

**Religious Variability in the Relationship Between Masculinity and Father Involvement**

KEVIN SHAFER  
*Department of Sociology*  
*Brigham Young University*

RICHARD J. PETTS  
*Department of Sociology*  
*Ball State University*

ANDREW J. RENICK  
*School of Social Work*  
*Brigham Young University*

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### ABSTRACT

While traditional masculinity and fathering behaviors are seemingly associated, few studies have considered the conditions under which masculine norms may influence fathers' behavior. Religiosity is an important factor to consider, given its association with both the endorsement of traditional gender attitudes and father involvement. This paper addresses the independent effects of traditional masculine norms and religiosity on fathering behaviors and considers whether religiosity moderates the relationship between masculinity and men's parenting behaviors. Using a national sample of fathers with children aged 2-17 in the United States, the results suggest that masculinity is negatively associated with father involvement, while religiosity is positively associated with father involvement. Yet, both highly masculine and highly religious fathers are more likely to engage in harsh discipline. Moreover, results suggest that religiosity attenuates the negative relationship between masculinity and active father involvement, while exacerbating the positive relationship between masculinity and harsh punishment.

**Keywords:** *family, fathering, masculinity, religiosity.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Contemporary fatherhood in the United States is characterized by contradictory expectations. On the one hand, men are increasingly embracing nurturing and engaged roles that are traditionally aligned with maternal parenting expectations (Marsiglio & Roy 2012; Townsend 2002). On the other hand, many of the expectations around fatherhood, such as breadwinning and acting as disciplinarian, remain rooted in traditional, hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1995; Pleck 2010). Despite acknowledgement of these competing norms, the relationship between adherence to masculine ideals and fathering behavior is still unclear in the literature, as studies have found positive, negative, and no associations between gender ideology (including masculinity) and fathering (Bulanda 2004; DeMaris, Mahoney, and Pargament 2011; Gaertner et al. 2007; Hofferth and Goldschreider 2010; NICHD Early Child Care Research Network 2001; Petts, Shafer, & Essig 2018; Stykes 2015). One potential reason for these contradictory findings is that researchers have not yet considered the various conditions under which masculinity may be more or less likely to influence paternal behaviors.

A potentially important moderator of the relationship between masculinity and fathering behavior is religiosity, or the centrality of a father's religious beliefs, practices, and attitudes to his identity. Numerous studies find that religiosity is associated with traditional gender norm attitudes (DeMaris et al. 2011; Denton 2004; Hayford and Morgan 2008; Lindsey 2015; Read 2003). Religiosity is also associated with higher levels of paternal involvement with children—including increased displays of warmth, emotional availability, and participation in child care (Petts 2007; Roggman et al. 2002; Wilcox 2004). Yet, studies considering the interrelationship between father involvement, traditional masculine norms, and religiosity primarily focus on Conservative and Evangelical Protestant men (Bartkowski and Xu 2000; Lynn, Grych, and Fosco

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2016; Wilcox 2004). Additional work, focused on a broader group of fathers, is necessary because religion (typically Christianity in the United States) is central to the identity of many Americans, not just conservative Protestants (Mahoney 2010). In particular, the strong emphasis on involved parenting in most religious communities may buffer against any negative relationship between masculinity and father involvement (Petts 2007; Tichenor et al. 2011). Yet, the promotion of traditional gender ideology within many religious communities may also exacerbate any negative relationship between masculinity and father involvement (DeMaris et al. 2011).

Using data from a national sample of American fathers, the current study focuses on the relationship between adherence to traditional masculine norms, religiosity, and father involvement. First, we model the association between adherence to traditional masculine norms and father involvement. Next, we examine the relationship between religiosity and father involvement. Finally, we consider if religiosity moderates the relationship between adherence to traditional masculine norms and father involvement. In addressing these questions, this study aims to inform the literature on masculinity and fatherhood by assessing the degree to which religiosity may shape this relationship, as well as expand our understanding of how the complimentary and opposing norms set forth by the structures of gender and religion intersect to influence father involvement.

### CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

#### **Masculinity and Father Involvement**

In light of expectations that fathers become increasingly involved and equitable parents and partners (Gerson 2010), contemporary fathers are more involved with children, do more housework, and report that emotional availability, family time, and father-child bonding are

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more important to them than ever before (McGill 2014). Consequently, researchers often use multidimensional measures of fathering that address both instrumental (e.g., spending time with children, caregiving, and disciplining children – which includes using positive control and appropriate punishments that avoid harsh discipline) and expressive (e.g., warmth toward children and being emotionally supportive) parenting behaviors to more accurately capture the various ways that fathers may be engaged parents (Finley and Schwartz 2004; Pleck 2010).

Despite increases in father involvement, men continue to spend far less time engaging in direct care of children than women (Parker and Livingston 2017). This gap persists, at least in part, because of societal pressures, economic and institutional barriers, and gender expectations that promote a traditional gendered division of labor (Connell 1995; Risman 2004). Gendered expectations for men are rooted in dominant, traditional, hegemonic masculine norms that are learned in childhood and reinforced by social structure (Risman 2004). These norms include restricted emotions, avoidance of the feminine, power over women, reluctance to seek help or assistance, a desire to control situations, pursuit of status, competitiveness, and risk-taking (Connell 1995; Levant et al. 1992; Mahalik et al. 2003).

Men who strongly adhere to traditional masculine norms may see masculinity as central to their personal identity (Pasley, Petren, and Fish 2014; Rane and McBride 2000; Stryker 1968). As a result, masculinity may play a substantial role in shaping attitudes and behaviors, including those in family life. Although findings in the literature are mixed, studies using multidimensional measures of traditional masculine norm adherence find that highly masculine fathers often reject contemporary fathering ideals, are less likely to engage in instrumental and emotional parenting, and are more likely to use harsh disciplinary techniques (Bulanda 2004; Gaertner et al. 2007; Hofferth and Goldscheider 2010; Petts et al. 2018). Such studies suggest that men with a strong

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masculine identity may not perceive father involvement as important to their children's development or well-being, and instead may opt to focus more on traditional paternal roles like breadwinning and disciplinarian (Lee and Lee 2016; Petts et al. 2018). Thus, we expect that:

*H1: Adherence to traditional masculine norms will be negatively associated with father involvement.*

### **Religiosity and Fathering**

Like masculinity, religion is often central to one's identity, shaping attitudes, values, and beliefs about a range of social institutions and personal decisions—including family dynamics (Lynn et al. 2016; Mahoney 2010). Religious individuals often sanctify family relationships, imbuing them with spiritual character and significance. Such sanctification is positively associated with various family outcomes, which may include father involvement (Mahoney 2010; Mahoney et al. 2003). Because most religious groups emphasize the importance of family life, these teachings may encourage fathers to strongly focus on their parental role (Edgell 2006; Wilcox et al. 2004; Wilcox 2004). Religious involvement may also provide fathers with access to social support networks that reinforce messages encouraging them to be engaged in their children's lives (Dollahite 1998; Petts 2007). In short, religion may be an important resource fathers can use to become more engaged parents by strengthening one's paternal identity and mitigating parenting stresses (Ellison and Levin 1998; Palkovitz 2002; Tichenor et al. 2011).

Prior research supports the notion that religion is an important resource for fathers. Research suggests that religious men are taught to be physically present, emotionally involved, and financially supportive of their children and family (Wilcox 2004). Consequently, highly religious fathers appear to place more importance on their role as fathers than less religious fathers (Tichenor et al. 2011)—often calling their role “sanctified” (Lynn et al. 2016). Religious

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fathers are also more likely to be involved in youth-related activities, engage in greater levels of child supervision, and engage in the day-to-day lives of their children more frequently than less religious fathers (Bartkowski and Xu 2000; King 2003; Petts 2007; Roggman et al. 2002).

Although there is substantial research suggesting a positive association between religiosity and father involvement, there are some studies that find a negative or null relationship between religiosity and various aspects of father involvement (Bartkowski and Xu 2000; Cooksey and Craig 1998; Wilcox 2002). For example, within Christianity, beliefs like biblical literalism, may limit active father involvement and promote the use of corporal punishment (DeMaris et al. 2011; Ellison, Bartkowski, and Segal 1996). Although these studies suggest a negative association between religiosity and father involvement, many of these studies focus exclusively on conservative Protestants, who are more likely to embrace literalism and traditional gender roles than other Christians (Denton 2004; Hoffman, Ellison, and Bartkowski 2017; Wilcox 2004). The current study uses national data from the United States to focus on a wide range of religious, albeit mostly Christian, groups. As a result, we expect that:

*H2: Religiosity will be positively associated with father involvement.*

### **Religiosity, Masculinity, and Fathering**

The relationship between masculinity and religiosity appears to be a complicated one. In one respect, many behaviors and attitudes associated with hegemonic masculinity appear incompatible with the teachings of many religious groups. For example, religious groups often eschew pre-marital sex and sexual promiscuity in favor of marriage and monogamy—although hegemonic masculine norms typically endorse the latter (Barkan 2006; Kraeger et al. 2016). At the same time, however, many religious teachings and behaviors are consistent with traditional masculine norms. Many faith traditions, for example, teach that men are the spiritual leaders of

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families while also emphasizing the importance of self-reliance and independence (Maples and Robertson 2001).

Research on the relationship between masculinity and religiosity reflects this complexity. Since the 1970s, support for traditional gender roles has declined among religious individuals (Petersen and Donnenwerth 1998), although these declines are smaller among more conservative groups (Wilcox 2004). Similarly, a myriad of religious men strongly identify with the new fatherhood ideal (Petts 2007; Tichenor et al. 2011; Wilcox 2004), buoyed by the sanctification of family relationships, strong social support for involved fatherhood, and messages that socialize fathers to build strong relationships with their children (Bollinter and Palkovitz 2003; Dollahite 1998; Wilcox et al. 2004). At the same time, religious men still endorse traditional gender roles more than their non-religious counterparts (DeMaris et al. 2011; Whitehead 2012). For example, many highly religious men report they are frequently exposed to teachings and messages which reinforce and encourage them to adhere to hegemonic masculine norms—particularly in family life (Bartkowski 1999; Gallagher and Smith 1999). Indeed, one study on traditional masculine norm adherence and religiosity found that religiosity was positively associated with traits like competitiveness, power over women, and homophobic attitudes, but negatively correlated with other attributes like emotional control, the use of violence, and sexual promiscuity (Ward and Cook 2011). As such, religion may promote a soft patriarchy in which male patriarchy remains the norm, but fathers are allowed (and encouraged) to focus on the “softer” side of parenting such as being nurturing to children (Van Leeuwen 1997; Wilcox 2004).

Because of the complexity of this relationship, it is unclear how masculine norm adherence and religiosity intersect to impact fathering behaviors. On the one hand, religious messages around the importance of family relationships, particularly with children, may lead



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highly religious men to act in ways that contradict traditional masculine norms—even if they endorse such norms. If true, we would observe that religious fathers are more involved, warmer, engaged, and available than less religious men that also endorse traditional masculinity. For example, highly masculine, religious fathers may be more engaged as parents than highly masculine, non-religious fathers because religious messages reinforcing the new fatherhood ideal would take precedence over societal norms that would lead to decreased parental involvement.

On the other hand, religiosity may exacerbate the negative relationship between masculinity and father involvement. If masculine norms are reinforced in religious communities, we would expect that the negative relationship between masculinity and father involvement, and the positive relationship between masculinity and corporal punishment would be more pronounced for religious fathers than their non-religious counterparts. For example, if both religious and masculine norms suggest that mothers should be primarily responsible for childcare tasks, then we would expect highly religious, masculine fathers to be less engaged parents than nonreligious masculine fathers because they are accountable to two sets of complimentary norms (compared to nonreligious fathers who would only be expected to adhere to societal gender norms). The current study assesses these competing hypotheses:

*H3a: The negative relationship between masculinity and father involvement will be stronger among less religious fathers compared to highly religious fathers.*

*H3b: The positive relationship between masculinity and harsh parenting will be stronger among highly religious fathers compared to less religious fathers.*

## DATA AND METHODS

### **Data**

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Our study utilized the Survey of Contemporary Fatherhood (SCF), a survey investigating various factors associated with father involvement. SCF is a national sample of 2,297 fathers, social fathers, stepfathers, and father figures in the U.S., collected by an interdisciplinary team of investigators from several universities in 2015. To be included in SCF, respondents had to be: (1) at least 18 years old, (2) a biological (residential or non-residential) father, residential stepfather, or residential father figure (defined as living with a non-biological, non-adopted child in a home with the child's biological or adoptive mother, but not in a marital relationship), (3) have English language proficiency, and (4) the ability to access the survey via the internet. Fathers responded to questions about a focal child between the ages of 2 and 18, defined as the youngest biological child, adopted child, stepchild, foster child, or child for which they are a father or father figure.

SCF is a quota sample, which was used to capture various paternal roles and because quota samples often produce similar results to random samples (Weinberg, Freese, and McElhattan 2014). The sample was obtained through Qualtrics, which maintains an opt-in online panel of approximately 100,000 panelists and randomly selects and proportions samples for surveys according to the general population. For the SCF, once individuals were randomly selected, they were contacted about their potential eligibility for the survey and provided a link to a screening site where final eligibility was determined.

Several data quality checks were used in accordance with best practices in online data collection, including attention filters, identification of careless respondents, safeguards against multiple submissions, and survey length minimums (Baker et al. 2010). Multiple demographic characteristics were also used in the sampling scheme and screening process to reduce the possibility of biased results, and post-collection data quality checks removed approximately 4% of respondents from the sample (Smith et al. 2016; Terhanian et al. 2016).

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Prior research has shown that online opt-in panels are fairly representative of individuals with regular access to the internet (Tourangeau, Conrad, and Cooper 2013). Yet, one concern with online panels is that they may exclude or underrepresent marginalized groups. In general, the demographic estimates (i.e., race/ethnicity, education, resident status, and income) from the full SCF sample appear similar to those from other national datasets (e.g., Survey of American Parents, National Survey of Family Growth). Even so, nonresident fathers, low-SES fathers, and racial/ethnic minorities are underrepresented in the SCF. Thus, consistent with other studies using quota sampling, results from this study are not nationally representative (Yang and Banamah 2014). Regardless, the quality of measures used and large national sample provide useful insight into the associations between masculinity, religiosity, and father involvement.

SCF was designed with developmentally appropriate measures of father involvement, acknowledging that fathers do not parent similarly across a child's life course. We include all fathers in our analysis, but split the sample based on child age. The sample size for our analysis is 2,202, which includes 1,154 fathers of children aged 2 to 8 and 1,046 fathers of children aged 9 to 18.

### **Dependent Variables**

To create our measures of fathering behavior, we used exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses (EFA and CFA, respectively). Following recommendations by Kline (2013), we first randomly split each age-specific sample in half, running an EFA on one half of the data and CFA on the other. We ran the EFA first, keeping all variables with factor loadings of .40 or greater on factors with Eigenvalues greater than one. Using these results, we then ran CFA models, which showed good fit and indicated that all measures retained from the EFA loaded at .60 or greater. Both the EFA and CFA analyses are available upon request.

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*Fathering Behaviors with Young Children.* We included five measures of fathering behavior for men of young children (aged 2-8). Each variable consists of multiple items that are summed together to create a continuous outcome. *Warmth* was measured with eight items: (a) I express affection to my child, (b) I praise my child, (c) I am easy going and relaxed with my child, (d) I smile at my child often, (e) I give my child affectionate nicknames, (f) I brag about my child, (g) I often think about my child, and (h) I think holding and cuddling my child is fun. This measure was assessed on a 0 (*not at all like me*) to 4 (*exactly like me*) scale ( $\alpha = .87$ ).

*Responsibility* was measured with seven items assessing how often (0 = *never* to 5 = *more than once a day*) fathers engaged in the following behaviors: (a) prepared meals for the child, (b) helped the child at bedtime, (c) help the child with bathing, (d) take them for a walk/play in the yard, park, or playground, (e) help the child get dressed, (f) help the child brush their hair, (g) change their diaper/use to the restroom ( $\alpha = .85$ ). *Engagement* indicates how often (0 = *never* to 5 = *more than once a day*) fathers did the following six activities with their child: (a) listened to their concerns, (b) discussed family issues, (c) discussed daily activities, (d) taught them between right and wrong, (e) taught them about their own and other cultures ( $\alpha = .89$ ). *Positive Control* was measured with four items indicating how likely (1 = *very unlikely* to 4 = *very likely*) the respondent would be to make a child take a time out, have them do work around the house, take away a privilege, or give them a warning if they misbehaved ( $\alpha = .72$ ). *Harsh Discipline* was measured with three items from the Parent-Child Conflict Tactics Scale (Straus et al., 1998). These items assessed how likely (0 = *not likely* to 3 = *very likely*) fathers would (a) spank, (b) hit the child, and (c) make fun of child if child were to get angry at father ( $\alpha = .70$ ).

*Father Involvement with Older Children.* We included four measures of fathering behavior for men of older children (aged 9-18). *Warmth* ( $\alpha = .91$ ) was measured with nine items

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indicating if the father: (a) helped their child, (b) let their child know they cared about them, (c) listened to them, (d) acted supportive, (e) acted in a loving manner, (f) let their child know they were appreciated, (g) told their child they were loved, and (h) tried to understand their child's feelings. All items were scored on a scale from 0 (*not at all*) to 3 (*always*). *Engagement* was measured with five items indicating how often (0 = *not at all* to 3 = *always*) the father: (a) helps the child when upset, (b) listens to their concerns, (c) discusses daily activities, (d) teaches them between right and wrong, and (e) teaches them about their own and other cultures ( $\alpha = .84$ ).

*Positive Control* was measured with nine items indicating how often (0 = *not at all* to 3 = *always*) the fathers knew (a) who their children spent time with, (b) how they spent their time, (c) how they spent their money, (d) where they went after school, (e) where they went on weekends, (f) problems they were having at school, (g) if they were told by their child when they leave the house, (h) if their child left a note or called them to give them information, and (i) if the child knew how to get in touch with them ( $\alpha = 0.94$ ). *Harsh Discipline* was measured with six items indicating how frequently (1 = *never* to 4 = *always*) fathers: (a) criticized, (b) shouted/yelled, (c) threatened physical harm, (d) grabbed/pushed/hit/shoved, (e) struck with their hand/object, and (f) insulted/swore at their child ( $\alpha = 0.90$ ) (Straus et al. 1998).

### **Key Independent Variables**

*Masculine Norms.* Adherence to masculine norms was measured with the Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory (CMNI; Mahalik et al. 2003). We used a short version of the CMNI that consisted of 22 items, which has been shown to be strongly correlated with the full CMNI (Burns and Mahalik 2008; Hamilton and Mahalik 2009). The 22 items come from the strongest two factors for each of 11 domains: winning (an emphasis on success at all costs), emotional control (restriction of emotions and displays of emotion), primacy of work (work as the primary

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focus of life), risk-taking (voluntary exposure to dangerous situations), violence (endorsement of violence as an acceptable response in certain situations), heterosexual self-presentation (importance of being perceived as straight and not LGBTQ+), playboy (endorsement of sexual activity with casual partners), self-reliance (reluctance to seek help and only rely on oneself), power over women (need to control women), dominance (the need for control in social groups), and pursuit of status (the need to feel important)<sup>1</sup>. Each item in the CMNI is measured on a 0 (strongly disagree) to 3 (strongly agree) scale. Items were summed, and higher scores indicated greater adherence to masculine norms ( $\alpha = .71$ ).

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<sup>1</sup> We ran tests where we separated out the CMNI scale into its 11 component parts. The results indicated that some characteristics, like dominance, power over women, emotional control, winning, and self-reliance were more important than other components of masculinity. However, both exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis suggested that a single scale was appropriate. Further, this approach is in line with the scoring criteria set forth by Mahalak and colleagues (2013) in their development of the scale.

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*Religiosity.* Religiosity was measured using the Centrality of Religiosity Scale (CRS), a 15-item scale addressing the importance of religious and spiritual identity for an individual (Huber and Huber 2012). The 15 items address five domains of religiosity (three items per domain): (1) the intellectual domain, or knowledge about their personal belief system; (2) the ideological domain, or beliefs, convictions, and understanding of a connection between deity and human; (3) public practice, or participation in religious rituals and religious communal activities; (4) private practice, or devotion to personal religious study, such as reading scripture or praying; and (5) religious experience, or emotional connection to deity<sup>2</sup>. All items were scored on a 0 to 4 scale, with higher scores indicative of greater religiosity. Scores could range from 0 to 60 ( $\alpha = .91$ ).

### **Control Variables**

We included several control variables in our analyses. *Religious affiliation* was measured using the coding scheme recently developed by Lehman and Sherkat (2018) that is calibrated to religious behaviors and beliefs in the United States<sup>3</sup>. The categories for this measure are: Liberal and Moderate Protestants (reference), Sectarian and Baptist, Catholic, other religious identity (we include members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in this category due to small sample sizes), and no religious affiliation. Several sociodemographic measures related to fathering attitudes and behaviors (Jones and Mosher 2013; Vogel et al. 2011) were included in our models as well. *Racial/ethnic identity* was included through a set of dichotomous variables

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<sup>2</sup> We ran supplementary analyses where we separated the CRS into its five component parts. We found limited support for the separation of the CRS into five separate areas. Public practice had positive effects on warmth and the use of harsh punishment with young and older children. Private practice increased warmth for both young and older children, and experience increased warmth and engagement with young children. Intellect increased harsh parenting with all children. Previous work by Huber & Huber (2012) suggests that the scale is best considered as a single measure of religiosity. Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses suggest the same approach in our data.

<sup>3</sup> We also tested an alternative coding strategy outlined by Steenland, et al. (2000), with Evangelical Protestant, Mainline Protestant, Catholic, other religious affiliation, and no religious affiliation. The results using both coding strategies are substantively similar to one another.

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indicating if the respondent identified as White (reference category), Black, Hispanic/Latino, or as a member of another racial/ethnic group. *Father's age* is indicated by a continuous variable and *father's income* is measured by a variable ranging from 1= no income to 11= \$200,000 or more. *Educational attainment* was measured with a variable ranging from 1= did not complete high school to 9= completed a professional or graduate degree. *Number of children* was a continuous measure indicating the number of biological, adopted, step, and foster children the father had. Controls are also included to indicate whether the focal child is not biologically related to the father (1= *non-biological child*), whether the child does not reside with the father (1= *non-residential child*), child's sex (1 = *female*), and father's employment (1= *not employed*).

Measures assessing the relationship between the focal child's parents were also included. *Maternal gatekeeping* was measured with nine items from Fagan and colleagues' (2003) maternal gatekeeping scale, with higher scores indicative of greater gatekeeping ( $\alpha = .81$ ). *Father's current relationship status* was measured with a multinomial variable indicating if the respondent was not in a romantic relationship (reference category), in a first marriage, divorced or separated, remarried, or cohabiting.

### **Analytic Strategy**

A series of regression models were used to test our hypotheses. We first used Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression to assess whether adherence to masculine norms and religiosity are associated with fathering behaviors, using separate models for fathers of younger and older children. We then incorporate interaction terms to assess whether religiosity moderates the relationship between masculine norm adherence and father involvement.



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In addition to the results presented here, we ran several supplementary models (results available upon request).<sup>4</sup> Our first set of supplementary models considered if the hypothesized relationships vary by religious affiliation (e.g., Wilcox 2004). Three sets of models predicting each outcome were run: (1) we interacted religious affiliation with masculinity; (2) religious affiliation with religiosity; and (3) a three-way interaction between religious affiliation, religiosity, and masculinity. We found no statistically significant differences by religious affiliation<sup>5</sup>. Our second set of supplementary models were run separately by religious affiliation, which underscored the lack of substantive differences in the effects of masculinity or religiosity by religious affiliation on father involvement. Finally, we tested the effects of masculine norm adherence and religiosity separately to assess the possibility of mediating effects. Both variables had substantively similar effects in all models, suggesting that mediation was not present.

All regression models were tested for multicollinearity, heteroskedasticity, and the presence of outliers/leverage values. Only heteroskedasticity appeared problematic in our models. We tested numerous variables to assess the source of the heteroscedasticity, but these tests were inconclusive, suggesting that the heteroskedasticity was from an unidentified source. As a result, we used the Huber-White-Sandwich estimator (robust standard errors) to correct the model. Finally, we had less than one-percent of our data missing on our dependent, independent,

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<sup>4</sup> One additional model that was tested centered around the question: how harsh is harsh punishment? We separated out the various dimensions of harsh parenting for both younger and older children. There were some variations in frequency by each dimension (spanking was the most common technique for young children and criticism was most common for older children), but each outcome had similar associations with religiosity and masculine norms—both in substantive effect and effect size. We also considered logistic models centered on the use of any harsh parenting technique—these results were also substantively similar to those presented here. We also considered alternative specifications of harsh parenting for older children. The results were substantively similar to those presented here. These various model specifications suggest substantial robustness in this relationship. The results of these additional models are available upon request.

<sup>5</sup> As a robustness check, we ran models where each religious group was also removed from the models. In each case, we found that the effects in each model were not driven by any particular group. Instead, it appears that the association between religiosity and all outcomes is not related to high religiosity in any particular group, but religiosity itself.

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and control measures. Little's test suggested that this data was missing at random. As a result, we used multiple imputation ( $n = 20$  imputations) to preserve sample size.

### RESULTS

#### **Descriptive Statistics**

Summary statistics are presented in Table 1. In general, fathers tended to be involved parents. On average, fathers indicated that they had relatively high levels of warmth ( $M = 25.35$  for young children,  $M = 20.89$  for older children) and engagement ( $M = 18.25$  for young children,  $M = 16.22$  for older children). Fathers also appeared to use positive control fairly often ( $M = 7.10$  for younger children,  $M = 20.57$  for older children) and, on average, rarely used harsh discipline ( $M = 1.14$  for young children,  $M = 5.84$  for older children). Also, fathers of younger children were somewhat engaged in caregiving and other forms of responsible parenting ( $M = 29.52$ ).

Fathers in our sample showed mean levels of religiosity that suggested, on average, they occasionally participated in religious practices. Furthermore, slightly more than a quarter of the sample identified with Liberal and Moderate Protestant denominations, 15% as members of Sectarian and Baptist denominations, 29% identifying as Catholic, 9% as members of other religious groups, and 20% claiming no religious affiliation.

[Table 1 About Here]

#### **Main Effects Results**

Results from models predicting father involvement with younger children are presented in Table 2. Beginning in the left-hand column of the table, masculine norm adherence was negatively associated with paternal warmth ( $b = -0.114, \beta = -0.147, p < .001$ ), while religiosity had the opposite effect ( $b = 0.051, \beta = 0.157, p < .001$ ). We found similar relationships for responsibility and engagement. While we found a small, but significant association between

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religiosity and positive control ( $b = 0.017, \beta = 0.111, p < .01$ ), masculine norm adherence was not significantly related. Finally, contrary to our previous findings, we found moderately-sized, positive effects for both masculine norm adherence ( $b = 0.071, \beta = 0.262, p < .001$ ) and religiosity ( $b = 0.017, \beta = 0.205, p < .001$ ) on harsh punishment. Overall, results suggest that masculinity was negatively associated with positive parenting behaviors while increasing the use of harsh discipline. Meanwhile, although religiosity was associated with more frequent positive parenting behavior with young children, it also increased the likelihood of a negative parenting behavior.

[Table 2 About Here]

The results for father involvement with older children are reported in Table 3. Results largely mirror those found for fathers of younger children. Masculine norm adherence had negative effects for warmth ( $b = -0.134, \beta = -0.169, p < .001$ ), engagement ( $b = -0.066, \beta = -0.076, p < .05$ ), and positive control ( $b = -0.073, \beta = -0.099, p < .05$ ), and was positively associated with the use of harsh disciplinary techniques ( $b = 0.166, \beta = 0.280, p < .001$ ). Religiosity was positively associated with warmth ( $b = 0.076, \beta = 0.243, p < .001$ ), engagement ( $b = 0.091, \beta = 0.273, p < .001$ ), positive control ( $b = 0.040, \beta = 0.134, p < .001$ ), and harsh discipline ( $b = 0.042, \beta = 0.193, p < .001$ ). Thus, as with younger children, masculine norm adherence was inversely associated with positive parenting practices whereas religiosity was associated with more frequent involvement in positive fathering practices but also increased use of harsh discipline.

[Table 3 About Here]

### **Interaction Results**

Finally, we test for interactions between masculinity and religiosity. Results are reported in Table 4 (truncated results are reported, but each model includes all control variables). We also provide figures for each statistically significant interaction to help with the interpretation of

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results (in these figures, 2 standard deviations (SD) above the mean of religiosity is used as the measure of high religiosity, mean religiosity is at the mean score, and 2 SD below the mean of religiosity is used as the measure of low religiosity). Following the recommendation by Hoffmann and Shafer (2015), we standardized the outcome variables, masculine norm adherence, and religiosity to correct for possible collinearity and improve interpretability.

[Table 4 About Here]

For fathers of young children, we found a statistically significant moderating relationship for three of the five outcome variables. First, results in Table 4 indicate that the association between masculine norm adherence and responsibility varies by religiosity. As illustrated in Figure 1, greater adherence to masculine norms is associated with fewer responsible fathering practices (more than a standard deviation difference between low and high masculinity) among the least religious men in the sample. The negative association between masculinity and responsibility is also negative for men of average religiosity, though the effect size is about half that of the least religious fathers. By comparison, masculinity has little to no effect on the responsible fathering behaviors of the most religious men in our sample.

[Figure 1 About Here]

Similar to responsibility, the association between masculinity and engagement with young children varies by religiosity. As illustrated the top right panel in Figure 1, masculine norm adherence is negatively associated with engagement for the least religious men, with predicted engagement scores dropping by 0.9 SD from low to high masculine norm adherence. In contrast, masculinity had little effect for fathers with average religiosity, and a positive effect of masculinity was observed for the most religious fathers. Thus, religiosity appears to buffer the negative relationship between masculinity and active father involvement with young children.

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The significant interaction term for harsh discipline also provides support for hypothesis 3b. As illustrated in the bottom left panel of Figure 1, masculine norm adherence is positively associated with harsh discipline for all fathers, but this positive relationship is most pronounced among the most religious fathers. In particular, moving from low to high masculinity is associated with a 0.5 SD increase in harsh parenting among the least religious fathers, a 1 SD increase in harsh parenting for fathers with average religiosity, and more than a 1.5 SD increase in harsh parenting for the most religious fathers. Thus, while masculinity proved to have little, or even positive, effects for the most religious men on measures of engagement and responsibility, we found that it substantially increased the use of harsh parenting, as well.

Results in Table 4 also show statistically significant interactions for all four indicators of involvement with older children. Consistent with results for younger children, all interaction terms are positive, providing support for our expectations. As illustrated in Figure 2, masculinity is negatively associated with warmth for the least religious men (approximately a standard deviation difference between low and high religiosity) and men with average religiosity, but masculinity was largely unrelated to warmth for the most religious fathers. Similar patterns were observed for engagement and positive control with older children, as illustrated in Figure 2.

[Figure 2 About Here]

As with fathers of young children, we found that harsh discipline followed a different pattern than indicators of active father involvement. Namely, the relationship between masculinity and harsh discipline was relatively flat for the least religious fathers in our sample. However, masculinity increased the likelihood of harsh disciplinary techniques among fathers with average and high religiosity. As illustrated in the bottom right panel of Figure 2, moving from low to high masculine norm adherence is associated with nearly 1 SD increase in harsh

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discipline among fathers with average religiosity, and an increase in more than 2 SDs for the most religious fathers. Overall then, results indicate that religiosity and masculinity can combine in ways that have both positive and negative implications for father involvement.

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The goal of this study was to focus on religiosity as one important factor that may condition the relationship between masculinity and father involvement. More specifically, we contribute to the literatures on masculinity, religion, and fathering behavior by considering whether religiosity moderates the relationship between masculinity and father involvement.

Consistent with research showing that masculinity and father involvement are negatively related, this study finds evidence that adherence to traditional masculine norms is associated with less frequent active father involvement and a greater likelihood of engaging in harsh punishment. Specifically, increased adherence to hegemonic masculine norms was associated with less warmth, engagement in fewer responsible behaviors with younger children, less frequent engagement and positive control of older children, and a greater likelihood of engaging in harsh punishment. These findings suggest that greater adherence to traditional masculine norms may lead fathers to emphasize aspects of parenting that are consistent with these ideals such as breadwinning, independence, and lack of emotional expression (Connell 1995). Thus, men who adhere to norms of masculinity may be less likely to engage in supportive parenting behaviors that may involve emotionality (warmth) or have traditionally been performed by mothers (responsibility), while also having a higher likelihood of engaging in authoritarian (and potentially harmful) parenting practices relative to fathers who less closely adhere to traditional masculine norms (Bulanda 2004; Gaertner et al. 2012; Hofferth and Goldscheider 2010).

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Our results also suggest that religiosity was positively associated with active paternal involvement. Consistent with previous research, highly religious fathers were warmer, showed higher levels of responsibility, were more engaged, and used positive discipline more frequently than less religious fathers regardless of child age (King 2003; Petts 2007; Wilcox 2004). Religious fathers may be regularly exposed to messages in their religious practices about the importance of family life, increasing the likelihood that fathers place greater emphasis on their role as parents and consequently are more involved in their children's lives (Mahoney et al. 2003; Tichenor et al. 2011; Wilcox et al. 2004). At the same time, religiosity appears to promote the use of harsh parenting techniques, like spanking; in our sample, both average and highly religious fathers were more likely than the least religious fathers to use such techniques. These findings persist outside of religious affiliation, as religiosity is associated with an increased likelihood of harsh discipline after controlling for religious affiliation. Prior studies have indicated that although the use of corporal punishment has decreased in recent years, religiously involved parents are more likely to use such methods than less religious individuals (Hoffmann et al. 2017; Rodriguez and Henderson 2010). This may be the result of religious individuals embracing teachings in religious texts that are perceived to endorse the use of corporal punishment (Bartkowski 1995). Similarly, religiosity may also be associated with a strong emphasis on obedience in children and the use of harsher techniques in an attempt to encourage obedience (Bartkowski 1995; Rodriguez and Henderson 2010).

Results from this study also provide some evidence that religiosity may moderate the relationship between masculinity and some aspects of father involvement. More specifically, we found that masculinity had substantial negative associations with engagement, responsibility for younger children, warmth toward older children, and positive discipline of older children. In

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contrast, masculinity had less of an association – or was positively associated – to these aspects of active fathering among more religious fathers. Yet, we also found that adherence to masculine norms had a strong positive association with the use of harsh parenting techniques among moderately and highly religious fathers, while it had a much smaller association for the least religious men. As such, we find some support for both competing hypotheses, suggesting that masculinity can serve as a “double-edged sword” for religious fathers. In one respect, religiosity seems to buffer many of the negative effects associated with masculinity for more involved parenting. The emphasis by religious institutions on being an involved, loving parent may encourage fathers to be more engaged and take more responsibility for their children (Bollinger and Palkovitz 2003; Wilcox et al. 2004). Given that religious institutions are often male-dominated, these messages may lead fathers to feel more comfortable engaging in these behaviors – even if they strongly adhere to masculine norms – particularly if they feel supported by these communities (Dollahite 1998; Whitehead 2012).

Yet, highly masculine fathers are also more likely to use harsh punishment when they are religious. These seemingly contradictory findings are consistent with previous work showing that conservative Protestant fathers are more likely to act as strict disciplinarians than other fathers but are also more likely to engage in nontraditional male behaviors, such as expressing emotions toward their children (Bartkowski and Xu 2000; Wilcox 2004). Our study is novel because it demonstrates that this trend is not restricted to conservative Protestant fathers but also persists for highly religious fathers more generally. As such, results from this study may provide further evidence that religion promotes a soft patriarchy (Van Leeuwen 1997; Wilcox 2004). That is, although religious institutions may encourage fathers to engage in nurturing (or “softer”)



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parenting styles, this message is promoted within a patriarchal institution which may also enable more hegemonic forms of masculinity (such as harsh punishment) to persist.

There are some limitations in this study to note. First, involvement is self-reported by fathers. Fathers may provide biased (or socially desirable) reports of involvement based on their identities such that more masculine fathers may underreport expressive engagement to maintain their masculinity. Fathers may also have different perceptions of these behaviors. Having children's (or mothers') reports of father involvement would help minimize the possibility of such bias. Second, future research should consider whether the relationships between masculinity, religiosity, and father involvement may differ among fathers facing various contextual constraints (Vogel et al. 2011). Supplementary analyses suggest that these relationships did not vary by religious affiliation, but other factors that have been linked to fathering behaviors (e.g., race/ethnicity, income, age, and child gender) should be considered in future studies (Petts et al. 2018). Yet, we did find some differences in fathering behaviors by religious affiliation. For example, fathers without a religious affiliation were warmer, more responsible, and more engaged with young children than fathers that identify with liberal or moderate Protestant groups. Fathers without a religious affiliation and sectarian/Baptist fathers were also more likely to use harsh punishment than liberal/moderate Protestant fathers. While outside the scope of this paper, additional investigation into differences among religious groups would further our understanding of the influence of religion on fathers.

Third, the analysis takes place with a national sample of fathers from the United States. The American religious context is primarily Christian and the results may vary in other cultural contexts with different religious profiles (Pew Research Center 2015). As a result, future research would do well to focus on different nations or groups to see if the association between

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religion, masculinity, and fathering varies across contexts. Finally, these data are not randomized, but come from a quota sample taken from an opt-in panel. These data likely underrepresent disadvantaged fathers, which may suggest that this study provides a conservative estimate of the relationships between masculinity, religiosity, and father involvement as low-SES and racial/ethnic minority fathers are more likely to endorse traditional masculine norms, and may be more religious, on average (Krause 2007; Vogel et al. 2011). Regardless, the study contributes by addressing the impact of religiosity, generally, on father involvement and how masculinity—an important aspect of male identity—works among men with varying religious commitment.

Overall, this study used comprehensive indicators of masculinity and religiosity to understand their independent and combined relationships with father involvement. Results from this study reinforce and extend previous research by showing that masculinity is largely negatively associated with father involvement, religiosity is largely positively associated with father involvement, and that religiosity both attenuates the negative relationship between masculinity and active father involvement and also exacerbates the positive relationship between masculinity and harsh punishment. As such, this study highlights the importance of understanding how complementary and opposing norms inform parenting behavior.

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