may increase the likelihood that families are attending religious services together and receiving the social support, integration, and control that religion provides (Abbott et al. 1990). Thus, I expect that *fathers' religiosity will be more likely to reduce problem behaviors among young children when mothers are also religious.*

DATA AND METHODS

Sample

Data from four waves of the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study (FFCW) are used in this study. This is a longitudinal, birth cohort study that follows 4,898 children born between 1998 and 2000. Both parents were interviewed at the hospital shortly after the child's birth and then again for three follow-up interviews approximately one, three, and five years after the child's birth. In addition, a subset of families participated in an additional interview at the three- and five-year follow up that focused on the child's health, behavior, and well-being. The FFCW is an urban study that is representative of all non-marital births in cities with populations of over 200,000, but there are also a sizeable number of married parents included in the study. Specifically, 4,798 mothers and 3,830 fathers in 20 cities were interviewed for the baseline survey, and retention rates for each of the follow-up interviews are over 80% (Reichman, Teitler, Garfinkel, & McLanahan, 2001).

This study focuses on 1,503 families consisting of fathers who were interviewed at each wave and families in which the five-year child survey was completed. Of the 3,830 families in which fathers were interviewed at the time of their child's birth, 1,541 were excluded because fathers were not interviewed in at least one of the 3 additional waves and an additional 633 were excluded because the 60-month child survey was not completed. Also, 81 families who were not part of the 18-city sample were excluded because they were not asked all of the questions of interest for this study, and 72 families were dropped because fathers did not report their religious involvement at each wave. Although these data are not generalizable to all families (especially given the restrictions), the longitudinal nature of the data, the breadth of questions on early childhood behavior, and the variety of religious and relationship indicators make these data well-

suitable for an exploration of whether and how fathers' religiosity influences early childhood behavior.

Dependent Variables

The three dependent variables used in this study are each taken from the Five-Year In-Home Longitudinal Study of Pre-School Aged Children. Children's behavior was measured using indicators from both the Child Behavior Checklist (Achenbach and Rescorla 2000) and the Adaptive Social Behavior Inventory (Hogan, Scott, and Bauer 1992). For each indicator, mothers report the extent to which the statement is true of the child's behavior (ranging from 0 = *not true* to 2 = *very true or often true*).

Externalizing Problem Behavior. Externalizing problem behavior is taken from mothers' responses to the aggressive and delinquency scales included in the survey ($\alpha = .86$). The aggressive scale consists of 20 items about whether the child boasts, bullies others, destroys things, threatens people, gets into fights, demands a lot of attention, and is unusually loud. The delinquency scale consists of 10 items that assess whether the child hangs around with others who get into trouble, sets fire, steals, swears, vandalizes, runs away from home, cheats or lies, and prefers being with other kids. Responses to these 30 items are summed.

Internalizing Problem Behavior. Internalizing problem behavior is taken from mothers' responses to the withdrawn and anxious/depressed scales included in the survey ($\alpha = .75$). The withdrawn scale consists of 9 items that assess whether the child would rather be alone, refuses to talk, is secretive, is shy, sulks, is unhappy, is withdrawn, and stares blankly. The anxious/depressed scale consists of 14 items about whether the child complains of loneliness, cries a lot, feels inferior, feels guilty, worries, feels no one loves him/her, is nervous, is fearful, and is suspicious. Responses to these 23 items are summed.

Positive Behavior. Mothers were also asked to report the frequency that their child exhibited 13 positive behaviors ($\alpha = .80$). These behaviors included whether the child understands others' feelings, is sympathetic to other children, is open and direct about what he/she wants, plays with other children, is confident, is proud of what he/she does, is interested in many things, enjoys talking with mother, says "please" and "thank you", and tends to watch others in social activity. Responses to these 13 items are summed.

Independent Variables

Religious Participation. How often fathers attend religious services is coded as a scale with the following values: 0 = *never*; 1 = *hardly ever*; 2 = *several times a year*; 3 = *several times a month*; 4 = *once a week or more*. The indicator of religious participation is taken from each of the four waves of the survey in order to assess changes in religious participation over time.

Religious Affiliation. Three dummy variables are used to indicate fathers' religious affiliation: evangelical Protestant, other religious affiliation (both Christian and non-Christian, used as reference group), and no religious affiliation.¹ Each of these variables is taken from fathers' responses at the third wave of data collection. In addition, a dummy variable is included to indicate whether fathers experienced a change in religious affiliation between the baseline survey and the 3-year follow up.

Religious Attitudes. Two variables are used to indicate fathers' religious attitudes, and each of these variables is taken from the 3-year follow up survey. First, religious family environment indicates whether fathers use their religious faith as a guide for the way they treat their family. Responses range from 0 = *strongly disagree* to 3 = *strongly agree*. Second, a variable is included to assess religious literalism. Fathers were asked the degree to which they felt that religious texts (either the Bible or the Koran, depending on religious affiliation) are the

¹ Expanding the categories of religious affiliation does not substantially alter the results presented in this study.

word of God and should be read literally. Responses range from 0 = *strongly disagree* to 3 = *strongly agree*. For Jewish fathers, they were asked whether keeping kosher is an important part of being Jewish.

Moderating Variables

Father Involvement. Father involvement is indicated by the number of days per week that fathers spent participating in eight activities with the child at the 3-year follow up ($\alpha = .83$): sing songs or nursery rhymes, hug or show physical affection, tell child that you love him/her, let child help with simple chores, play imaginary games, read stories, tell stories, and play inside with toys with child. Responses ranged from 0 to 7 days a week, and the mean for the eight activities is used as the scale score.

Relationship Quality. Relationship quality is indicated by five statements about the birth mother taken from the 3-year follow up survey (0 = *never* to 2 = *often*): (a) she is fair and willing to compromise, (b) she expresses affection or love for you, (c) she insults or criticizes you or your ideas (reverse coded), (d) she helps you do things important to you, and (e) she slaps or kicks you (reverse coded). Responses range from 0 = *never* to 2 = *often*, and the mean is used as the indicator of relationship quality ($\alpha = .70$).

Family Structure. I use two dummy variables to indicate family structure. The first variable is resident status, which includes all fathers who are living with the birth mother and child at the 3-year follow up. The second variable is marital status, which indicates fathers who are married to the birth mother at the 3-year follow up. I also include a dummy variable that indicates whether fathers had experienced a break-up with the birth mother prior to the 3-year follow up survey. This variable indicates whether fathers experienced the dissolution of a married or cohabiting union between the baseline survey and the 3-year follow-up.

Mother's Religious Participation. This variable uses the same scale as fathers' religious participation, and the mean value from all four waves of data is used to indicate mother's religious participation.

Control Variables

A number of variables that may alter the relationship between fathers' religiosity and early childhood behavior are also included as controls. Fathers' age is measured in years, and is taken from the 3-year follow up. A dummy variable is included to indicate the gender of the child (1 = *male*). Four dummy variables are used to indicate fathers' race: White (reference group), Black, Latino, and other racial group. Father's educational attainment is taken from the baseline survey, and is categorized as (a) less than high school (reference group), (b) high school diploma, (c) some college, and (d) college graduate. Controls are also included for the number of hours worked per week for fathers and mothers at the 3-year follow up (mothers' work hours taken from mothers' reports), whether fathers had an involved biological father while growing up (1 = *yes*), whether this is the father's first child (1 = *yes*), and the number of additional children that the father reported at the 3-year follow up.

Analytic Strategy

A number of steps are taken to assess whether fathers maintain a higher level of religious participation five years after the birth of a child, and then whether father's religiosity is associated with early childhood behavior. First, group-based trajectory modeling is used to obtain estimates of fathers' religious participation over the first five years of their child's life. This method is a type of finite mixture modeling that uses maximum likelihood techniques to estimate each group's trajectory, the proportion of the sample assigned to each trajectory group, and the probability of membership in each group for all individuals in the data (Nagin 1999;

Jones, Nagin, and Roeder 2001; Nagin 2005). This methodology is useful for this study because it is able to uncover longitudinal patterns of fathers' religious participation without forcing the researcher to make arbitrary group cutoffs. Although these trajectory groups are only approximations, they are helpful in illustrating the different patterns of religious participation that fathers may experience after the birth of a child.

Because the measure of religious participation is a scale ranging from 0 to 4, a censored normal model is used to estimate the trajectories. The basic model estimating each trajectory specifies the link between interview year and religious participation as a polynomial function:

$$y_{it}^j = \beta_0^j + \beta_1^j \text{YEAR}_{it} + \beta_2^j \text{YEAR}_{it}^2 + \beta_3^j \text{YEAR}_{it}^3 + \varepsilon_{it}.$$

In this model, y is the predicted rate of religious participation for person i in trajectory group j at time t , β_0 , β_1 , β_2 , and β_3 are parameters that determine the shape of each trajectory, and ε is an error term for each group. Because a unique set of parameters are used to estimate each trajectory, the shapes of the trajectories can vary by group (Nagin 2005). These models are run using a procedure in SAS (PROC TRAJ) to estimate trajectories of religious participation (Jones et al. 2001). Once the trajectory estimates are obtained, these estimates are used as the indicators of father's religious participation in the second part of the analysis.

For the second part of the study, Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression models are used. For each child outcome, variables are entered into stepwise models. First, I include all measures of fathers' religiosity. The second model adds all mediating and control variables. Finally, I test for interaction effects between family characteristics and fathers' religiosity, and a third model is presented that includes any interaction effects that were statistically significant.

Missing Data

After all of the sample restrictions, missing data does not appear to be a major problem. Most variables have few (less than 10% of total cases), if any, missing values.² To preserve sample size, regression-based imputation is used for each variable that has missing cases. Supplementary analyses using listwise deletion produced similar results as those presented here.

RESULTS

In order to obtain the correct model for group-based trajectory analysis, the researcher must specify the number of groups and the order of the trajectory (linear, quadratic, etc.) prior to estimating the models (Nagin 2005). BIC (Bayesian Information Criterion) statistics are used as the primary formal test to determine the optimal number of groups, but model parameters and researcher judgment are also helpful in specifying the correct form of each trajectory. The goal is to use a combination of researcher judgment and diagnostic statistical tests to determine a best-fitting model that conveys all of the substantive features of the data while remaining parsimonious (Nagin 2005).

Using BIC statistics and model parameters as a guide, a five-group model emerged as the best-fitting model; two of the groups follow quadratic trajectories, one group follows a linear trajectory, and two groups attend religious services at a constant rate.³

----- Insert Figure 1 About Here -----

Trajectories from the five-group model are presented in Figure 1. Consistent with previous research (Petts 2007), most fathers increase their religious involvement after the birth of a child. Furthermore, results in Figure 1 suggest that 66% of fathers continue to attend religious services more frequently as their child ages. Specifically, 51% of fathers (moderate increasing attenders) experience a slight increase in religious participation from hardly to several times a

² Household income is not included as a control variable due to the high number of missing cases. Instead, education is used to account for SES.

³ Other diagnostic tests suggest that this is a good-fitting model. For example, Nagin (2005) suggests that the average posterior probability (the average probability that each individual assigned to that group actually belong to the group based on their pattern of religious participation) for each group should be at least .70. The average posterior probabilities in this study are .92, .92, .81, .82, and .93.

year one-year after their child's birth, and maintain this level of involvement when their child is 3 and 5 years old. In addition, 15% of fathers (high increasing attenders) experience a more dramatic increase in religious participation in the year following their child's birth, from several times a year to several times a month. These fathers continue to attend religious services more frequently over time, and by the 5-year follow up, these fathers are attending religious services at least once a week.

Although most fathers increase their religious participation, there are also fathers that maintain a constant rate of religious involvement or decrease their religious involvement throughout their child's early life. Approximately 14% of fathers never attend religious services throughout the first five years of their child's life, and 11% of fathers consistently attend religious services at least weekly. Finally, approximately 9% of fathers are classified as high decreasing attenders. These fathers experience a slight increase in religious participation after the birth of a child (attending services between several times a month and weekly), but then slightly decrease their religious involvement at both the 3 and 5 year follow up. Overall, results in Figure 1 suggest that most fathers maintain a higher level of religious participation for a least a few years after the birth of a child. The next stage of the analysis examines whether these patterns of religious participation are associated with children's behavior.

----- Insert Table 1 About Here -----

Table 1 includes mean values within each trajectory group for all variables used in the analysis. These results provide some insight into the differences between fathers following unique patterns of religious involvement. On average, frequent attenders have children who report fewer externalizing and internalizing problem behaviors, report higher levels of father involvement, higher relationship quality with the birth mother, and are more likely to be married and/or resident fathers than non-attenders and moderate increasing attenders. Because the mean

values for frequent attenders suggest that children of these fathers may experience the fewest number of problems, the remaining analyses focus on whether the other four trajectories of religious participation are significantly different from frequent attendance in predicting early childhood behavior.⁴

----- Insert Table 2 About Here -----

Results examining the relationship between fathers' religiosity and children's externalizing problem behavior are presented in Table 2. In support of my hypothesis, results in Model 1 suggest that children raised by non-attenders and moderate increasing attenders are more likely to display externalizing problem behaviors than children of frequent attenders. Moreover, children raised by fathers with no religious affiliation are more likely to exhibit externalizing problem behaviors than fathers with a religious affiliation. Taken together, these results provide some evidence that children raised by religious fathers are less likely to experience externalizing problem behaviors.

When other variables are added in Model 2, patterns of religious participation are no longer associated with children's externalizing behavior. However, the relationship between religious affiliation and externalizing problems persists; having a father with no religious affiliation is still associated with greater externalizing problems. Also as expected, fathers' relationship quality with the birth mother is associated with fewer externalizing problems as expected. Somewhat surprisingly, mother's religious participation is negatively associated with children's externalizing problems, suggesting that mother's religiosity may play a more important role in early childhood development than father's religiosity.

Interaction terms are introduced in Model 3, and results provide some evidence that father's religiosity may enhance the influence of parental relationship quality on children's

⁴ Supplementary models using non-attenders as a reference group produced similar results as those presented.

behavior. The interaction term in Model 3 suggests that relationship quality between parents is associated with fewer externalizing problem behaviors when fathers believe that religion provides an important guide for how to treat their family. Consistent with my hypotheses, religion may lead fathers to place greater meaning and significance on family relationships, and this commitment may be beneficial to the co-parental relationship. Moreover, parents who share a strong relationship may be more likely to provide social control and support for their children, reducing the potential for their children to display externalizing problem behaviors.

----- Insert Table 3 About Here -----

Results examining the relationship between father's religiosity and children's internalizing problem behaviors are presented in Table 3. Overall, results are strikingly similar to those presented in Table 2. Father's religious characteristics are presented in Model 1. Children raised by fathers following a trajectory of moderate or high increasing attendance are more likely to exhibit internalizing problem behaviors than children raised by fathers following a trajectory of frequent attendance. In addition, father's religious literalism is associated with increased internalizing problem among children. Although these findings provide some evidence that fathers' religiosity is associated with internalizing problem behaviors, these results are no longer significant when other variables are included in the model (Model 2).

Similar to the results in Table 2, relationship quality with the birth mother and mother's religious participation are both negatively related to children's internalizing problem behavior (Model 2). These results provide further evidence of the benefits of the co-parenting relationship and mother's religiosity for young children's well-being. Furthermore, one significant interaction term highlights the benefits of being raised in a family in which both parents are religious. The interaction term in Model 3 suggests that mother's religious participation is especially likely to reduce internalizing problem behavior among children when fathers also feel that religion is an

important guide for how to treat their family. Once this interaction term is introduced into the model, the coefficient for mother's religious participation is no longer significant, suggesting that mother's religiosity is only beneficial to children when fathers also feel that religion is important. Being raised by two religious parents may increase social support for children, making them feel secure and reducing the likelihood that they experience internalizing problem behaviors.

----- Insert Table 4 About Here -----

Results examining the relationship between fathers' religiosity and positive behavior among young children are presented in Table 4. In contrast to the previous results, none of the indicators of father's religiosity are associated with children's positive behavior in Model 1. When other variables are introduced in Model 2, one variable becomes significant; children raised by fathers following a trajectory of high decreasing attendance are more likely to exhibit positive behaviors than children raised by fathers following a trajectory of frequent attendance. Supplementary analyses suggest that this result is due to a suppression effect; once race is controlled for, the relationship between high decreasing attendance and positive behavior becomes significant. Over one-third of high decreasing attenders are Latino (see Table 1), and children raised by Latino fathers are less likely to exhibit positive behaviors. Thus, once race is accounted for, children raised by fathers following a trajectory of high decreasing attendance display more positive behaviors than other children. One possible explanation for this is that as fathers become more involved in their children's lives, they are unable to attend religious services weekly. High decreasing attenders may attend religious services enough that they receive guidance and support from a religious community but still have time to devote to their family and perhaps even their job. These fathers may be less stressed and better able to promote positive development among their children.

Results in Model 3 suggest that the relationship between father involvement and children's positive behavior may depend on father's religious affiliation. The interaction terms suggest that high levels of involvement may be associated with increased positive behavior among children of evangelical Protestant fathers. Consistent with previous research (Wilcox 2004), expressive fathering is highly valued with evangelical Protestant communities, and evangelical Protestant fathers who are actively involved in their children's lives may be better able to provide the support needed for their young children to develop in positive ways than fathers within other religious traditions.

DISCUSSION

The two goals of this study were to extend previous research by examining whether fathers increase their level of religious involvement after the birth of a child and maintain this higher level of religious participation as their child gets older as well as whether father's religious beliefs and practices were associated with early childhood behavior. Overall, results indicate some support for my hypotheses, showing that most fathers maintain a higher level of religious participation three and five years after their child's birth and that father's religiosity may help to increase family support and stability, reducing the likelihood that children exhibit problem behaviors and increasing the likelihood that children display positive behaviors.

One contribution of this study is the illustration of patterns of religious participation that men experience for five years following the birth of a new child. Consistent with previous research, 75% of new fathers increase their religious involvement in the year following their child's birth, and most of these fathers maintain this higher rate of religious participation throughout the early years of their child's life. Men that turn to religion for support and guidance when they transition to fatherhood may continue to rely on this support as they face new parental

challenges during early childhood. Results also suggest that many men also seem to be entrenched in their religious beliefs and practices, and maintain a consistent rate of religious involvement (or non-involvement) throughout the first few years of their child's life. Somewhat unexpectedly, 9% of men start to decrease their religious participation when their child is 2 or 3 years old. These fathers may have to sacrifice time spent at religious services for time spent with children. Overall, results from this study show the diverse trajectories of religious participation that new fathers experience after the birth of a child.

The second goal of this study was to examine whether these patterns of religious involvement were associated with early childhood behavior. For the most part, results indicate that fathers' religiosity is not directly related to problem or positive behavior among children. However, results from this study provide three interesting and useful insights into the role of parental religion on early childhood development. First, although fathers' religious participation was not directly related to children's behavior, being raised by a mother that is active in a religious institution is associated with fewer problem behaviors among young children. Mothers often play an important role in the socialization of young children, and may be more involved in their child's daily life than fathers. Moreover, women are more likely to be religiously involved than men, perhaps resulting in greater access to the parental support and guidance that many religious communities provide (Krause, Ellison, and Marcum 2002; Miller and Stark 2002). Thus, children may receive benefits from increased interaction with a religious parent.

Results of this study also suggest that fathers may influence early childhood behavior indirectly by believing that religion is an important part of family life. Believing that religion is an important part of family life may lead fathers to place a higher value on family relationships (Wilcox 2002; Mahoney et al. 2003). Religious fathers may be more involved in family life, look

for opportunities (such as attendance at religious services) to spend time as a family together, and be more considerate towards other family members, all of which may increase social support and integration for children and reduce the likelihood that they display problem behaviors early in life. In addition, fathers' religious attitudes also appear to condition the influence of mothers' religious participation on early childhood behavior. Mother's religious participation is more likely to reduce problem behaviors among young children when fathers reinforce and value this religious message within the home. Children may be best able to benefit from the support and guidance that religious parents may provide when they are receiving a consistent message from both parents.

Finally, there is some evidence showing that fathers' religious affiliation may be linked to early childhood behavior. Being raised by a religious father may provide social control in a child's life. Most religious traditions provide standards and guidelines for how people should live their lives, and religious fathers likely pass these teachings on to their children to provide some structure in their children's lives. In contrast, children raised by fathers who do not claim a religious affiliation may lack some of these social controls and be more likely to exhibit externalizing problem behaviors such as fighting, threatening others, and other types of delinquent behavior. Although I did not make any specific hypotheses on how religion may influence different types of child behavior in unique ways, this finding is consistent with other research on religion, social control, and delinquency and suggests that paternal religiosity may begin to provide social control to children from an early age.

Consistent with previous research, having an involved evangelical Protestant father seems to be more beneficial to youth than involvement with fathers from other religious backgrounds. Warm, expressive fathering is emphasized in many evangelical Protestant

traditions, which may encourage these fathers to not only be engaged in their children's lives, but also to provide support and affection to their children while being involved. Results from this study suggest that this unique type of expressive fathering may be beneficial to children and encourage them to exhibit positive behaviors from a young age.

Despite the numerous strengths in this study, there are also some limitations that need to be acknowledged. One limitation is that the data used for this study are not generalizable to all fathers or families. The FFCW is an urban sample that includes an oversample of unwed and minority fathers. Furthermore, because this study is restricted to families in which fathers were interviewed at each wave of data collection, the sample used for this study is likely biased towards fathers who are more engaged in their family life than fathers who may have dropped out of the study. Although these results are not generalizable, using four waves of data allows for a more thorough analysis of how fathers' religiosity and changes in fathers' religiosity may influence children. Given the lack of research on the influence of religion on young children, researchers should continue to examine how various aspects of parental religiosity may influence early childhood behavior.

This study is also limited by the questions that were available at each wave. Ideally, it would be useful to analyze each measure of fathers' religiosity over time to see how changes in these responses (or consistency over time) may influence their young children's development. Unfortunately, religious participation is the only religious question that is asked of fathers in each wave. Religious affiliation is measured at two time points (baseline and 3-year follow up), and all of the other religious questions are only asked at the 3-year follow up. Thus, this study was designed to use as much of the data as possible while still allowing for a causal pathway

between fathers' religiosity and children's behavior; wave 3 variables are used to predict early childhood behavior at age 5.

Finally, this study focuses primarily on the influence of fathers' religiosity on early child behavior. However, results from this study suggests that mothers' religiosity may be equally, if not more, important in predicting problem behaviors among young children. A full examination of the influence of mothers' religiosity on children is outside the scope of this study, but future research needs to consider how the family religious environment may influence early childhood behavior independently and in conjunction with other family characteristics.

Despite these limitations, this study contributes to the literature on family and religion by using longitudinal data to explore how fathers' religious beliefs and practices may influence early childhood behavior. This study highlights five trajectories of religious participation that fathers may experience after the birth of a new child. Furthermore, this study suggests that fathers' religious beliefs and practices may enhance family relationships and contribute to positive development among young children. Overall, results from this study provide further evidence that fathers may turn to religious institutions for support and guidance after having a child, and extends this knowledge by showing how fathers' religiosity may work in conjunction with other family characteristics to reduce problem behaviors and promote positive behaviors among young children. Future research should continue to explore how parental religion may shape children's lives from an early age and whether these experiences continue to shape outcomes as children transition into adolescence and later into adulthood.

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Figure 1: Trajectories of Fathers' Religious Participation

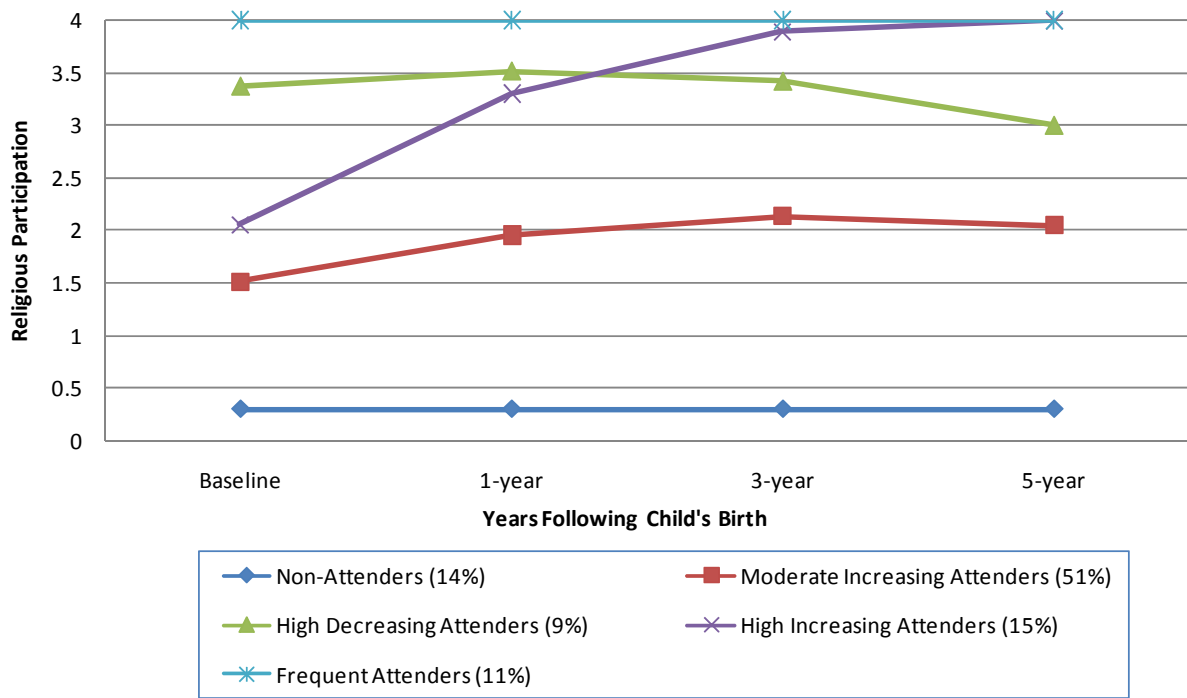


Table 1. Mean Values of All Variables by Trajectory Group of Fathers' Religious Participation

	Non-Attendees	Moderate Increasing Attendees	High Decreasing Attendees	High Increasing Attendees	Frequent Attendees
Child Behavior					
Externalizing Problem Behavior	13.20 ^{ce}	12.42 ^e	11.42 ^a	12.02	10.77 ^{ab}
Internalizing Problem Behavior	5.50 ^e	5.40 ^e	5.25	5.50	4.64 ^{ab}
Positive Behavior	20.79	20.98	21.50	20.60 ^e	20.83 ^d
Father's Religious Characteristics					
Evangelical Protestant	0.11 ^{bcde}	0.29 ^{ade}	0.29 ^a	0.37 ^{ab}	0.39 ^{ab}
No Religious Affiliation	0.61 ^{bcde}	0.19 ^{acde}	0.07 ^{ab}	0.04 ^{ab}	0.03 ^{ab}
Father Changed Religious Affiliation	.39	.38	.38	.34	.36
Religious Family Environment	1.37 ^{bcde}	2.22 ^{acde}	2.64 ^{abde}	2.84 ^{abc}	2.86 ^{abc}
Religious Literalism	1.49 ^{bcde}	2.20 ^{acde}	2.62 ^{abe}	2.69 ^{ab}	2.78 ^{abc}
Relationship Characteristics					
Father Involvement	4.36 ^e	4.31 ^e	4.45	4.48	4.46 ^{ab}
Relationship Quality with Birth Mother	1.53 ^{cde}	1.57 ^e	1.62 ^a	1.61 ^a	1.68 ^{ab}
Married to Birth Mother	0.34 ^{cde}	0.38 ^{ce}	0.51 ^{abe}	0.45 ^{ae}	0.74 ^{abcd}
Resident Father	0.79 ^e	0.80 ^e	0.82	0.83	0.89 ^{ab}
Prior Breakup with Birth Mother	0.17 ^e	0.19 ^{cde}	0.11 ^b	0.12 ^b	0.08 ^{ab}
Mother's Religious Participation	1.70 ^{bcde}	2.46 ^{acde}	3.00 ^{abe}	3.21 ^{abe}	3.53 ^{abcd}
Controls					
Father's Age	30.39 ^{ce}	30.75 ^{ce}	32.81 ^{abd}	30.74 ^{ce}	34.13 ^{ab}
Child is Male	.53 ^e	.51	.57 ^e	.48	.43 ^{ac}
Black	.39 ^{bd}	.51 ^{ac}	.39 ^{bd}	.53 ^{ac}	.46
Latino	.17 ^{cd}	.21 ^{cd}	.34 ^{abe}	.31 ^{abe}	.15 ^{cd}
Other Race	.06 ^d	.04	.04	.02 ^a	.04
High School Education	.34 ^c	.34 ^{ce}	.22 ^{acd}	.33 ^c	.26 ^c
Some College Education	0.21 ^c	0.25	0.32 ^a	0.26	0.30
College Degree	0.12 ^e	0.12 ^{ce}	0.19 ^{bd}	0.11 ^{ce}	0.29 ^{abd}
First-time Fatherhood	0.50 ^{ce}	0.42	0.35 ^a	0.41	0.38 ^a
Number of Additional Children	1.46 ^{de}	1.61	1.64	1.75 ^a	1.82 ^a
Own Father's Involvement	.62 ^{cde}	.67 ^e	.75 ^a	.73 ^a	.80 ^{ab}
Birth Mother's Hours Worked	19.69	21.58	21.14	20.18	20.37
Father's Hours Worked	32.13 ^{cde}	34.87	37.29 ^a	36.33 ^a	36.80 ^a
N	202	770	136	224	171

N = 1503

Note: Two-tailed t-tests used to determine differences between group means.

^a = significantly different from Non-Attendees ($p < .05$); ^b = significantly different from Moderate-Increasing Attendees ($p < .05$); ^c = significantly different from High-Decreasing Attendees ($p < .05$); ^d = significantly different from High-Increasing Attendees ($p < .05$); ^e = significantly different from Frequent Attendees ($p < .05$)

Table 2. Results from Regression Models Predicting Externalizing Problem Behavior among Children at Age Five

	1	2	3
Father's Religious Characteristics			
<i>Trajectory of Religious Participation</i>			
Non-Attendees	2.19 **	-0.06	-0.06
Moderate Increasing Attendees	1.71 **	0.03	-0.06
High Decreasing Attendees	0.66	-0.34	-0.41
High Increasing Attendees	1.26	-0.03	-0.07
<i>Religious Affiliation</i>			
Evangelical Protestant	-0.23	-0.39	-0.39
No Religious Affiliation	1.62 **	1.20 *	1.15 *
Change in Religious Affiliation	0.01	-0.17	-0.17
<i>Religious Attitudes</i>			
Religious Family Environment	0.20	0.34	2.01 *
Religious Literalism	0.36	-0.08	-0.07
Moderating Variables			
Father Involvement		0.01	0.02
Relationship Quality with Birth Mother		-1.64 **	0.82
Married to Birth Mother		-0.69	-0.68
Resident Father		-0.47	-0.49
Prior Breakup with Birth Mother		-0.54	-0.50
Mother's Religious Participation		-0.52 **	-0.50 **
Controls			
Father's Age		-0.05	-0.05
Child is Male		0.77 *	0.77 *
Black		0.28	0.28
Latino		0.23	0.27
Other Race		-0.58	-0.58
High School Education		-1.02 *	-1.03 *
Some College Education		-1.55 **	-1.55 **
College Degree		-2.32 ***	-2.30 ***
First-time Fatherhood		-1.03 *	-1.03 *
Number of Additional Children		0.15	0.14
Own Father's Involvement		-0.22	-0.23
Birth Mother's Hours Worked		-0.02	-0.01
Father's Hours Worked		-0.02	-0.02 *
Interactions			
Religious Family Environment x Relationship Quality			-1.07 *
R ²	0.02	0.08	0.08
*p < .05; **p < .01; *** p < .001			
N = 1503			

Table 3. Results from Regression Models Predicting Internalizing Problem Behavior among Children at Age Five

	1	2	3
Father's Religious Characteristics			
<i>Trajectory of Religious Participation</i>			
Non-Attendees	0.81	-0.40	-0.50
Moderate Increasing Attendees	0.76 *	-0.11	-0.32
High Decreasing Attendees	0.59	-0.06	-0.21
High Increasing Attendees	0.88 *	0.12	0.03
<i>Religious Affiliation</i>			
Evangelical Protestant	-0.26	0.12	0.15
No Religious Affiliation	0.09	0.13	0.17
Change in Religious Affiliation	-0.01	0.00	-0.01
<i>Religious Attitudes</i>			
Religious Family Environment	-0.23	-0.13	0.37
Religious Literalism	0.33 *	0.08	0.07
Relationship Characteristics			
Father Involvement		0.01	0.01
Relationship Quality with Birth Mother		-0.84 **	-0.83 **
Married to Birth Mother		-0.56	-0.53
Resident Father		0.28	0.27
Prior Breakup with Birth Mother		-0.42	-0.40
Mother's Religious Participation		-0.30 **	0.22
Controls			
Father's Age		0.00	0.00
Child is Male		0.07	0.09
Black		0.12	0.10
Latino		1.42 ***	1.39 ***
Other Race		0.56	0.52
High School Education		-0.34	-0.34
Some College Education		-0.76 *	-0.76 *
College Degree		-0.84	-0.82
First-time Fatherhood		-0.50	-0.48
Number of Additional Children		-0.03	-0.03
Own Father's Involvement		-0.28	-0.26
Birth Mother's Hours Worked		-0.01 *	-0.01 *
Father's Hours Worked		-0.01	-0.01
Interactions			
Religious Family Environment x Mother's Religious Participation			-0.24 *
R ²	0.01	0.06	0.07
*p < .05; **p < .01; *** p < .001			
N = 1503			

Table 4. Results from Regression Models Predicting Positive Behavior among Children at Age Five

	1	2	3
Father's Religious Characteristics			
<i>Trajectory of Religious Participation</i>			
Non-Attendees	0.00	0.29	0.34
Moderate Increasing Attendees	0.14	0.34	0.39
High Decreasing Attendees	0.66	0.85 *	0.85 *
High Increasing Attendees	-0.23	-0.01	0.02
<i>Religious Affiliation</i>			
Evangelical Protestant	-0.06	-0.01	-1.43 **
No Religious Affiliation	-0.29	-0.31	-1.15 *
Change in Religious Affiliation	0.08	0.06	0.05
<i>Religious Attitudes</i>			
Religious Family Environment	-0.07	-0.06	-0.06
Religious Literalism	0.01	0.13	0.14
Relationship Characteristics			
Father Involvement		-0.08	-0.22 **
Relationship Quality with Birth Mother		0.44	0.45
Married to Birth Mother		0.06	0.09
Resident Father		0.22	0.15
Prior Breakup with Birth Mother		0.18	0.17
Mother's Religious Participation		0.07	0.07
Controls			
Father's Age		-0.05 ***	-0.05 ***
Child is Male		-0.16	-0.18
Black		-0.73 **	-0.74 **
Latino		-0.95 ***	-0.96 ***
Other Race		-0.38	-0.41
High School Education		0.09	0.08
Some College Education		0.51 *	0.52 *
College Degree		0.62	0.67 *
First-time Fatherhood		0.00	0.00
Number of Additional Children		-0.05	-0.05
Own Father's Involvement		-0.38 *	-0.38 *
Birth Mother's Hours Worked		0.01 *	0.01 *
Father's Hours Worked		0.00	0.00
Interactions			
Evangelical Protestant x Father Involvement			0.32 **
No Religious Affiliation x Father Involvement			0.19
R ²	0.01	0.04	0.05
*p < .05; **p < .01; *** p < .001			
N = 1503			