

Father Engagement *and* Children's Social Development: Evidence *from* Early to Middle Childhood

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Many thanks to our funders:

- Administration for Children and Families
- NICHD
- Ford Foundation
- University of Maryland, College Park

Do Fathers Matter for
children's social and
emotional development?

YES!

Critical Development Transitions

- **Prenatal through Early Childhood (0 to 5 years)**
 - Rapid physical, cognitive and socio-emotional development
 - Neurobiological, behavioral, mental
 - Foundation established for transition from home to school
- **Middle Childhood/Early Adolescence (10 to 15 years)**
 - Rapid biological and psychological changes
 - More autonomy and skill development but increased exposure to risk
 - Sets trajectory for success in high school
- **Late Adolescence/Early Adulthood (18 to 25 years)**
 - Transition from home and school to post-secondary education, employment, and self-sufficiency
 - Must acquire skills and attitudes to be successful in rapidly changing workplace

Fathers' Influences on Infants and Toddlers are

Positive and Negative

Emotion Regulation

Social Competence

Moral Development (antisocial)

Academic and cognitive

Achievement

Short and Long Term

Why Social and Emotional Development?

- Social and emotional development begins during infancy in the context of an ecological network of social and reciprocal relationships
- The *quality child's early experiences* with his/her caregivers, including fathers, are critical for future relationships

Social and Emotional Development

- Children who are socially competent display behaviors that suggest a *certain set of values, positive self-identity, interpersonal skills, self-regulation, planning and decision-making*, and display *cultural competence*
- Children who are emotionally competent are able to express, understand, and recognize emotions as well as learn the causes and consequences of emotions

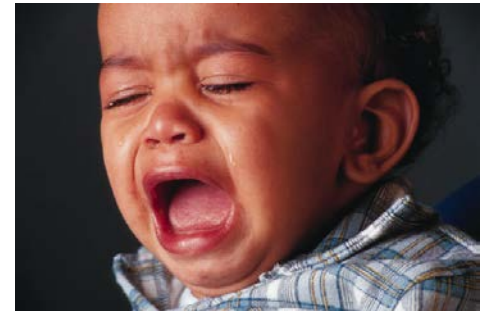


Fathers and their Infants

- Today, fathers are more involved in caregiving and physical play than they used to be (Cabrera, Hofferth, & Schae, 2011) BUT are less engaged in cognitive stimulating activities during infancy.
- Dads become more involved as their children reach the 2 to 6 age range (Belsky, Rovine, & Fish, 1989).

Evidence Clearly Indicates that Father **Absence** is Associated with:

Poor school achievement
Lower scores on intelligence tests
Lower grade point averages
Trouble with mathematical and puzzle tasks
Difficulties paying attention
Higher likelihood of being expelled, drop out
Lower higher education attainment
Poor moral development
Delaying gratification
More impulsivity
Social and emotional maladjustment
Conduct and anxiety disorders
Suicide
Deviant peer group selections
High rates of aggression, bullying, and antisocial behavior
Higher rates of physical and sexual abuse
Higher rates of involvement with the criminal justice system
Higher rates of alcohol and other drug problems
Earlier onset of sexual intercourse, smoking, AUD
Higher probability of possessing weapons



How about father **presence**?

Research question:

How do fathers ***directly and indirectly*** influence their children's social & emotional development?



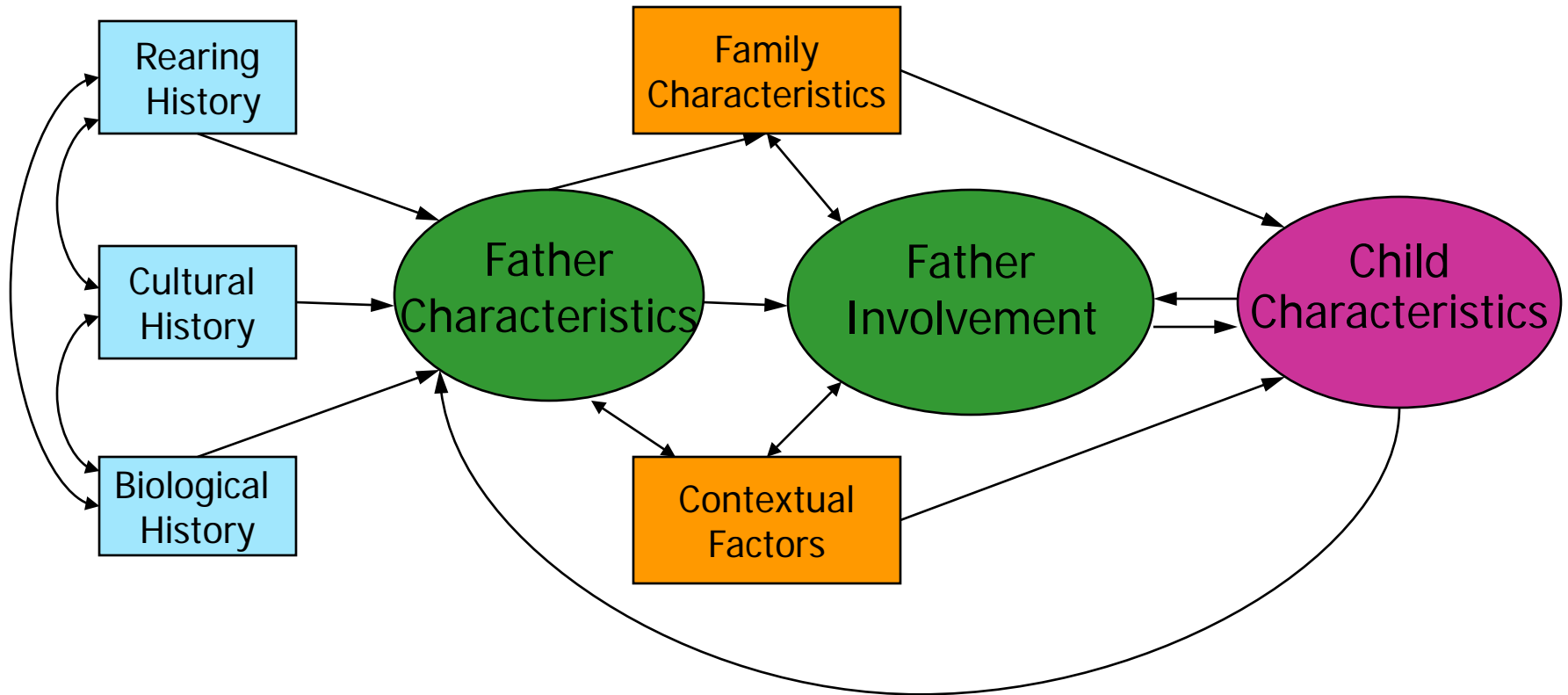
Data Sources

- **EHS National Father Research Consortium**
 - 3000 families in random-control design
 - Mother and father interviews and videotaping at 14, 24, 36 mos and Pre-K
 - Study of newborns
- **ECLS-B**
 - Nationally representative sample of 10,688 children born in 2001
 - 9, 24, & 48 months surveys collected from children, mothers, and fathers.

Attachment Theory

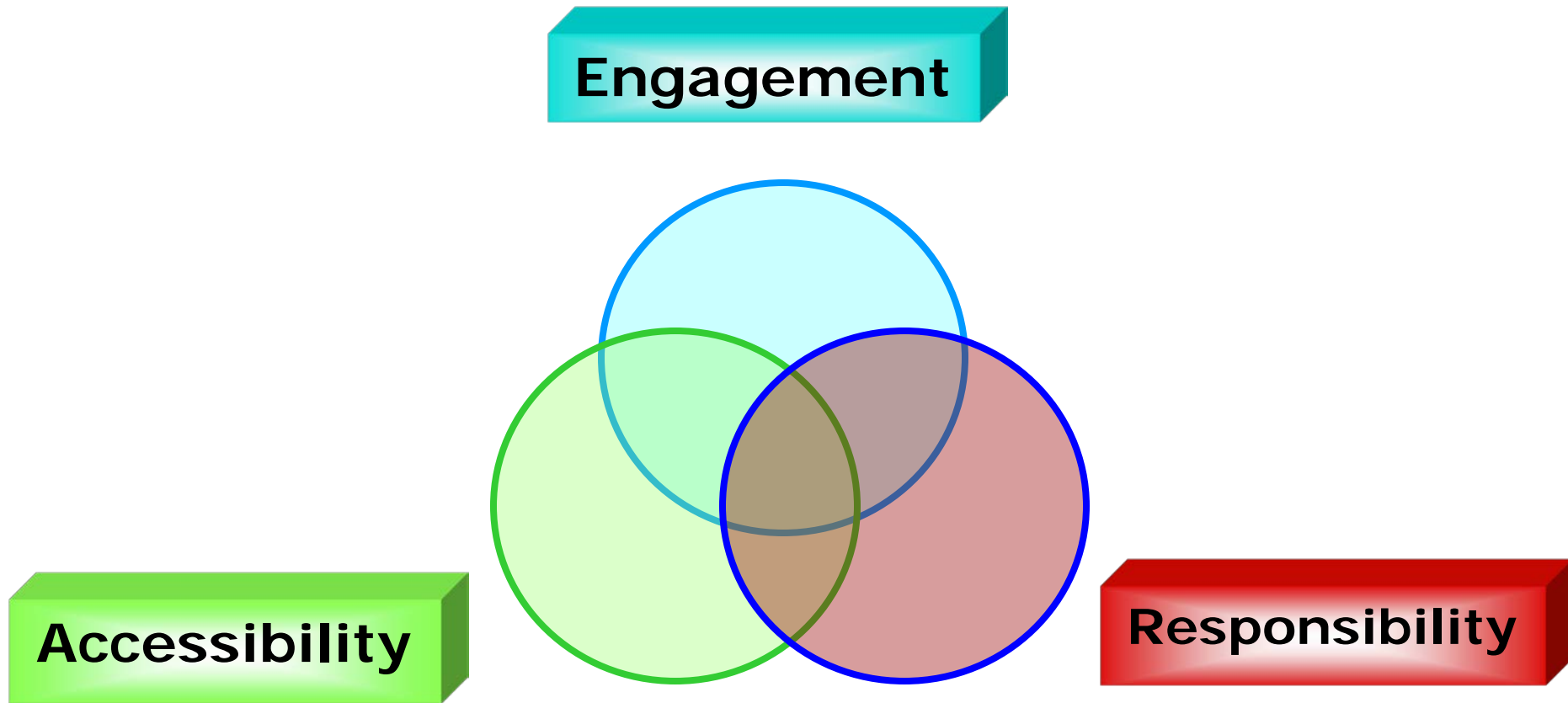
- Beginning at infancy, the early childhood period is a significant period where caregivers establish close relationships with the baby that form the foundation for child well being and development
- Family systems are dynamic change over time as family adjusts to child
- Family subsystems are interdependent and influence one another

Dynamic Model of Paternal Influences on Children over the Life Course



Cabrera, N., Fitzgerald, H. E., Bradley, R. H., & Roggman, L. (2007). Modeling the dynamics of paternal influences on children over the life course. *Applied Developmental Science*, 11, 184-188.

Typology of Father Involvement



Direct Effects

EHS data: Quality of **father play** and children's social and emotional development

Fathers who allowed their toddlers to explore and refrained from overly dictating the child's activities had children **who exhibited fewer behavioral problems** (Shears & Robins, 2005)

When fathers exhibited high levels of physical play and used less coercive tactics, their children were rated as **less aggressive** (McDowell & Parke, 2009)

In context of rough and tumble play, children learn to **regulate their behaviors** and impulses (Paquette, 2008)

Low-Income Fathers' Influence on Their Children's Emotional Development: **From Toddlers to Pre-K**

EHS sample of resident biological father

- n=290 2 and 3 year olds
- n=313 pre-k

Measures

- Child Assessments: Bayley, PPVT
- Parent characteristics
- Father- and mother-child videotaped play interactions



Cabrera, N. J., Shannon, J. D., & Tamis-LeMonda, C. (2007). Fathers' influence on their children's cognitive and emotional development. *Applied Developmental Science*, 11, 208-213

Findings

- Although children in our study scored .5 to 1.0 SD below national norms of cognitive tests, they were **highly regulated across ages** (i.e., attentive, able to stay on task)
- *Father supportiveness coded in the context of play* was positively associated with children's **emotional regulation** at 2 years

Cabrera, N. J., Shannon, J. D., & Tamis-LeMonda, C. (2007). Fathers' influence on their children's cognitive and emotional development. *Applied Developmental Science*, 11, 208-213

National data: Long-term effect of fathers engagement on children's sustained attention

ECLSB:

- 3,550 children and their fathers and mothers
- Sample includes children in some type of child care with two biological resident parents

Measures:

- Fathers and mothers literacy levels
- Child care setting literacy Levels



Findings

Shared book reading by mothers *and* fathers had same effect on SR

- Shared book reading by fathers was uniquely related to **sustained attention** and other school readiness skills
- Effects of mother and father reading were multiplicative –
 - mothers who read frequently to their children had a stronger effect on children's sustained attention when fathers also read frequently to their children

EHS data: **Middle school children's** perceptions of their relationship with their fathers and behavioral problems and peer relationships

EHS sample of children and their fathers

- n=508 children
- Measures
 - Father reported on residence (age 2- pre K);
 - Mothers reported on CBCL and father residence 5th grade;
 - 5th graders reported on quality of relationships with fathers and peers

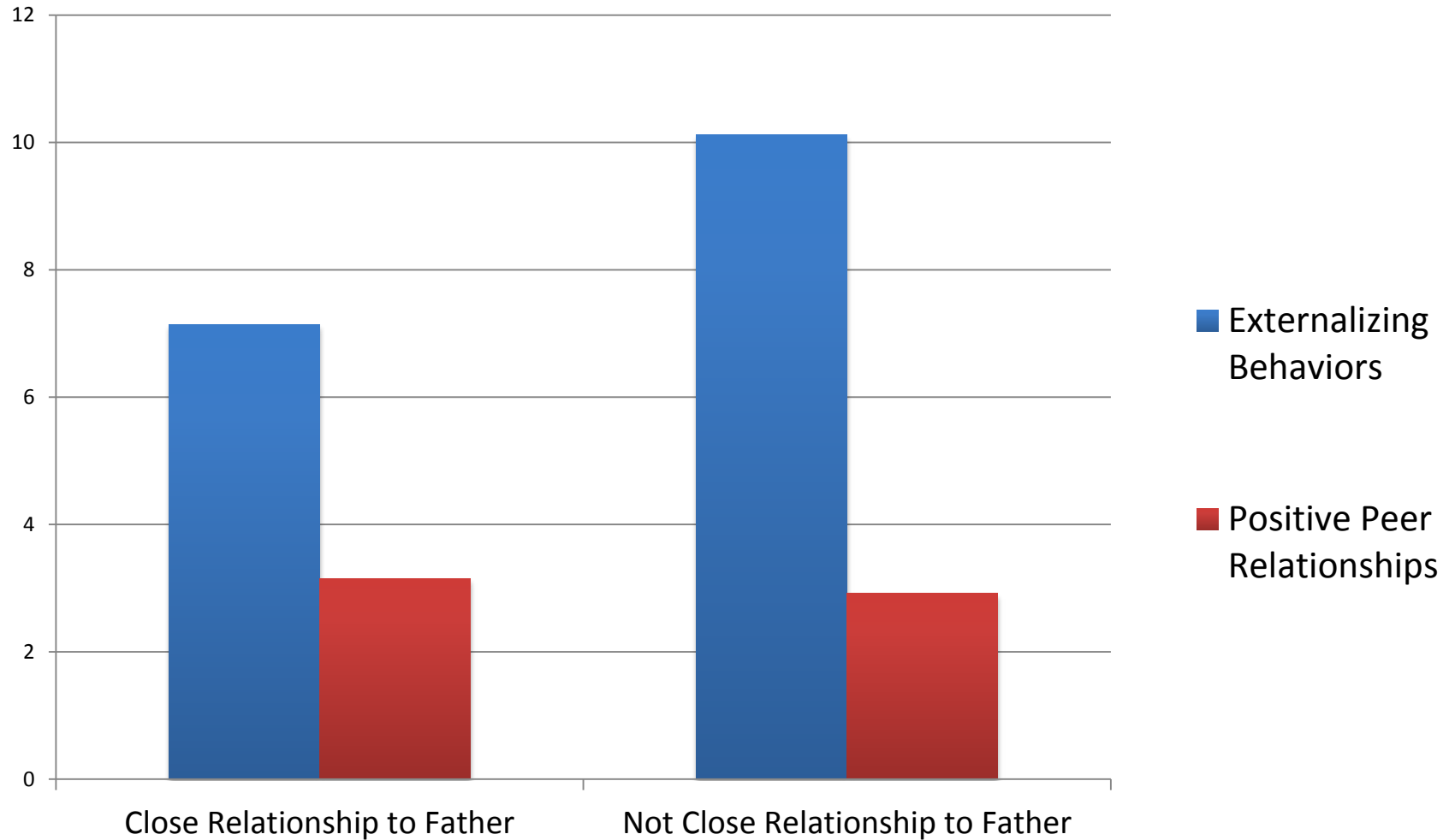


Cabrera, N., Cook, G., McFadden, K., & Bradley, B. (2012). Father residence and father-child relationship quality: Peer relationships and externalizing behavioral problems. *Family Science*.

Findings

- Early father residence predicted 5th graders' perception of their relationship with their fathers but did not predict to social adjustment
- **Children's report** on their relationship with their father predicted children's social adjustment
 - Children who said they *had and have* a close relationship with dad had fewer externalizing behaviors
 - Children who said they had a close relationship with their dads said they had more friends

Father Relationships and Child Social Adjustment



But father engagement is
not always good...

Quality of mother and father interactions: Contributions to aggression in girls and boys

EHS sample of resident biological father

- N=588 pre-K

Measures

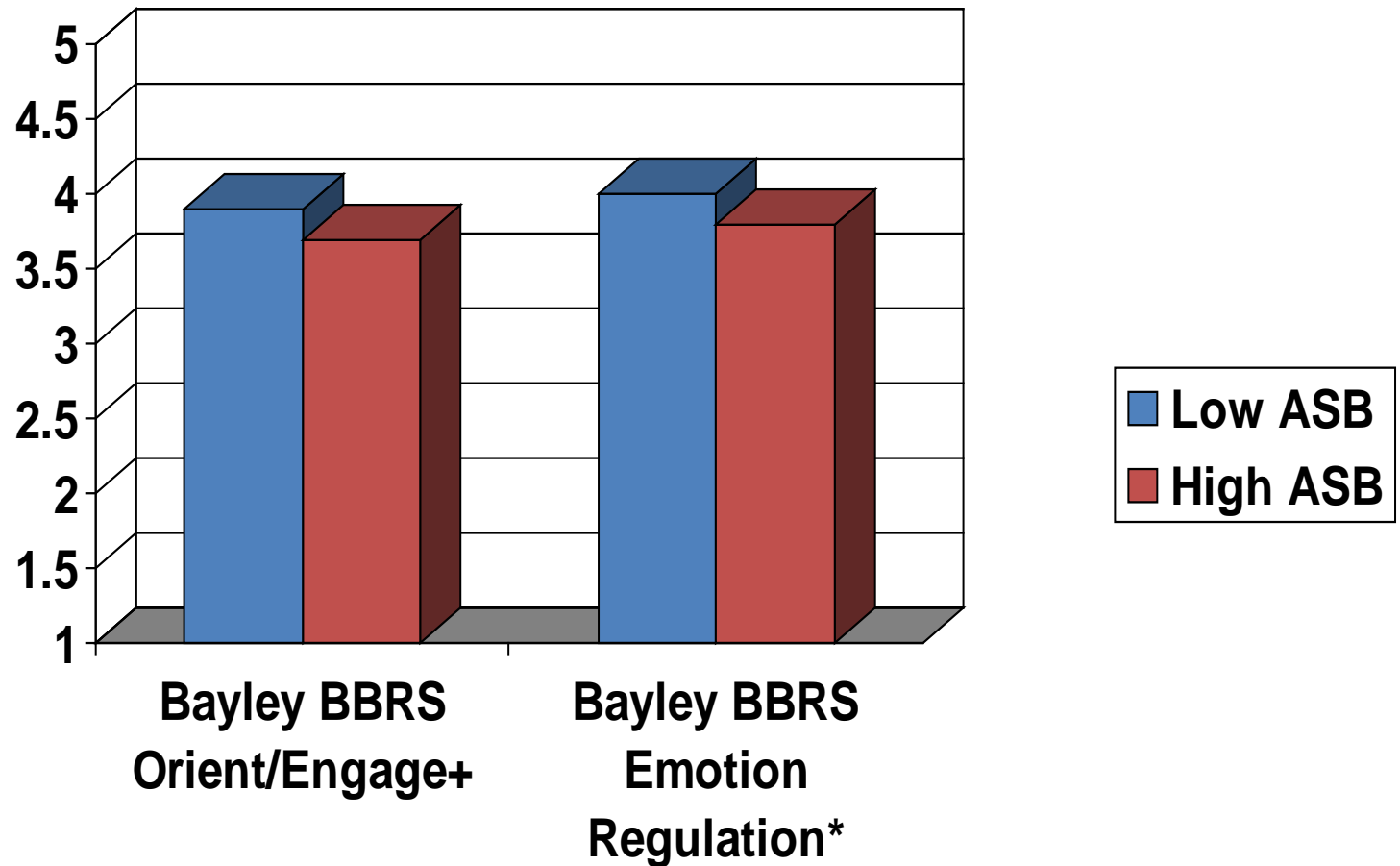
- Mothers and fathers report of aggression
- Maternal supportiveness and intrusiveness
- Paternal supportiveness and intrusiveness

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Findings

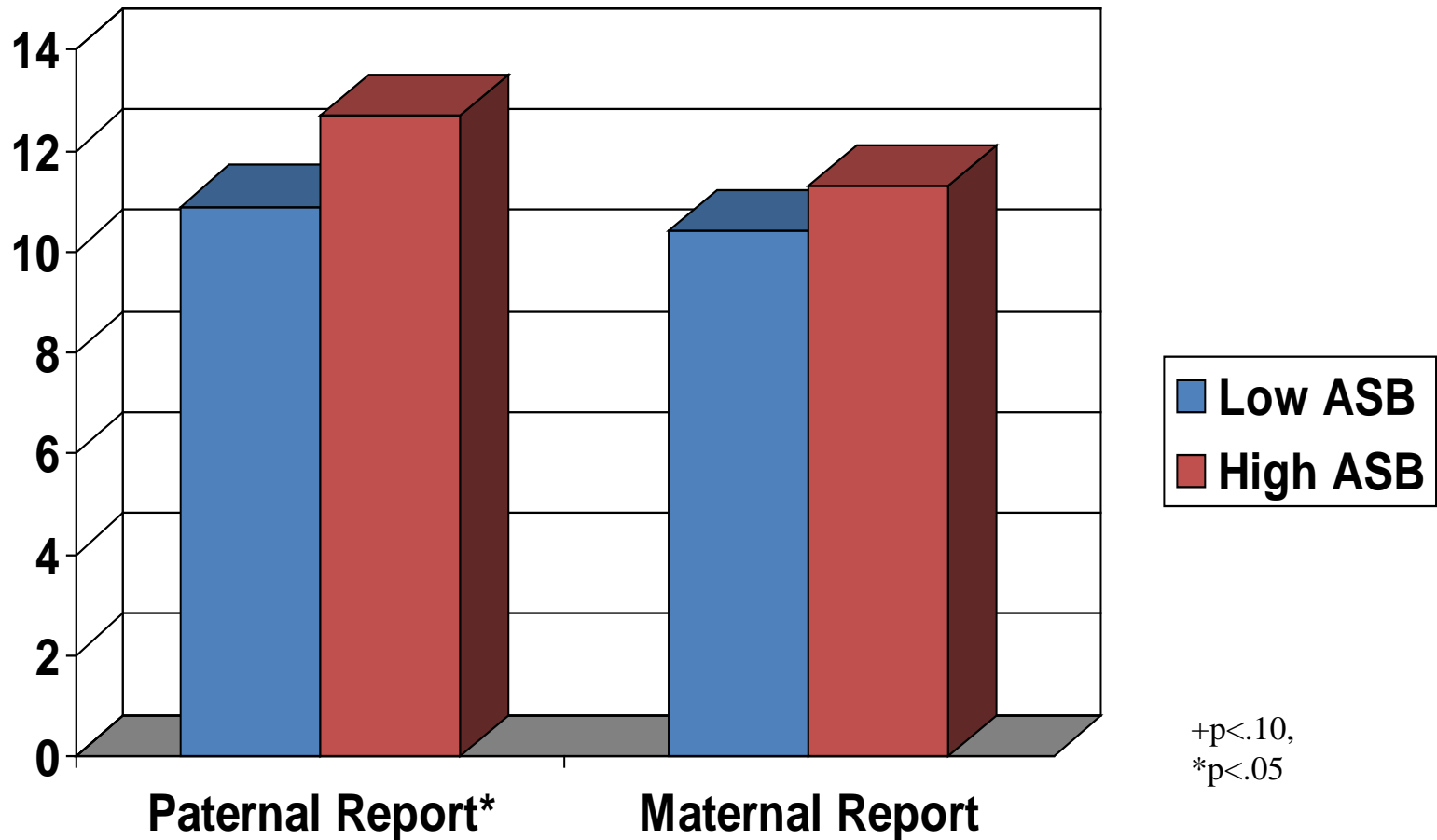
- For girls
 - Maternal **intrusiveness and spanking** predicted to **aggressive behavior**
- For boys
 - **Mom and dad spanking** predicted to **aggressive behavior**
 - **And also chaos in the home**
- In another study, father intrusiveness was inversely related to **less emotional regulation** (Cabrera et al., 2007)

Father Antisocial Behavior and Child Outcomes



Fitzgerald, H. E., McKelvey, L., Schiffman, R., & Montenez, M. (Jan. 2004). Origins of risk: Paternal and neighborhood influences on child and family functioning. In Symposium on Fathers and Infants: International Perspectives (H. E. Fitzgerald, Chair). Ninth WAIMH World Congress, Melbourne, Australia.

Father Antisocial Behavior and Child Aggression



Fitzgerald, H. E., McKelvey, L., Schiffman, R., & Montenez, M. (Jan. 2004). Origins of risk: Paternal and neighborhood influences on child and family functioning. In Symposium on Fathers and Infants: International Perspectives (H. E. Fitzgerald, Chair). Ninth WAIMH World Congress, Melbourne, Australia.

SUMMARY:

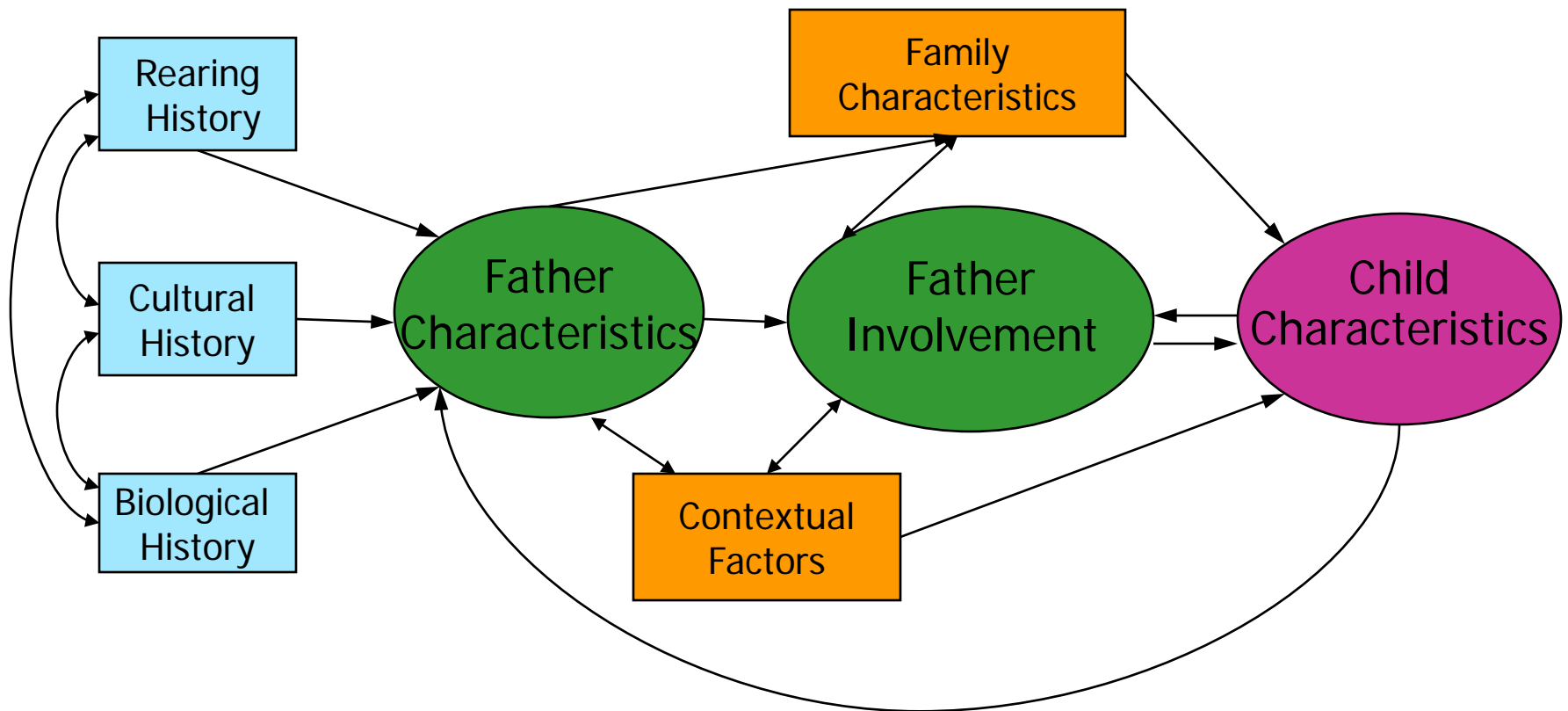
Evidence clearly indicates that fathers independently have positive influences on:

- **Behavior Regulation (esp. with boys)**
- **Emotion Regulation (esp. with girls)**
- **Stronger attachment relationships**
- **Social Competence more stress tolerance
better internal locus of control**
- **Social Maturity more likely to take initiative, use
self-direction, less impulsivity**



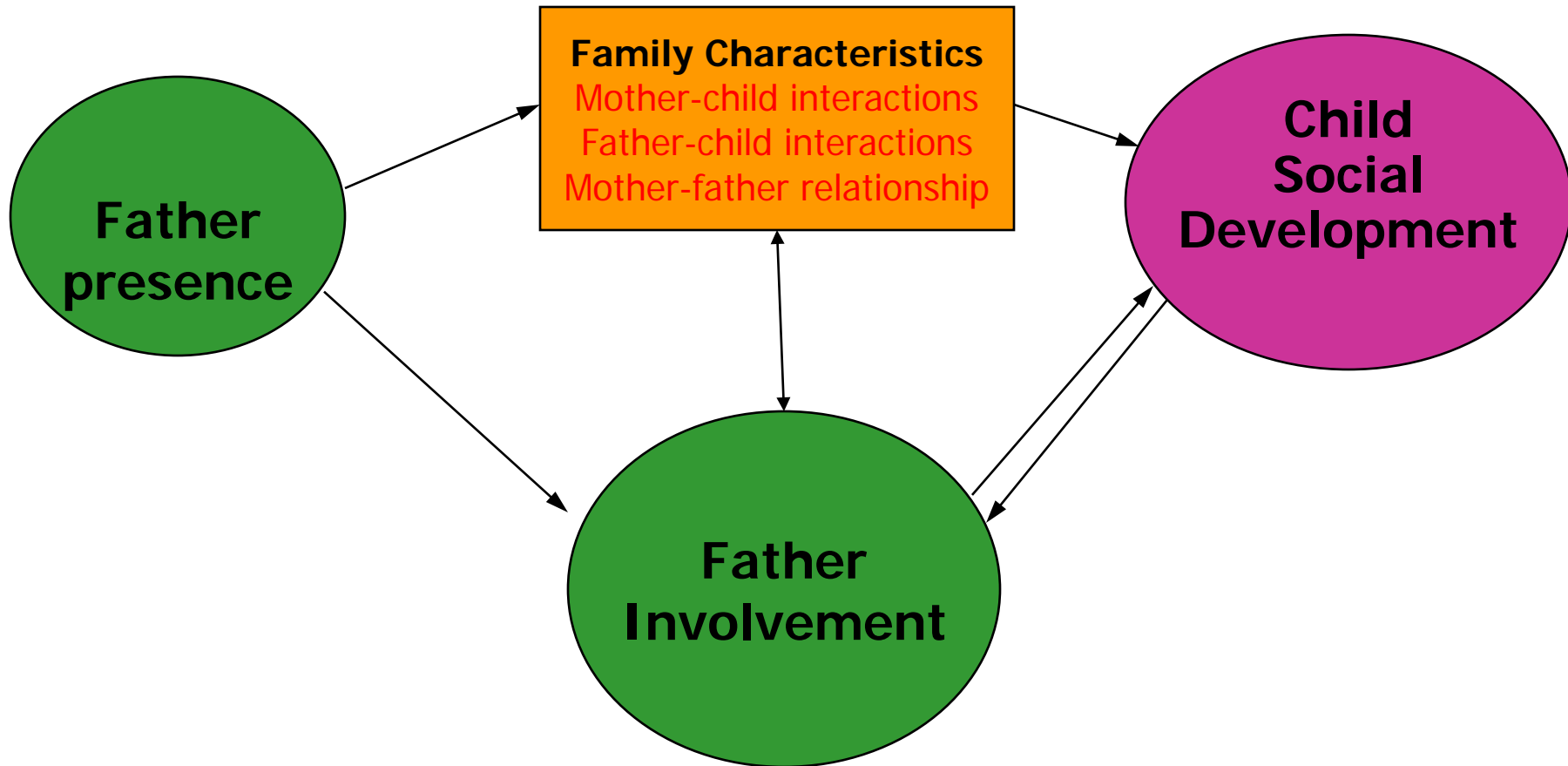
**WHAT *are the* PATHWAYS
through which Fathers
INFLUENCE Children?**

Dynamic Model of Paternal Influences on Children over the Life Course



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Dynamic Model of Paternal Influences on Children over the Life Course



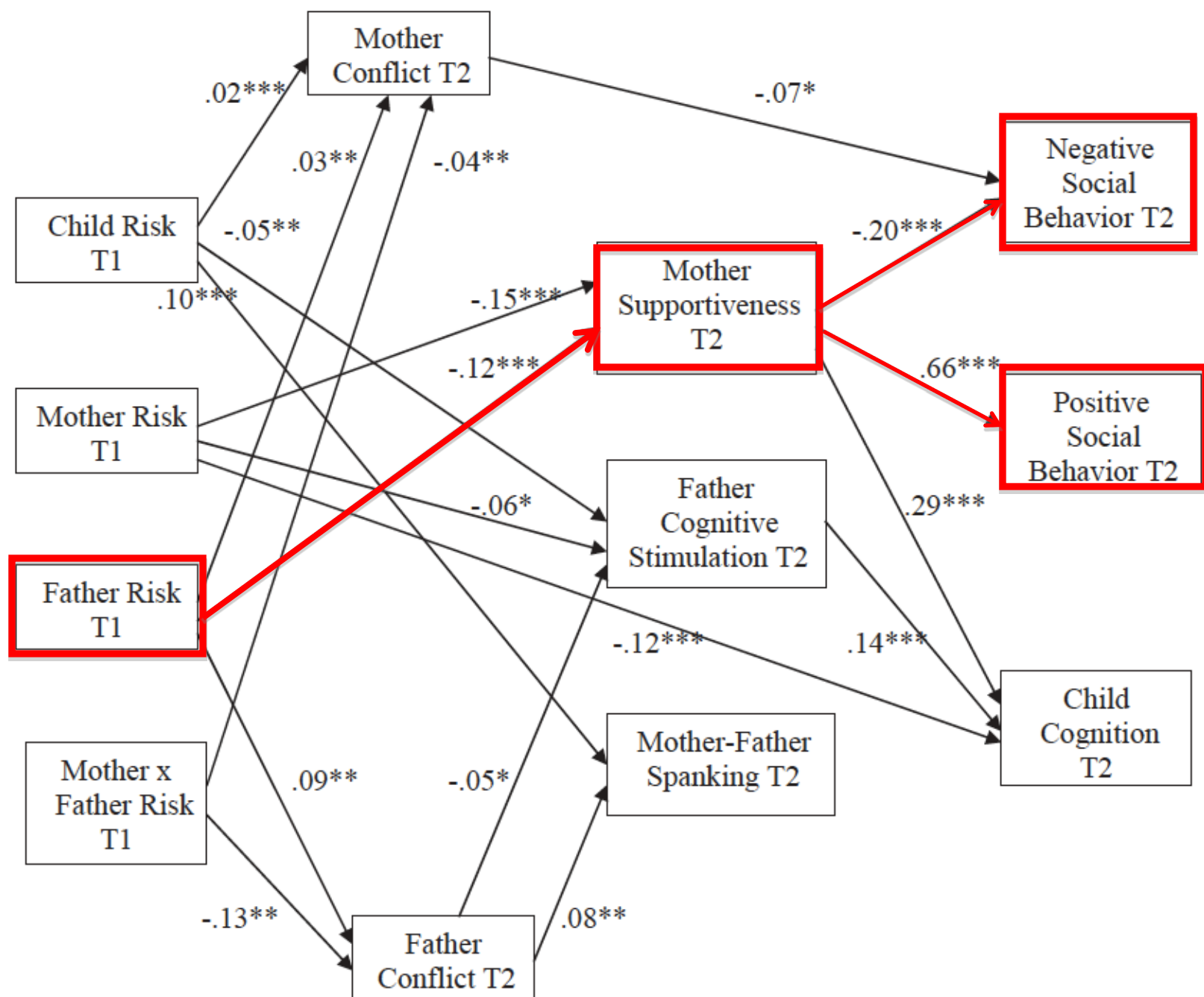
Cabrera, N., Fitzgerald, H. E., Bradley, R. H., & Roggman, L. (2007). Modeling the dynamics of paternal influences on children over the life course. *Applied Developmental Science*, 11, 184-188.

National data:

Fathers in the context of families

- Examining the indirect association among fathers' risk (mothers' and child's risk) and **social behaviors** at 24 months
- ECLS-B n =4,200 on toddlers and their mothers and fathers
- Measures:
 - Father engagement
 - Mother-child support
 - Observed child social behaviors





Findings

- Although mother and father risk are linked to negative social behaviors, the pathways are different
- Fathers with higher levels of risk had children with fewer social behaviors (attention, engagement) **because mothers were less sensitive**
- Fathers are less engaged in cognitive stimulating activities when their partners and children have higher levels of risk

Fathers' presence and resources: Long-term mediational effects

- Early father residence predicted the quality of the father-child relationship in 5th grade and was **mediated** by **father residence** during 5th grade (Cabrera et al., 2012)
- Fathers' resources such as education are linked to children's social behaviors through **maternal support and father engagement** (Cabrera et al., under review)



Conclusions

The early childhood period is an important context for fathers to contribute to their children's social and emotional development

During middle childhood, being close to dads reduces behavior problems

Fathers' contribution is unique and independent

These father effects are long-term and are linked to children's social adjustment

Fathers effects are transactional



Next Steps

Need research that places men *IN* families and in a cultural context

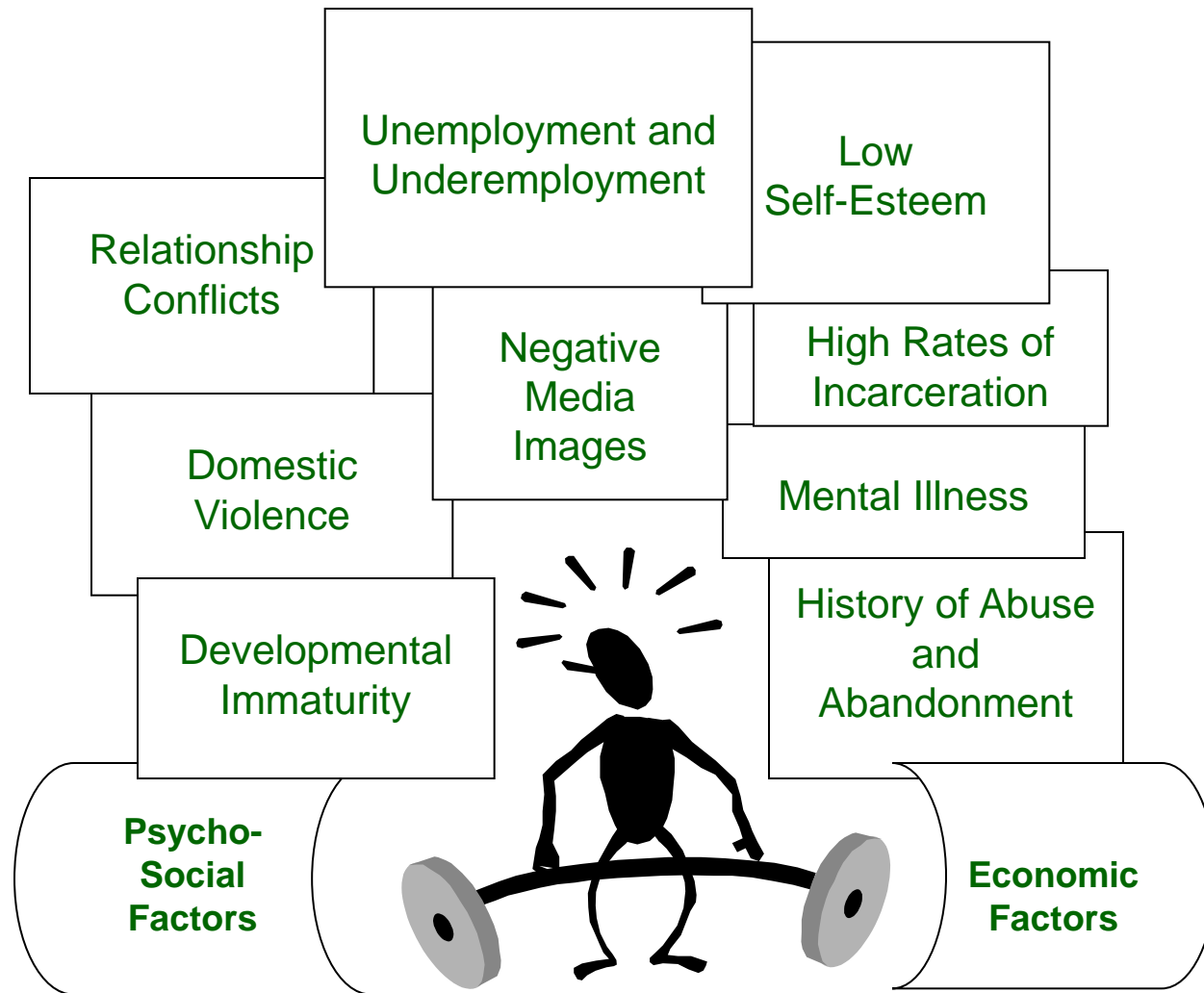
We need to move beyond one-single parent approach – to look at how mothers and fathers parent: additive and multiplicative effects

Include other family processes – expand view of family, including child and others

Mechanisms – How??

More interdisciplinary research

Thank You!



Barriers to Father Involvement

McAllister, C. L., Wilson, P. C., & Burton, J. (May, 2004). The evolution of father involvement in an Early Head Start program. Presented at the biennial meeting of the International Conference on Infant Studies. Chicago, IL

The background of the book cover is a photograph of a man and a young child walking away from the viewer on a sandy beach. They are silhouetted against a bright, low sun that creates a warm, golden glow across the sky and the water in the distance. The man is on the left, holding the child's hand, and they are walking towards the right side of the frame.

HANDBOOK OF FATHER INVOLVEMENT

MULTIDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVES

SECOND EDITION

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