

The Association of Physical Maturation With Family Hassles Among African American Adolescent Males

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This research examined associations between physical maturation and adolescent-perceived family hassles within a sample of urban African American families who resided in high-risk communities. The purpose of the study was to examine the relations between physical maturation and youths' perceptions of their family context and the associated daily stresses experienced. The participants were 251 parent-son dyads who were interviewed separately. The combination of quantitative and qualitative results extends the literature on physical development and urban African American populations by indicating that parents are most aware of pubertal changes during early puberty. The findings suggested that adolescent-perceived hassles are indications of parental monitoring and more adaptive parenting strategies are needed for high-risk neighborhoods.

• *physical maturation* • *stress* • *parental monitoring* • *puberty*

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As children transition into adolescence, many aspects of the parent-child relationship begin to change. Researchers have noted disagreement in the levels of parental monitoring and communication within the dyads, which include negotiating household expectations such as chores or approval for activities such as going to the movies with friends (Holmbeck, 1996; Paikoff & Brooks-Gunn, 1991). However, little research has examined parent-adolescent relationships within urban, African American male adolescents (Smetana & Gaines, 1999). Our research examined associations between physical maturation and adolescent-perceived family hassles (e.g., doing chores, parents monitoring phone conversations) within a sample of urban, African American families who resided in high-risk communities. The purpose of the study was to examine the relations between physical maturation and youths' perceptions of their family context and the associated daily stresses experienced.

Associations between physical maturation and parent-adolescent conflict have been extensively studied in Caucasian families. Prior research has examined the effects of puberty in relation to educational outcomes (Dubas, Graber, & Petersen, 1991a; Duke et al., 1982; Simmons & Blyth, 1987) and adolescent peer groups (Jones & Musen, 1958) for male youths. However, studies examining characteristics such as ethnicity, gender, and family environment for African American youths are rare (Sagrestano, McCormick, Paikoff, & Holmbeck, 1999). The researchers who have indicated the effects of parent-adolescent interactions within African American families have noted different outcomes. Steinberg, Lamborn, Dornbusch, and Darling (1992) suggested that peers might influence behaviors of adolescents more than parents might during the second decade of life. However, Spencer, Dupree, Swanson, and Cunningham (1996) reported that parental influences on adolescent behaviors remain important during the adolescent years. The type of influence varies depending on the strategies parents per-

ceive as necessary given their environment and characteristics of the child. Smetana and Gaines (1999), for example, found that parenting strategies and sociodemographic factors (i.e., family income and parental education) predicted the number and intensity of conflicts between parents and their adolescent children among middle-class African Americans. Furthermore, McLoyd (1998), in a focus on socioeconomic disadvantage, posited that family income affects parenting and child outcomes because it impacts economic resources that are available and influences what the lack of economic resources represent.

Previous research has indicated that the biological changes occurring during adolescence are coupled with psychosocial changes and may lead to differences in how parents interact and monitor their adolescents' behaviors (Spencer, Dupree, et al., 1996). Sagrestano et al. (1999) reported parents used more verbal aggression in their conversations with their sons during mid-puberty versus early or late puberty in their sample of urban African American adolescents. However, an important distinction in examining parent-adolescent relationships is the differences between how parents differentiate pubertal status from pubertal timing. Dubas, Graber, and Petersen (1991b) referred to pubertal status as "an adolescent's current level of physical maturation" and pubertal timing as "whether an adolescent's physical maturation is occurring on time, early, or late, relative to same-sex peers" (p. 444). The present study examines the relations among pubertal status, pubertal timing, and adolescent perceptions of hassles from their parents. The last is also conceptualized as parental monitoring (Spencer, Dupree, et al., 1996).

We conceptualize pubertal timing to be associated with the adolescent's physical maturation as measured by the adolescent's height and weight, whereas pubertal status is associated with how the parents report the adolescent's physical maturation is occurring in relation to the teen's peer group. As indicated in other research (Spencer, Du-

pree, et al., 1996), adolescent perceptions of parental hassles are conceptualized as indications of parental monitoring associated with family life in many urban and high-risk communities.

Theoretical Framework

We examined the association of adolescent-perceived hassles (which might be a form of parental monitoring) with physical maturation by using a phenomenological variant of ecological systems theory (PVEST; Spencer, 1999). The PVEST framework is an extension of traditional ecological systems theory described by Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Lewin (1946). The phenomenological aspect provides a heuristic device for understanding the complexity of adolescent experiences. For example, in the present study it is important to understand how parents buffer adolescent males from potential stresses often associated with urban neighborhoods. These buffering techniques are particularly salient for African American adolescent males who are early maturers. They may be viewed as adult men, and others may misinterpret their behaviors in their environment (see Cunningham, 1999; Spencer, Cunningham, & Swanson, 1995; Stevenson, 1997). Further, Spencer (2001) noted that African American parents use gender-specific parenting strategies. Specifically, she reported that parents were often viewed as providing different socialization experiences for male and female youths. She stated, "Often males are encouraged to be physical and allowed significant independence, whereas females are frequently assisted rather than encouraged toward independence and mastery" (p. 58). However, what remains unclear is whether parents provide different parental strategies if they perceive their sons as vulnerable to neighborhood dangers because of being physically more or less mature than their same-age peers.

An important characteristic to note for this study is the assessment of the *actual* experiences of raising a son in a high-risk com-

munity and *perceptions* of the experiences. For example, an adolescent may report increased hassles in a home in which strict parental monitoring is practiced to protect their physically mature son from becoming involved in gang activity or involvement with drugs. That is, one's perception of an experience is just as crucial to an explanation as the behaviors associated with the actual experience. We therefore examined the relations between parent reports of their sons' physical status with adolescent reports of perceived family hassles and stresses experienced in their community context. From the parents' perspective, they are protecting their sons. However, adolescents may perceive the parental monitoring as a hassle: an infraction on their need to establish autonomy. Nonetheless, the risks experienced by youths need to be explained within a framework that acknowledges normative issues of family stresses encountered when parenting within high-risk neighborhoods (Spencer, Swanson, & Glymph, 1996). In the present study, the dynamics of family-adolescent relationships and perceptions of the relationships are examined to understand if parental monitoring (conceptualized as perceived hassles from adolescents' perspective) is associated with physical maturation in African American adolescent males.

The PVEST perspective is used in explaining how relations between physical development and expected milestones (e.g., perceiving oneself as more independent) can be mediated by family dynamics and environmental stimuli. Parental supervision may thwart, or come in conflict with, independence desires of adolescents living in "hostile environments" and may be perceived as family hassles from the youths' perspective. However, perceptions of family hassles could well be indications of adolescent-reported parental monitoring activities necessary in high-risk environments. Thus, particularly for underrepresented and minimally researched groups, PVEST affords significant utility for examining relationships between self and context in groups (see

Cunningham & Spencer, 2000, for empirical examples).

Research Questions

Because of the lack of empirical evidence that examines the relations between physical maturation and parental monitoring strategies within urban, African American heterosexual families, we address three questions. First, are parents aware of when their sons enter puberty? Prior research with Caucasian adolescents has indicated that mothers' ratings of their adolescent's pubertal development were accurate (Brooks-Gunn & Warren, 1985). Although the ratings are more accurate for daughters than sons, empirical reports are lacking on parental knowledge of pubertal timing for African American adolescents, particularly males.

Second, understanding parenting practices and adolescent responses to their parents need to be understood within a framework that recognizes the experiences that families have within their cultural and ecological niche (McLoyd, 1998; Spencer, 1986, 2001). Steinberg's (1981) examination of parent-son relations within Caucasian family triads (mother, fathers, and sons) indicated that conflict between parents and their sons decreased with the sons' physical maturation. However, similar data are not available with urban African American families. Many African American families are female headed and reside in high-risk communities. Thus, is parental monitoring, as indicated by adolescent reports of family hassles, related to family structure, and are student reports of stressful events related to perceived hassles? Finally, to further investigate the relationship that parents have with their adolescent sons, our third question addresses whether parent-adolescent conflict is heightened in high-risk neighborhoods. As suggested by Spencer and her colleagues, a strict parental monitoring relationship may be an indication that parents are aware of potential dangers associated with residing

in high-risk communities and therefore monitor their adolescent behaviors more.

Method

Participants

The data used to examine relations of physical maturation and family hassles come from the Promotion of Academic Competence (PAC; Spencer, 1989). Project PAC was a 5-year longitudinal study examining the developmental transitions for economically disadvantaged African American youths in a southeastern urban city. Out of a sample of 294 male participants, 251 parent-son dyads were interviewed separately during the first year of the study.

The students were sixth ($n = 81$), seventh ($n = 90$), and eighth ($n = 80$) graders who attended one of four predominantly African American, public middle schools. Fifty-eight percent of the students' families met the 1990 federal poverty guidelines and were 2.5 standard deviations below the national poverty level.

Procedure

STUDENTS. The students were seen several times at their respective schools. They completed three surveys in small groups during the academic year that included several instruments concerning their social and academic experiences. A research assistant read surveys to the groups while other assistants proctored. Following completion of the surveys, a one-on-one interview was conducted with each student by a same-race and -gender interviewer. Additionally, the students had their height and weight assessed either before or after the interview. At the end of the academic year, the students were given a \$25 incentive for their participation.

PARENTAL ASSESSMENT. In an in-home, one-on-one format, African American mental health professionals who served as part-time research assistants (e.g., social workers, com-

munity center counselors, and ministers) interviewed parents. At the beginning of the interview, the purpose of the study was reiterated to the parents with a reminder that they would receive a \$15 incentive for their participation. The interview questions ranged from demographic information to questions regarding parental expectations and challenges of rearing adolescents, including questions about their son's maturational development. The extensive interview was developed for the study (Spencer, 1989). A few parents (less than five) had more than one son who was involved in the study. These parents completed a separately scheduled interview for each son at least 2 weeks apart to minimize mirrored responses and received \$15 for each interview.

Measures

FAMILY DEMOGRAPHICS. Female headship was measured using a dichotomous variable (0–1). A home was designated as female headed if there was neither a husband nor live-in boyfriend present in the home currently or within the last 12 months (coded as 1). As indicated in Table 1, the sample is 69% female headed. Single-father families comprised less than 0.5% of the participating families and were not included in the analyses. Families that were married or had a live-in partner were heterosexual couples (31%). The breakdown of the other female-headed households was as follows: widowed (5%), separated (27%), never married (25%), and divorced (12%).

TABLE 1 Types of Female Headship ($N = 251$)

<i>Parental marital status^a</i>	<i>Actual no.</i>	<i>%</i>
Married or has live-in partner ^b	78	31
Widowed	12	5
Separated	68	27
Never married	63	25
Divorced	30	12

^aSingle-father families comprise less than 0.5% of the participating families and were not included in the analyses. ^bAll couples self-identified as heterosexual.

Family income was calculated using a formula that considered the actual annual income, the number of children and adults in the household, and the federal poverty income criterion (Spencer, Cole, Jones, & Swanson, 1997). For example, in a household of four with an annual income of \$15,000, the income was divided by the federal poverty income criterion for a family of four: \$13,950. The resulting number was a family income index (for the given example, the index is 1.08). The resulting family index indicated that the family income for the example household was slightly above the federal poverty level.

PHYSICAL DATA. Height and weight were obtained in the entire sample of the male students ($N = 294$) during the academic year. However, the weight and height data were categorized to indicate the relative physical status of the adolescents with respect to the middle school cohort, which was African American. This method of categorization is recommended as providing an accurate pubertal assessment of populations that are frequently understudied, and the grouping is based on the students' same-age cohorts (Graber, Petersen, & Brooks-Gunn, 1996). As indicated in Table 2, the students were identified as below average if they were more than one standard deviation below the

TABLE 2 Height and Weight Distribution by Grade ($N = 294$; $n = 251$)

<i>Measure and grade</i>	<i>N (n)</i>	<i>-1 SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>+1 SD</i>
Height in inches				
6th	122 (81)	23 (16)	80 (53)	19 (12)
7th	90 (90)	11 (11)	64 (64)	15 (15)
8th	82 (80)	11 (11)	59 (57)	12 (12)
Weight in pounds				
6th	122 (81)	20 (13)	80 (52)	22 (16)
7th	90 (90)	18 (18)	61 (61)	11 (11)
8th	82 (80)	12 (11)	59 (58)	11 (11)

Note. Standard deviations are based on the means from this middle school cohort of male adolescents. The subsample is presented in the parentheses and represents the number of participants who also had parent interviews.

mean for height ($n = 38$) or weight ($n = 42$). They were categorized as average if they were within one standard deviation below or above the mean for height ($n = 174$) or weight ($n = 172$) and as above average if they were more than one standard deviation above the mean for height ($n = 39$) or weight ($n = 37$).

In addition, parents' estimates of their sons' pubertal status were obtained from their responses to the question, "How much growth has your child attained?" Response groupings included (a) hasn't entered puberty yet, (b) has just entered puberty, (c) is right in the middle of puberty, and (d) combination of just about through puberty and finished with puberty. The questions were similar to the adolescent version of the Pubertal Development Scale (Petersen, Crockett, Richards, & Boxer, 1988). The procedure used is recommended given objections of the more commonly used Tanner Measure (Marshall & Tanner, 1970) or similar assessment tools that use pictures of adolescent pubertal changes (Graber et al., 1996).

Youth Psychological Status Variables

Two measures were standardized for use with the present sample.

CHILDREN'S HASSLES SCALE. This measure is a self-report inventory that was developed to measure child- and adolescent-perceived reports of hassles (Kanner, Feldman, Weinberger, & Ford, 1987). The measure includes 40 items with two response scales (measuring frequency and magnitude). The participants were informed, "The statements describe events that occur between kids and parents. These sorts of things can sometimes make life difficult." Participants then responded to several statements such as, "In the past 6 months how often have your parents had to continually remind you to keep the house clean? . . . clean up after your siblings or relatives?" and so on. The responses were on a 4-point Likert scale indicating *rarely*, *sometimes*, *a lot*, or *constantly* where a higher score reflects greater perceived

hassle. After each response, participants also indicated the magnitude of the event when it occurred. For example, "When your parents had to remind you to keep the house clean or clean up after siblings or relatives, how much of a hassle was it?" The responses are on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (*no hassle*) to 5 (*a big hassle*).

Although the measure has been used with other early adolescent populations (Kanner et al, 1987), reports of its reliability were not available. Thus, McDermott and Spencer (1995a) performed exploratory factor analyses. Two factors were produced and confirmed through oblique principal item cluster analysis. In the rescaling procedures, each pair of responses (e.g., how often event occurred and how much of a hassle) was multiplied to produce variables that accounted for the relative weighted frequency. The results indicate two scales with strong psychometric properties: Home and Family Hassles (standardized $\alpha = .90$) and Personal Independence Hassles (standardized $\alpha = .80$). Although the scales represent adolescent perceptions of hassles, further research by Spencer, Dupree, et al. (1996) suggested that they are indications of parental monitoring.

LIFE EVENT RECORD. This is a 40-item self-report inventory intended to identify recent major stressful events among West Coast adolescents (Coddington, 1972). For the present study, the original items were altered somewhat in language, referents, and sequence to conform to the participants in this sample in the Southeast. Sixteen additional items were added and are extensions of the original measure. The additional items addressed events commonly associated with high-risk neighborhoods. Because the original measure was altered, principal-components analysis was performed. The results indicated one factor with salient loadings greater than or equal to .35 (McDermott & Spencer, 1995b). The dimension was named the Stressful Events Scale ($r_\alpha = .86$).

TABLE 3 Intercorrelations Among Demographic, Physical, and Psychological Variables for Sixth-Grade Males ($n = 81$)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Income	—	-.31***	.11	.11	.01	-.01	.01	.05
2. Female headship		—	-.03	.04	-.11	-.26**	-.03	-.02
3. Height			—	.46***	.26*	-.03	-.05	-.11
4. Weight				—	.27*	.03	-.00	-.04
5. Pubertal status					—	-.03	-.05	-.24*
6. Home and family hassles						—	.63***	-.24*
7. Independence hassles							—	-.45***
8. Stressful events								—

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

Results

Quantitative (correlational) findings are reported first. Then, qualitative (descriptive) findings from the parental interview are reported. To examine the research questions with the correlational analyses, we converted the raw scores for each of the measures into area T scores through the weighted sum of the salient items. Weller (1984) noted that T scores should be used when comparing scores from different scales.

Physical Development/ Pubertal Status

As expected, independent of grade (i.e., age), as reported in Tables 3, 4, and 5, there was a significant and positive correlation between height and weight (sixth-grade males, $r = .46$, $p < .001$; seventh-grade males, $r = .48$,

$p < .001$; eighth-grade males, $r = .51$, $p < .001$). The first research question addressed if parents are aware when their sons entered puberty. Parental estimates of their sons' pubertal status were statistically significant only for the youngest (sixth-grade) boys (height, $r = .26$, $p < .05$; weight, $r = .27$, $p < .05$). Given the four categories of pubertal status estimates, the finding is in keeping with the sample's distribution because greater sample variability would be expected for the youngest group of boys (sixth-grade males). The findings are also linked with developmental literature that describes the onset of puberty as more noticeable by significant adults (e.g., mother or caregiver) because of rapid increases in height and weight associated with earlier stages of puberty (Connolly, Paikoff, & Buchanan, 1996; Tanner, 1991).

TABLE 4 Intercorrelations Among Demographic, Physical, and Psychological Variables for Seventh-Grade Males ($n = 90$)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Income	—	-.19	.20	.15	-.01	-.10	-.05	.10
2. Female headship		—	.01	.02	.01	-.00	.04	.03
3. Height			—	.48***	-.06	-.03	.11	.06
4. Weight				—	.11	.07	.18	-.06
5. Pubertal status					—	-.07	-.02	.14
6. Home and family hassles						—	.57***	-.21
7. Independence hassles							—	-.33**
8. Stressful events								—

** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

TABLE 5 Intercorrelations Among Demographic, Physical and Psychological Variables for Eighth-Grade Males ($n = 80$)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Income	—	-.35***	.23	.12	.02	.06	.04	.04
2. Female headship		—	.09	.05	-.05	-.23*	-.16	.12
3. Height			—	.51***	.03	.17	.15	.09
4. Weight				—	-.03	-.11	.00	.21
5. Pubertal status					—	-.01	-.11	.20
6. Home and family hassles						—	.70***	-.33**
7. Independence hassles							—	-.43**
8. Stressful events								—

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

Correlation findings for adolescent-achieved height and weight were unrelated to income and parent-reported pubertal status. Income implies the availability of economic resources and would be assumed to be associated with adolescent-reported hassles (e.g., the unavailability of resources for typical adolescent purchases; McLoyd, 1998). However, as noted from the correlation matrices (see Tables 3 through 5), income was totally independent of reported home and independence hassles for each cohort of males. More specifically, findings from the rescaled hassles measure supported a different operational definition for the construct than the one usually assumed from the literature.

Hassles and Stress

The second research question addressed two components. Are student reports of stressful events related to perceived hassles, and are the hassles, conceptualized as parental monitoring, related to family structure? For the three groups of boys in the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades, both hassles scales (i.e., except for home/family hassles for seventh-grade boys) were significantly and *negatively* correlated with the reporting of stressful events. As indicated in Table 3 for the sixth-grade males, the correlation between stressful events and home/family hassles was $r = -.24$, $p < .05$. Furthermore, more variance was accounted

for in the second correlation between stressful events and the independence hassles ($r = -.45$, $p < .001$). The results for the seventh-grade males are reported in Table 4. The correlation between stressful events and independence hassles was statistically significant ($r = -.33$, $p < .01$). However, statistical significance between stressful events and home/family hassles was absent. The statistical significance levels between the perceived hassles and stressful events were the strongest for the eighth-grade boys. As reported in Table 5, the correlations between stressful events and the hassles scales were statistically significant (home/family hassles, $r = -.33$, $p < .01$ and independence hassles, $r = -.43$, $p < .001$). The patterned relations are consistent with previous research (Spencer, Dupree, et al., 1996) that suggests that adolescents' reports of home/family hassles might be euphemisms for parental monitoring.

The independence-focused hassles were negatively correlated with stressful events for each of the three age groups with $p < .01$ or less. Similarly, home/family hassles were negatively correlated with reported stress for the youngest and oldest age groups only (see Tables 3 and 5).

To examine whether parent-adolescent conflict was heightened in high-risk neighborhoods (i.e., low-resource and high-crime areas), we examined if strict parental monitoring was related to stressful life events as reported by the sons. This marginalization

hypothesis suggests that more stress would be expected for boys on the extreme ends of height and weight development. Consistent with the hypothesis, although for the sixth-grade boys only (see Table 3), parental report of least advanced pubertal status (i.e., late-maturing rate estimates) was correlated with youth-reported stress ($r = -.24, p < .01$). Similar to traditional gender-specific findings, early-maturing males have more positive experiences (i.e., less reported stress) than later maturing boys. The findings indicate that parental observations of pubertal status are linked to objective assessments of height and weight in addition to being related to the findings reported earlier.

Descriptive Parental Interview Findings

African American adolescents, and specifically males, are infrequently evaluated from a "normal developmental" perspective (Spencer, 2001). In general, the major adolescence-linked changes reported by parents are consistent with other findings. When asked, "What major changes have you noticed in your son within the last year?" the parent responses are as follows: The most frequent response was "greater independence" (19.7%); the second most frequent response was "no change observed" (19%). Greater aggressiveness was reported equally as frequent as "other" (i.e., more diverse or noncategorical responses; 13.3%).

Parents were further probed to focus on the major physical changes noticed. One third of parents responded that the "major change in physical development observed was an increase in height" (33.1%). Other frequently reported changes include "son has grown facial hair" (12.1%) and "son is bigger or has increased in weight" (10.8%). Similar to the question concerning "the number one adolescent major change," 16.7% of the sample parents indicated "none" for major physical change in development observed. Consistent with the delayed physical development of males generally, 26.7% of the parents reported "12 years of age" to the question, "when [did] the changes begin?"

When the parents responded regarding whether their son experienced any stress linked to his physical changes, only 7% of the parental reports indicated that "child [was] upset by changes." For this sample of African American male adolescents and their parents, 72.6% of parents reported "yes" to the question, "did anyone talk about changes?" In general, the discussion was with the mother (28%), who reportedly discussed physical changes with her son. Also, the parents indicated that the adolescent's father (21%) was the person who had a discussion with the son about the physical changes almost as frequently as mothers were, which is expected given that 31% of the families are two-parent households. The responses to the question of when major adolescent behavior changes began were quite dispersed. Almost 24% of the parents reported that the discussions began when their son was between 10 and 12 years of age. Over 85% of the parents responded "yes" when asked, "Do you expect additional physical changes to occur?" The additional changes expected were an increase in physical development: increased height (22.9%), growth of facial hair (15.8%), and a generalized response of "getting bigger" (16.4%).

After responding to questions regarding their son's physical development, the parents were asked if the son's physical changes affected their child-rearing strategies. Although three fourths of sample parents (72.6%) reported that normative changes were discussed, over two thirds (i.e., 69.8%) responded "no" to the question, "Did the changes [actually] affect child rearing?" The major reason given was that specific child-rearing strategies are required of parents in the particular neighborhood and are required regardless of the normative adolescent physical changes that occurred in their sons.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the relations between physical maturation and youths' perceptions of their family con-

text and stressful events experienced. Additionally, parent-son relations were examined for urban African American families. The results of the present study extend the literature on physical development and urban African American populations. Specifically, Sagrestano et al. (1999) reported gender-specific strategies associated with parent-child conflict. They found more verbal aggression in parents' conversations with their sons than daughters during mid-puberty versus early or late puberty. The present study's results focus on male adolescents' pubertal development based on cohort changes. In addition, the focus addresses broader sources of stress than parental conflict. We found that parents were most aware of pubertal changes during early adolescence and that parenting strategies were not varied as a result of these changes.

Findings suggest that parental estimates of their sons' pubertal status, on average, are very similar to objective observations, although only for the youngest boys. The indicators of physical change are more pronounced during the early adolescent years and are consistent with the normative growth spurt for males that occurs between 10 and 14 years. Additional physical changes, although expected by parents, are more subtle and subject to greater variability during middle to late adolescence than early adolescence. Like traditional findings for boys from longitudinal research efforts (i.e., Steinberg, 1981), early-maturing boys in the present study had more positive experiences (i.e., less stress) than later developing male youngsters did.

The statistically significant correlations between the hassles constructs and stressful life events for each group of males suggest that interactions between sons and their parents are also linked to parenting in high-risk environments (see Spencer et al., 1997, for detailed description of participants' neighborhoods). Although the sons perceived hassles from their parents, the results support previous research (Spencer, Dupree, et al., 1996) associating youth hassles to paren-

tal monitoring activities. This pattern of findings suggests that although described as "hassles" from the boys' perspective, the reported activities reflect their evaluative judgments of parental restrictions on independent activities and expected responsibilities at home. The findings relate monitoring to fewer youth-reported major life events. This provides corroboration not only for an alternative interpretation of youth reports of hassles but also for a contextualized interpretation of parental monitoring activities.

The descriptive findings from parental interviews reaffirm that the majority of parents are very much aware of their youths' developmental changes. When asked if they changed their parenting strategies in conjunction with their sons' physical maturation, the majority of the parents in this study responded in the negative. Although acknowledging the rapid developmental changes, they did not vary their child-rearing efforts. This inconsistency between their perceptions and actions reflects parental concerns about neighborhood safety. Their success up to the time of the interviews supports the efficacy of their current parenting strategies. Awareness of pubertal changes is insufficient to warrant major changes in monitoring behaviors: The environment requires consistent child-rearing efforts (and close monitoring). Identifying factors that contribute to changes in parental strategies for youths developing in high-risk communities is an area for future investigation. In general, the findings suggest that youths are engaged in normative adolescent development as their parents manage their own developmental tasks that include child-rearing activities (Spencer, Swanson, & Glymph, 1996). The data suggest a less "neglectful" view of African American family life and parental child-rearing efforts than what is often suggested in the literature.

The present sample of adolescents struggle with "normal" developmental tasks in economically challenged families who reside in high-risk and underserved neighborhoods. The findings are an indication of

the view of youth development and family life that suggests the importance of alternative ways of thinking about coping methods and adaptive strategies used given unchanging economic-linked stresses (see Spencer, 1999). Our findings suggest that previously documented parental behaviors (i.e., strict monitoring) are more normatively adaptive than generally accepted in reviews and analyses of African American youth development and family functioning. Thus, as implied within PVEST perspective, concerns regarding normative adolescent development must also simultaneously consider issues associated with the context in which development occurs. Furthermore, future research should delineate parenting strategies that are gender, context, or the combination of gender and context specific, which would provide opportunities for identifying better programs of support.

Several research limitations to the study should be noted. First, this study focused on a specific geographic area (large southeastern urban city), gender (all males), and ethnicity (African Americans). The results may not be generalizable to adolescents of other ethnic groups who reside in rural communities. Studies of family dynamics with males of other ethnic backgrounds are needed. Parent–female relationship patterns might also vary in expression in similar high-risk neighborhoods. Second, the study did not use a longitudinal design. Future research is needed that examines how parent–son and parent–daughter relations change within the same cohorts of participants. Third, the results of the study are correlational. The causal direction of the relation cannot be inferred. Continued attention to various ethnic group patterns of normative behaviors allows for future developmentally specific and culturally sensitive research and applied efforts.

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