

## **Family-level factors affecting social and academic competence of African American children: An examination of promotive and protective factors**

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### **Abstract:**

**Background:** Research shows children’s life trajectories and outcomes are strongly influenced by factors affecting development of social and academic competence that also interact with racial disparities in academic settings. Given the importance of social and academic competencies, identifying factors that promote these competencies among African American children is critical to their success over the life course. **Objective:** This study examines a socioeconomically diverse sample of African American children to determine whether family-level factors promote and protect social and academic competence. **Method:** We analyze longitudinal data from a convenience sample of 97 African American children (54 girls, 43 boys) and their families who participated in a larger study of social and academic development. We analyze 2 waves of data collected when children were 7 and 10 years old. **Results:** A series of 2-level, random-intercept, fixed-effects models show social competence is positively affected by quality of parent–child relationships, positive parenting practices, low parental stress, and routine family home environment. Similarly, academic competence is positively affected by low parental stress and family social support. **Conclusions:** Study findings fill a critical knowledge gap regarding predictors of social and academic competence of African American children from various socioeconomic strata. Potential avenues for intervention are discussed.

**Keywords:** Protective factors | Promotive factors | Risk and resilience | Middle-class African Americans | Academic gaps | Black families

### **Article:**

Researchers and practitioners are interested in ensuring children achieve social and academic competence because the successful development of social skills and academic achievement places children on a positive trajectory for their lifespan. Social competence is defined as having

skills for communication, cooperation, engagement, and self-control that are displayed within the home, school, and community. Children who do not develop age-appropriate social competence often exhibit challenging externalizing or internalizing behaviors and experience persistent academic difficulties (Landy 2002). Further, social and academic competence have not only been shown to protect children against negative outcomes such as delinquency, substance abuse, and teen pregnancy (Fraser et al. 2004; Landy 2002; Schneider 1993) but also shown to promote positive outcomes related to self-esteem, mental health, and academic achievement (Herman et al. 2008; Landy 2002; Thurm et al. 2014; Valiente et al. 2008). Nevertheless, despite the well-established importance of social and academic competence for children's short- and long-term outcomes, research on African American children has historically eschewed a strengths-based approach, instead primarily focusing on deficits in social skills, lack of academic achievement, problematic behaviors, and negative risk factors associated with inadequate social and academic development (e.g., American Psychological Association [APA] 2008). Although this body of research has well documented the individual, sociohistorical, and contextual factors that place African American children at elevated risk for negative outcomes, far less research attention has been given to positive family-level factors that can promote and protect children's social and academic competence. With the aim of advancing understanding of African American children's life course trajectories, this study sought to explore the influence of family-level factors (e.g., parent-child relationship, family social support) as promotive and protective factors of African American children's social and academic competence.

### **Social Competence in African American Children**

Given the ever-increasing body of research that supports an association between children's social competence and positive outcomes later in life, both researchers and practitioners have shown increasing interest in understanding which factors affect development of social competence as well as which are malleable to intervention to promote social competence of African American children. Skills such as self-regulation and social-cognitive skills are critical to the development of social competence. Notably, recent research reported by the Society for Research in Child Development (SRCD) indicated that African American children from low-income households generally had high self-regulation and social-cognitive skills (Cabrera and SRCD 2013). Moreover, the SRCD study findings also supported those of an earlier Head Start program study that found African American children exhibited specific social and social-cognitive skills such as high levels of interactive peer play and high attention levels (Fantuzzo et al. 1998). The critical nature of these specific social and social-cognitive skills to outcomes in later life was revealed by a 20-year retrospective study that examined social competence scores of kindergarten children and their outcomes as young adults (Jones et al. 2015). Jones and colleagues found that, as compared with children who scored at the lower end of the social competence scale, children who scored at the higher end of the scale were 4 times more likely to have obtained a college degree and to have secured better employment (e.g., higher wages, professional careers) by young adulthood. However, despite the promising findings of these and other studies, African American children continue to have disproportionate rates of negative outcomes related to low social competence, including academic problems and criminal justice involvement (McCoy and Bowen 2014; Musu-Gillette et al. 2017). These persistent disparities have raised questions about what is occurring in the years immediately after preschool to impede social development of African American children, and which factors promote or hinder social competence among these

children. Moreover, given the racial academic gap and social inequities that people of color in the United States experience on a daily basis, identifying which factors are malleable to intervention to promote social competence is critically important to ensuring success of African Americans across the lifespan.

### **Academic Competence in African American Children**

The Annie E. Casey Foundation (2012) is a leader among those calling for greater efforts to close America's racial academic gap. Indeed, when African American children scored lower than children of other races on all but one index indicator of academic outcomes, the Casey Foundation declared the racial academic gap had risen to the level of a "national crisis" (p. 12). Additional evidence of the racial academic gap was revealed by 2015 assessments that showed Grade 4 children had a 26-point White/Black gap in reading scores and a 24-point White/Black gap in mathematics (Musu-Gillette et al. 2017). Despite the slight improvement in these scores over gap scores reported in 1992 and 1990, (32- and 32-point gaps, respectively), the existing academic gaps are unacceptable and indicative of a systemic problem.

Typically, educational achievement gaps are linked to poverty as a primary factor because the effects of living in chronic poverty can affect academic outcomes in multiple ways, ranging from children attending under-resourced schools in poor neighborhoods to the effect that the lack of books and technology in the child's home has on school readiness. The association of poverty and educational outcomes is especially salient for African American children because they disproportionately experience poverty. Moreover, growing up in chronic poverty has been shown to contribute to persistent, elevated stress levels that can affect children's academic outcomes (Shonkoff and Phillips 2000). A 2015 Pew Center study not only found African American children were almost 4 times more likely to live in chronic poverty than children of other racial/ethnic groups but also found the poverty rate for African American children had remained stable whereas poverty rates had declined for all other racial/ethnic groups (Patten and Manuel Krogstad 2015). Thus, the association between poverty and the racial academic gap remains a persistent challenge for African American children and their families.

The academic gap can also be perpetuated by structural racism and discrimination. Research evidence suggests persistent implicit and explicit racial biases negatively affect the academic outcomes of African American children (APA 2008; Neblett et al. 2006; Wong et al. 2003). For example, research has shown implicit bias contributes to racial disproportionality in school discipline, with African American students—especially boys—more likely than their White peers to be removed from the classroom, suspended, or expelled from school (Rudd 2014). Thus, the next critical step in closing the academic achievement gap is identifying the factors that promote or hinder social competence of African American children and intervening as needed to ensure these students master basic academic skills, and thereby, improve their likelihood of positive outcomes later in life, including college enrollment (e.g., Musu-Gillette et al. 2017).

### **Risks to Social and Academic Competence of African American Children**

Although highlighting the challenges African American children face in developing social and academic competencies is important, it is equally important to recognize that African American

race per se does not place children at risk for compromised social and academic outcomes (APA 2008; Fraser et al. 2004). Rather, such risk is due to the sociohistorical factors associated with being a person of color in America and the legacy of racism in the United States. Due to past and present prejudice, discrimination, and racism, African Americans are disproportionately burdened with poverty; have differential opportunities for health care, employment, and education; and experience high levels of negative psychosocial outcomes (Fraser et al. 2004; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 2001).

### **Limitations of Extant Research**

Although the existing literature has advanced the understanding of children's social and academic competencies, this literature is restricted by several serious limitations and gaps. First, the literature has often ignored the positive influence of the African American family on children's competency. For example, the recent SRCD report summarized studies that examined children's individual attributes, but provided a far less clear picture of how family characteristics might contribute to children's social competence (Cabrera and SRCD 2013). Moreover, much of the available research on social competence in African American children has focused exclusively on low-income African American children, leaving a critical knowledge gap regarding ways of promoting social and academic competence of African American children from other socioeconomic status (SES) strata. Addressing this gap is crucial not only because African Americans are not a homogeneous population but also because SES resources do not produce the same health gains or protective effects for African Americans as Whites (Assari 2018; Braveman et al. 2005; Hudson et al. 2013; Thomas 2015). Moreover, this knowledge gap underscores the need for research that considers a broad scope of SES strata when exploring the factors affecting African American children's social competence.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is grounded in the risk and resilience framework postulated by Fraser et al. (2004). In this framework, the term *protective factors* refers to internal and external resources that promote resilience and reduce the likelihood of negative outcomes by buffering the effect of risk factors associated with behavioral or social problems. *Promotive factors* are described as the internal and external resources that influence positive developmental outcomes in general, independent of risk. The framework identifies protective and promotive factors across three system-related domains: (a) individual psychosocial and biological, (b) family factors, and (c) environmental conditions. The current study focused on the family domain within the risk and resilience framework, building on a foundation of research that suggested family components were key predictors of social and academic outcomes among African American children (Gutman et al. 2002; Oravecz et al. 2008; Washington et al. 2013, 2014). Influenced by the risk and resilience framework, we conceptualized promotive factors as those family-level factors that predict social and academic competence among African American children. In addition, we conceptualized protective factors as those family-level factors that have an interactive effect that functions to buffer risk to African American children's social and academic competence.

### **Influence of Family Factors on Children's Social and Academic Competence**

Although the factors linked with African American children's achievement include the quality of neighborhoods, schools, socioeconomic resources, and other endogenous and extrinsic factors, the African American family plays a critical role in buffering the effects of these factors on children's social and academic skills (Barbarin et al. 2005). Although modest, a body of empirical research has indicated the attributes of African American families can have a positive impact on their children's outcomes, including social and academic competence. According to Franklin (2007), the family is one of the most important traditions in the African American community, and the use of kinship care is one of their major strengths (Hill 1972, 1977). Kinship care refers to caregiving of children by family members or others who have strong bonds (e.g., church members, Godparents) with the children when biological parents are unwilling or unable to care for their children (Annie E. Casey Foundation 2012; Hill 1999). Kinship care can be traced to the adaptations of the African American community to ongoing racial and economic oppression (Fuller-Thomson and Minkler 2000; Hill 1977). When children cannot remain with their biological parents, kinship care has been shown to have a positive impact on children's social and academic competence (Washington et al. 2013, 2019)

Flexible family roles among immediate and extended family have contributed to the stability and advancement of numerous African American children and families (Hill 1999). For example, family role flexibility among African American families often include fathers taking nontraditional roles of cooking and cleaning as well as older children assisting with caring for younger siblings. In addition, extended family members often provide important support to low-income households or those headed by a single parent. Other strengths of the African American family and community are spirituality or the Black Church (Billingsley and Morrison-Rodriguez 2007; Hill 1999; Schiele 2017) and collectivity (Schiele 2017; Smith 2001). Notably, researchers and practitioners are beginning to recognize the importance of leveraging the strengths within the African American family when working to improve outcomes for children and their families (Freeman and Logan 2004; Schiele 2017; Smith 2001). Building on this foundation, our study sought to elucidate the strengths and resources within African American families that contribute to children's successful development of social and academic competencies, thereby creating a positive life trajectory.

### **Promotive and Protective Family-Level Factors**

In general, the parent-child relationship and family environment have been shown to have a positive impact on children's academic and social outcomes (e.g., Harmeyer et al. 2016; Landy 2002). However, few studies have examined these family-level factors specific to African American families. One exception was a longitudinal study that Toldson and colleagues conducted with sample of 465 rural African American 12-year-olds and their families to determine whether links existed between children's social competence and family attributes (Toldson et al. 2006). The specific attributes examined included (a) participation in a family-based prevention program, (b) a family environment characterized by a routine structure, (c) a supportive mother-child relationship, and (d) level of family resources. The study results revealed that children with higher levels of social competence were raised in families with a routine family environment and frequent parent-child interaction (Toldson et al. 2006). Similarly, Brody et al.'s (1995) study with a sample of rural African American children found a positive relationship between the quality of family interactions (i.e., home environment) and

children's academic competence. The quality of parent-child relationships have also been positively associated with academic outcomes of low-income minority youth (Murray 2009) and African American youth from two-parent households (Dotterer et al. 2014). These findings provide insight into the ways the home environment and the parent-child relationship interact to promote competence.

In addition, some evidence suggests an association exists between parenting practices and children's social and academic competence (Gutman et al. 2002; Taylor et al. 2015). Findings from Garner's (2006) study with 70 preschoolers controlled for family SES in the analysis, and found positive predictors of the children's prosocial behavior included the mothers' modeling of prosocial behaviors in the home. Likewise, Oravecz et al. (2008) also found that positive parenting attributes of being nurturing, responsive, and consistent with their children promoted social competence in low-income African American preschoolers. The positive impact of parental involvement in the lives of older children was demonstrated by Gutman et al.'s (2002) study that found students whose parents provided consistent discipline and were very involved in their child's school had higher grade-point averages than their peers from families without these attributes.

Parental monitoring has been linked to positive outcomes among minority youth in both academic achievement (Henry et al. 2011; Lowe and Dotterer 2013) and social competence (APA 2008; Taylor et al. 2015). For example, Malczyk and Lawson's (2017) study on female-headed single-parent families found parental monitoring had a significant positive impact on academic outcomes of elementary-school age children. Similarly, two recent studies found direct and indirect relationships between parental monitoring and social competence among student populations that were largely Hispanic and lower income (Taylor et al. 2015; Top et al. 2017).

Similar to parental monitoring, parental social support is another family-level factor with demonstrated positive impact on minority youth. For example, Oravecz et al.'s (2008) study with 184 African American mothers and female caregivers of children enrolled in Head Start explored the role of social support in predicting children's social skills. The study's analytic results revealed a significant positive association between a caregiver's informal social support (measured using the Family Support Scale; Dunst et al. 1984) and children's social competence. An indirect positive association between a maternal social support and children's social competence was reported by Taylor et al. (2015), with their findings suggesting that a mother's perceived social support contributes to her children's social competence via the positive effects of that support on maternal monitoring. However, less is known about how parental social support influences children's academic competence. Notably, a few studies have not found positive associations between social support and children's social or academic competence (e.g., Sani 1997). Thus, additional research is warranted to further investigate the impact of parental social supports on children's development of these competencies.

Researchers using the risk and resilience framework have argued the psychological well-being of caregivers contributes to positive outcomes for children (Thomlison 2004). Among this body of research, one study has found an inverse relationship between caregiver stress and children's social competence (Sani 1997) and two more recent studies reported a similar inverse relationship between caregiver stress relationship and children's academic competence

(Harmeyer et al. 2016; Tan et al. 2017). Specifically, Harmeyer et al.'s finding revealed that mothers' parenting stress experienced when their children were 15 months old was inversely related to the children's vocabulary and academic skills just prior to entering kindergarten. However, the majority of these studies have been conducted using samples of low-income and/or mixed race families, leaving critical gaps regarding how parenting stress might affect African American children and families who are economically diverse. Moreover, much of this literature does not address how family-level factors might function to as protective factors by buffering risk, and thus, improving children's social and academic outcomes.

Given the importance of family to children's healthy development and in light of the critical gaps in the existing literature, the current study was guided by two research hypotheses. First, we hypothesized that social and academic competence of African American children would be associated with six family-level factors: (a) quality of the parent-child relationship, (b) extent of parental monitoring, (c) use of positive parenting practices, (d) extent of family social support, (e) quality of family home environment, and (f) low parenting stress (between-person effects). Second, we hypothesized that changes over time in these family-level factors would be related to corresponding changes in African American children's social and academic competence over time (within-person effects). We tested these hypotheses as stand-alone models (promotive models) and in the context of risk through the addition of externalizing behaviors (protective models).

## **Methods**

### **Recruitment and Attrition in the Larger Study**

The larger study from which we obtained our sample had a two-fold recruitment goal: to obtain a sample of children who were (a) at risk for developing externalizing behavior problems, and (b) representative of the racial and SES profile of the community. All participants were recruited through day care centers, the county health department, and the local Women, Infants, and Children program that provides supplemental nutrition and health resources to low-income pregnant or postpartum women and their children (up to age 5 years).

Cohort 1 and 2 participants were recruited when children were 2 years old (Cohort 1: 1994–1996; Cohort 2: 2000–2001). To allow oversampling for externalizing behavior problems, potential participants were screened using the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL 2–3; Achenbach 1991). The CBCL was completed by the mothers using a 3-point Likert scale (0 = *not true*, 1 = *somewhat or sometimes true*, or 2 = *very true or often true*) to capture whether they agreed with statements describing their child's behavior in the past 6 months. Raw scores for each CBCL subscale are converted to norm-referenced *T*-scores, with *T*-scores greater than or equal to 60 points indicating the child was considered at risk for developing externalizing behaviors. The recruiters (i.e., on larger study) made efforts to obtain nearly equal numbers of boys and girls. Recruitment efforts for Cohort 1 and 2 yielded a sample of 307 children.

Cohort 3 participants were recruited in 1998 when the target children were 6-month-old infants. Potential participants were identified as children exhibiting high levels of frustration, with this determination based on laboratory observation and parent report. Cohort 3 children were

followed through the toddler period (12–36 months old; see Masked for Review, for more information). Criteria for inclusion in the larger study included the child's mother completing the CBCL 2–3 when the child reached age 2 years old, which yielded a Cohort 3 sample of 140 children.

In all, the three cohorts yielded a total sample of 447 children, of whom, 37% were identified as at risk for externalizing problems. Comparisons of the cohorts revealed no significant demographic differences between cohorts relative to gender [ $\chi^2(2, N = 447) = .63, p = .73$ ], race [ $\chi^2(2, N = 447) = 1.13, p = .57$ ] or 2-year SES [ $F(2, 444) = .53, p = .59$ ].

Participants enrolled in the larger study were later dropped from the sample if they failed to participate in at least one wave of data collection. For example, of the three cohorts ( $N = 447$ ) included in the larger study, six participants were dropped because they did not participate in any data collection by age 2 years (Year 2 data wave). However, another 12 participants who did not participate in the Year 2 data wave were retained in the sample because they participated in data waves at later years. For the Year 7 data wave (i.e., children were 7 years old), 350 families participated, including 19 families who did not participate in Year 5 (assessment when children were 5-years old). No significant differences were found between families who did or did not participate in the Year 5 assessment relative to gender [ $\chi^2(1, N = 447) = 2.12, p = .15$ ], race, [ $\chi^2(3, N = 447) = .19, p = .67$ ], and 2-year externalizing  $T$  score [ $t(445) = 1.30, p = .19$ ]. However, families with lower 2-year SES [ $t(432) = -2.61, p < .01$ ] were less likely to participate in the Year 7 data collection. At the Year 10 data collection wave (i.e., when children were 10 years old), 357 families participated in the data collection, including 31 families who did not participate in the Year 7 assessment. No significant differences were noted between families who did or did not participate in the Year 10 assessment relative to child gender [ $\chi^2(1, N = 447) = 3.31, p = .07$ ] race [ $\chi^2(3, N = 447) = 3.12, p = .08$ ], 2-year SES [ $t(432) = .02, p = .98$ ]; or 2-year externalizing  $T$  score [ $t(445) = -.11, p = .91$ ]. When children were 15-years old, 327 families participated in the Year 15 data wave, including 27 families who did not participate in the Year 10 data wave. No significant differences were found between families who did or did not participate in the Year 15 assessment relative to race [ $\chi^2(3, N = 447) = 3.96, p = .27$ ], 2-year SES [ $t(432) = -.56, p = .58$ ], or 2-year externalizing  $T$  score [ $t(445) = .24, p = .81$ ]. However, at the Year 15 assessment, boys were less likely than girls to participate in the data collection [ $\chi^2(1, N = 447) = 9.31, p = .002$ ].

## Sample

This study used data obtained from three cohorts of children (and their families) who participated in a larger, ongoing longitudinal study of social and emotional development. Cohort membership was based on the period when the participant was recruited into the study and participant age at recruitment (Cohort 1, 1994–1996, recruited 2-year-olds; Cohort 2, 2000–2001, recruited 2-year-olds; Cohort 3, 1998, recruited 6-month old infants). Participant data were obtained from assessments conducted when children were 7 years old (i.e., Year 7 data wave) and 10 years old (i.e., Year 10 data wave).

The three cohorts of the larger study contained 447 participants. Our study inclusion criteria reduced the sample to 97 African American children (54 girls, 43 boys) and their families.



Participants were included in our study sample if they (a) identified as African American, and (b) had any data on academic or social competence at the Year 7 or Year 10 assessments.

We determined the economic diversity of the sample using Hollingshead (1975) scores at Year 7. Generally, Hollingshead scores ranging from 40 to 54 points reflect minor professional and technical occupations considered representative of middle-class SES. The sample families were economically diverse, with Hollingshead scores ranging from 9 to 63 ( $M = 39.14$ ,  $SD = 11.98$ ), representing each level of social strata captured by this scale. Additional sample details are provided in Table 1. All study procedures were approved by the University of North Carolina at Greensboro Institutional Review Board.

**Table 1.** Demographic characteristics of the AA families included in this study

	N	%
<i>Sex of child</i>		
Male	38	41.8
Female	53	58.2
<i>Mother education</i>		
Some HS	2	2.30
HS graduate	9	10.34
Some college	34	39.08
College graduate	36	41.38
Advanced degree	6	6.90
<i>Father education</i>		
Some HS	3	4.17
HS graduate	23	31.94
Some college	33	45.83
College graduate	10	13.89
Advanced degree	3	4.17
<i>Mother marital status</i>		
Single	29	33.72
Divorced	6	6.98
Married	51	59.30
<i>Mother salary</i>		
None	5	6.33
< \$20,000	20	25.32
\$20,000–\$34,999	35	44.30
\$35,000–\$49,999	13	16.46
≥ \$50,000	6	7.59
<i>Father salary</i>		
None	0	0.00
< \$20,000	11	16.67
\$20,000–\$34,999	22	33.33
\$35,000–\$49,999	14	21.21
≥ \$50,000	19	28.79

## Measures

To assess children's social competence, mothers completed the Social Skills Rating System (SSRS; Gresham and Elliot 1990), which assesses a parent's perception of their child's behavioral social skills based on how often certain behaviors occur (0 = *never* to 2 = *very often*). Rather than using teachers' SSRS ratings that were limited by observing behaviors in only one setting (i.e., school), we chose to use mothers' SSRS ratings because the mothers were more likely to have observed their children's social competence in multiple settings. The SSRS includes items such as, "Invites others to join in activities" and "Receives criticism well." We used the Total Social Skills scale, which is a mean composite of the assertion, cooperation, responsibility, and self-control subscales. The composite had very good internal reliability ( $\alpha = .89$ ;  $\alpha = .91$ ), and was administered at the Year 7 and Year 10 assessments when children were 7 years and 10 years old, respectively.

To assess academic competence, Grade 2 and Grade 5 teachers completed the Academic Performance Rating Scale (APRS; DuPaul et al. 1991), which uses a 5-point scale (1 = *poor* to 5 = *excellent*) to capture teachers' appraisals of a child's academic performance. In general, teachers' rating of academic competence is less subjective than parental ratings of academic competence. Moreover, in the larger study, teachers were the only raters who completed the APRS. We used the APRS academic success subscale that includes items such as, "How consistent has the quality of this child's academic work been over the past week" and "What is the quality of this child's reading skills". This subscale had excellent internal reliability at both the Grade 2 ( $\alpha = .95$ ) and Grade 5 ( $\alpha = .93$ ) time points.

### Family-Level Factors

To determine if certain characteristics or attributes have a protective or promotive effect on children's social and academic outcomes, we examined six family-level factors: parent-child relationship, parental monitoring, positive parenting practices, parenting stress, family social support, and family home environment.

#### Parent-Child Relationship

The quality of the parent-child relationship was assessed by having mothers complete the closeness subscale of the Child-Parent Relationship Scale-Form (Pianta 1996). This eight-item subscale includes items such as, "I share an affectionate, warm relationship with my child" and captures responses on 5-point scale ranging from *definitely does not apply* (= 1) to *definitely applies* (= 5). This subscale had adequate internal reliability at both assessment points (Year 7,  $\alpha = .78$ ; Year 10,  $\alpha = .82$ ).

#### Parental Monitoring

The extent of parental monitoring was assessed by having mothers complete the Parental Monitoring Scale (PMS; Stattin and Kerr 2000) to determine the parents' knowledge of their child's whereabouts, activities, and associations. Example items include, "Do your parents: know what you do during your free time? Know who you have as friends during your free time?" The PMS had moderate-to-acceptable reliability at both time points (Year 7,  $\alpha = .66$ ; Year 10,  $\alpha = .79$ ).

## Positive Parenting

Parents' use of good parenting practices was assessed by having mothers complete the positive parenting subscale of the Alabama Parenting Questionnaire (Frick 1991). This six-item subscale asks about parenting practices related to verbal praise, physical affection, and rewarding good behaviors. This subscale had acceptable-to-good reliability at both time points (Year 7,  $\alpha = .80$ ; Year 10,  $\alpha = .75$ ).

## Parenting Stress

The degree to which parents felt stress related to caring for their child was assessed through mother reports on the Parenting Stress Inventory-Short Form (PSI; Abidin and Brunner 1995). The 36-item PSI captures responses a 5-point scale ranging from *strongly agree* (= 1) to *strongly disagree* (= 5). Items include questions such as, "There are some things my child does that really bother me a lot" and "My child makes more demands on me than most children." The item scores are summed to create a *total stress score*, with higher scores indicating greater level of perceived stress. Internal reliability was excellent at both time points (Year 7,  $\alpha = .92$ ; Year 10,  $\alpha = .94$ ).

## Family Social Support

The amount of social support available to parents was assessed using mothers' reports on the Family Support Scale (FSS; Dunst et al. 1984). The FSS asked mothers to rate the helpfulness of 18 members of their social networks (e.g., parents, partner, friends, and co-workers, as applicable) in raising children during the past 3–6 months. Responses were captured on a 5-point scale (1 = *not at all helpful* to 5 = *extremely helpful*), with higher scores indicating higher levels of perceived social support. In addition, the FSS includes two open-response items, allowing the mother to identify and assess sources of support not included in the designated list of social supports. The 20 items on the FSS are summed into a total score, which had good internal reliability at both time points (Year 7,  $\alpha = .84$ ; Year 10  $\alpha = .81$ ).

## Family Home Environment

The quality of the child's home environment was assessed by having mothers complete the MC-HOME Inventory (HOME; Caldwell and Bradley 1984; Totsika and Sylva 2004). The HOME is a 59-item measure designed to assess the quality and quantity of support and stimulation the child receives in the home environment. This measure combines a semi-structured interview conducted with the mother and a home visit to observe mother–child interactions. Internal reliability was acceptable-to-good (Year 7,  $\alpha = .75$ ; Year 10,  $\alpha = .81$ ).

## Risk Variables

### Externalizing Behaviors

Problematic behavior was identified using the externalizing behaviors subscale of the CBCL (Achenbach 1991). Because we were making comparisons within the study sample only and using a repeated measures design, we followed Achenbach's recommendations for using the CBCL in research and used raw scores in all statistical analyses. Further, the externalizing subscale of the CBCL has exhibited good long-term (1–2 year intervals) reliability at age ranges similar to those used in this study ( $\alpha < .85$ ).

### Covariates

We included three covariates: family SES, child age, and child gender.

The family SES variable was determined using the Hollingshead Four-Factor Index of Socioeconomic Status (Hollingshead 1975). Because existing research has shown lower SES can negatively affect children's academic and social competence, the current study controlled for SES in all models. The variable *child age* was dummy coded to control for maturation at age 7 years (= 0) and age 10 years (= 1). Child gender was dummy coded as girl (= 0) and boy (= 1). All models controlled for child age, child gender, and family SES covariates.

### Analysis

Study data were obtained from the sample children at two time points: age 7 years (Year 7) and age 10 years (Year 10). Because the data did not meet the assumption of independence required for ordinary least squares regression techniques, we used linear mixed modeling to account for nested data, that is, multiple observations within persons. To test for associations between competence and family-level factors, we created a series of two-level, random-intercept, fixed-effects models. The assumption of normally distributed residuals was checked via visual inspection of histograms and  $Q-Q$  plots generated from the initial full models for social and academic competency. Outliers were removed, and then assumptions rechecked before refining the model.

All independent variables of interest were measured at each assessment point. However, separating and modeling within-person effects and between-person effects can be a highly informative approach, because their associations with variance in outcome measures may differ in kind or degree. For example, differences between families in mean levels of parental monitoring may not be associated with social competence, but within-family changes in parental monitoring across time may be associated with change in social competence. In this example, a failure to decompose variance in the dependent variable due to between-person and within-person effects may result in a failure to observe any association between parental monitoring and social competence. Between-person (Level 2) differences were captured by first calculating each participant's average score across the two assessment periods, and then subtracting the grand mean of the sample. Within-person (Level 1) changes were captured by subtracting each participant's cross-assessment average from that participant's observed score at each assessment (i.e., group-mean centered). Effects associated with Level 2 variables indicated the impact on competence of residing higher or lower on a measure relative to other participants. Effects associated with Level 1 variables indicated the impact of fluctuation on a measure relative to that participant's average value.

Preliminary descriptive analysis revealed missingness on multiple predictor variables that would result in significant loss of data. Although linear mixed modeling using full information maximum likelihood estimation allows for missingness on outcome variables, missing data on independent variables results in listwise deletion. Therefore, we used Mplus v.8 (Muthén and Muthén 1998–2017) to conduct two-level imputation of missing data, using Bayesian estimation under an unrestricted model (Asparouhov and Muthén 2010) to generate 10 datasets with no missing data for each model (i.e., academic and social competence). Rates of missing data were typically low, although the HOME measure had rates of missing data exceeding 50%. No events or reports during the data collection process suggested the presence of non-ignorable missing data. Similarly, examination of patterns of missingness and pairwise descriptive did not suggest the presence of non-ignorable missing data.

Given the exploratory nature of this analysis, a backward-stepwise approach was taken to model refinement: all predictors were entered into the main effects model, and then removed one-by-one based on criteria for entry ( $p < .200$ ) and removal ( $p \geq .200$ ). Consideration for variable removal was made on a pair-by-pair basis to maintain the between/within variance decomposition: to be removed, the Level 1 and Level 2 versions of a predictor variable had to be associated with  $p$  values greater than or equal to .200. Last, again using a backward-stepwise approach with the same  $p$  value threshold for entry and removal as used for the main effects, we tested potential Level 2 interactions between externalizing behavior and promotive factors. Because this study was largely exploratory, the threshold for statistical significance of individual predictors was set at  $p < .100$ . Change in overall model fit at each stage of refinement was assessed using the sample-size adjusted Bayesian Information Criteria (BIC).

## Results

### Social Competence

Examination of Level 1 residual plots suggested acceptable normality; therefore, we proceeded with imputation with the full sample. Relative model fit improved across each step of refinement for the promotive (BIC = 1335.253), externalizing behaviors (BIC = 1336.773), and final moderation (BIC = 1337.081) models. Full results for social competence models are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Social competence models

Parameter	Social competence					
	Promotive factors		Externalizing behavior		Protective factors	
	$\beta$	SE	$\beta$	SE	$\beta$	SE
Intercept	54.335**	1.155	54.153**	1.175	53.681**	1.207
Sex	-2.356	1.514	-2.175	1.509	-1.903	1.517
Age	1.143	1.052	1.360	1.185	1.327	1.185
SES	0.066	0.092	0.077	0.089	0.078	0.089
<i>Level-1 (within)</i>						
Externalizing Behavior			0.119	0.223	0.117	0.223
FSS	-0.128 <sup>†</sup>	0.075	-0.122	0.077	-0.123	0.077
PSI	0.132	0.081	0.131	0.080	0.131	0.080

Parameter	Social competence					
	Promotive factors		Externalizing behavior		Protective factors	
	$\beta$	SE	$\beta$	SE	$\beta$	SE
HOME	-0.122	0.207	-0.124	0.210	-0.126	0.210
Positive relations	0.171	0.112	0.216	0.146	0.215	0.146
PMS	0.398 <sup>†</sup>	0.220	0.417 <sup>†</sup>	0.229	0.417 <sup>†</sup>	0.229
Positive parenting	0.190	0.399	0.161	0.396	0.163	0.396
<i>Level-2 (between)</i>						
Externalizing Behavior			-0.219	0.140	-0.256 <sup>†</sup>	0.153
SES	0.054	0.087	0.062	0.087	0.059	0.085
FSS	-0.014	0.056	0.003	0.059	0.011	0.059
PSI	-0.142 <sup>†</sup>	0.074	-0.119	0.077	-0.114	0.076
HOME	0.251	0.155	0.252 <sup>†</sup>	0.153	0.214	0.151
Positive relations	0.352**	0.127	0.294*	0.121	0.321*	0.126
PMS	-0.244	0.224	-0.269	0.216	-0.309	0.222
Positive parenting	0.83**	0.314	0.844**	0.317	1.050**	0.325
<i>Level-2 interactions</i>						
ExtBeh * PMS					-0.064*	0.031
ExtBeh * PosParent					0.099 <sup>†</sup>	0.060

SES socioeconomic status, FSS Family Support Scale, PSI parenting stress inventory-short form, HOME home observation of the environment inventory—middle childhood, Positive Relations Child-Parent Relationship Scale-short form, PMS Parental Monitoring Scale, Positive Parenting Alabama Parenting Questionnaire;  $\beta$  unstandardized beta-coefficients, SE standard error

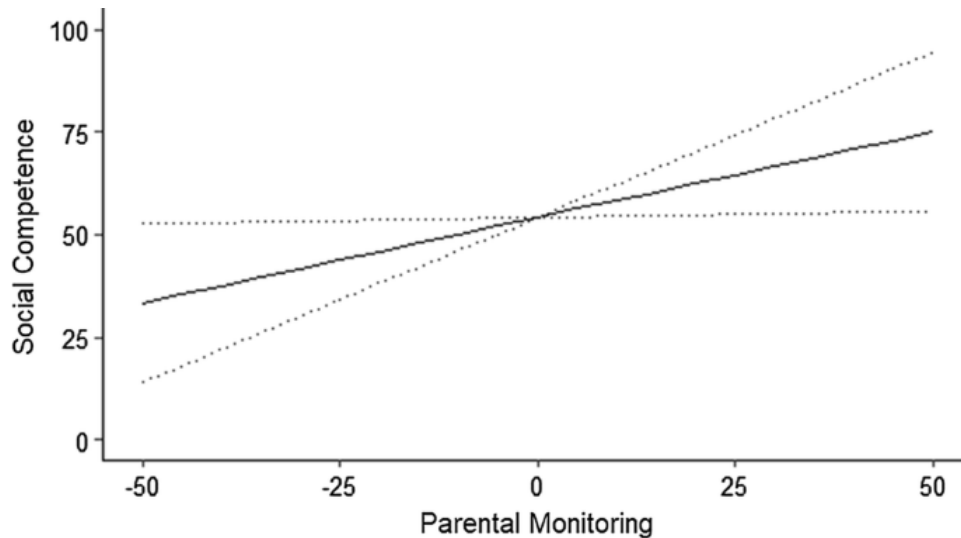
<sup>†</sup> $p < .10$ ; \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$

### Between-Persons Results

The promotive model indicated that on a between-persons level, the specific factors significantly associated with children's social competence included a positive relationship with the child ( $\beta = 0.352, p = .006$ ), positive parenting ( $\beta = 0.830, p = .008$ ) and PSI scores ( $\beta = -0.142, p = .054$ ). In addition, the between-persons association of HOME with social competence approached significance ( $\beta = 0.251, p = .105$ ). Next, we added externalizing behaviors to the model to test whether promotive relationships remained stable in the context of risk. When the externalizing behaviors variable was added to the model, two family factors remained significant predictors of social competence: positive relationship with the child ( $\beta = 0.294, p = .015$ ) and positive parenting ( $\beta = 0.844, p = .008$ ); however, PSI was no longer a significant predictor of social competence ( $\beta = -0.119, p = .122$ ). Further, with the addition of externalizing behaviors to the model, home environment ( $\beta = 0.252, p = .099$ ) emerged as a significant predictor of social competence on the between-person level. The protective model also yielded two statistically significant Level-2 interactions: PMS with externalizing behavior ( $\beta = -0.064, p = .038$ ); positive parenting with externalizing behavior ( $\beta = 0.099, p = .097$ ). Specifically, these interactions were such that higher relative parental monitoring signaled an exacerbation of the negative association between externalizing behavior and social competence, but higher relative positive parenting signaled an amelioration of the negative association between externalizing behavior and social competence.

### Within-Person Results

The promotive model indicated that on a within-person level, scores on the PMS ( $\beta = 0.398, p = .071$ ) and FSS ( $\beta = -0.128, p = .088$ ) were significantly associated with children's social competence, with the PSI ( $\beta = 0.132, p = .103$ ) approaching significance. When the externalizing behaviors variable was added to the model, within-person changes in PMS remained a significant predictor of social competence ( $\beta = 0.417, p = .069$ ; see Fig. 1), but FSS only approached significance ( $\beta = -0.122, p = .110$ ). The protective model did not yield any interactions at the within-person level.



**Figure 1.** Predicted social competency scores given within-person changes in parental monitoring (PMS), controlling for other family-level factors, externalizing behaviors and SES. Dashed lines represent CI<sub>95%</sub> bands

### Academic Competence

Examination of Level 1 residual plots suggested acceptable normality; therefore, we proceeded with imputation with the full sample. Relative model fit improved across each step of refinement for the promotive (BIC = 518.586), externalizing behaviors (BIC = 516.724), and final moderation (BIC = 516.825) models. Full results of the academic competence models are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Academic competence models

Predictors	Academic competence					
	Promotive factors		Externalizing behavior		Protective factors	
	$\beta$	SE	$\beta$	SE	$\beta$	SE
Intercept	3.696**	0.127	3.718**	0.124	3.723**	0.125
Sex	0.062	0.196	0.083	0.197	0.077	0.197
Age	0.015	0.115	-0.043	0.115	-0.043	0.115
SES	-0.013	0.015	-0.018	0.016	-0.018	0.016
<i>Level-1 (within)</i>						
Externalizing Behavior			-0.036 <sup>†</sup>	0.021	-0.036 <sup>†</sup>	0.021
FSS	0.018*	0.008	0.016 <sup>†</sup>	0.008	0.016 <sup>†</sup>	0.008
PSI	0.001	0.008	0.003	0.008	0.003	0.008

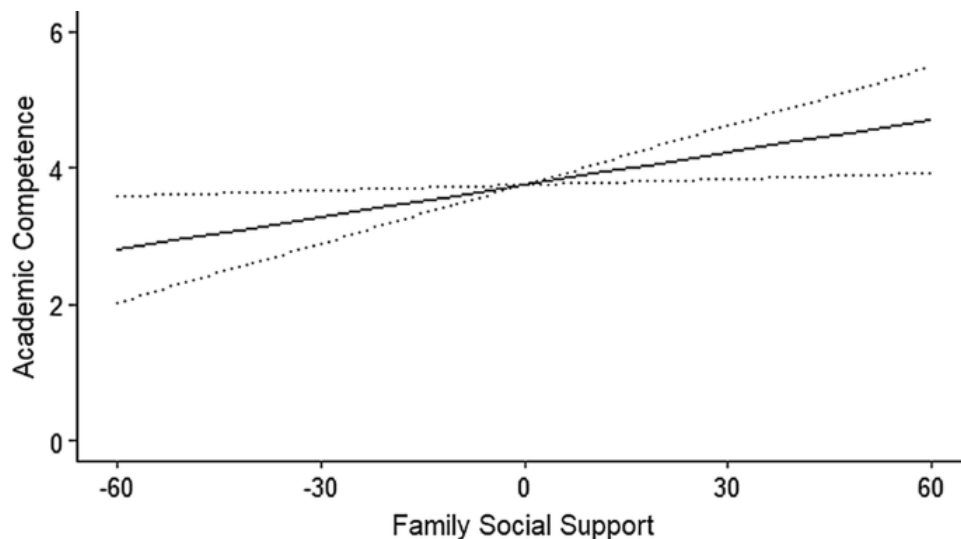
Predictors	Academic competence					
	Promotive factors		Externalizing behavior		Protective factors	
	$\beta$	SE	$\beta$	SE	$\beta$	SE
<i>Level-2 (between)</i>						
Externalizing Behavior			-0.019	0.019	-0.031	0.020
SES	0.015 <sup>†</sup>	0.009	0.016 <sup>†</sup>	0.009	0.017 <sup>†</sup>	0.009
FSS	-0.017**	0.006	-0.015*	0.006	-0.015*	0.006
PSI	-0.02**	0.007	-0.016 <sup>†</sup>	0.009	-0.016 <sup>†</sup>	0.008
<i>Level-2 interactions</i>						
ExtBeh * PSI					0.001	0.001

SES socioeconomic status, FSS Family Support Scale, PSI parenting stress inventory-short form,  $\beta$  unstandardized beta-coefficients, SE standard error

<sup>†</sup> $p < .10$ ; \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$

### Between-Persons Results

The promotive model indicated that on a between-persons level, SES ( $\beta = 0.015, p = .090$ ), PSI ( $\beta = -0.020, p = .003$ ) and FSS ( $\beta = -0.017, p = .007$ ) were significantly associated with children's academic competence. We then added the externalizing behaviors variable to the model to test whether promotive relationships remained stable in the context of risk. Similar to the models for social competence, we found that SES ( $\beta = 0.016, p = .070$ ), PSI ( $\beta = -0.016, p = .063$ ) and FSS ( $\beta = -0.015, p = .017$ ) remained significantly associated with academic competence. However, in this model, the externalizing behaviors variable was not significantly associated with academic competence on the between-person level. The protective model did not yield any statistically significant interactions on the between-persons level.



**Figure 2.** Predicted academic competency scores give within-person changes in family social support (FSS), controlling for other family-level factors, externalizing behaviors and SES. Dashed lines represent CI<sub>95%</sub> bands

### Within-Person Results



The promotive model indicated that on a within-person level, FSS ( $\beta = 0.018, p = .025$ ) was significantly associated with academic competence. When the externalizing behaviors variable was added to the model, within-person changes in externalizing behaviors ( $\beta = -0.036, p = .080$ ) and FSS ( $\beta = 0.016, p = .062$ ; see Fig. 2) were significantly associated with academic competence. The protective model failed to yield any statistically significant interactions of promotive factors with externalizing behavior.

## Discussion

Although research has documented the critical, positive role social and academic competence play in a child's life trajectory, research on African American children has tended to focus on identifying deficits and shortfalls in social and academic competencies. Not only has this literature tended to overlook the existence of African American children's social and academic competencies but it has also largely ignored the protective and promotive factors within African American families that may account for the resiliency of these children. The aim of this study was to explore family-level factors and identify the promotive and protective effects of those factors on the social and academic competence of African American children. By focusing on the strengths and resources of African American families, this study contributes to a paradigm shift in the way that researchers think about African American children's development and life trajectories. Moreover, this study's inclusion of African American families from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds provides insight to the literature on childhood social and academic competence.

### Social Competence Promotive Model

Our hypothesis for the social competence promotive model was partially supported. As anticipated, our findings supported the relationship between the social competence of African American children and the following four factors: the quality of the parent-child relationship, use of positive parenting practices, low parental stress, and a routine family home environment (between-person effects). Additionally, the results indicated that changes over time in factors such as parental monitoring, parental stress level, and the family's social support network were related to corresponding changes over time in children's social competence (within-person effects). In our study, the average effects for the mother-child relationship were significant, positive predictors of children's successful development of social competence. This finding is similar to Washington et al.' (2013) finding that African American children in kinship care placements who had maintained a high-quality relationship with their birth parents had higher levels of social competence than their counterparts without a quality relationship with birth parents. Our finding is also similar to Toldson et al.'s (2006) finding that African American children with high levels of social competence had frequent parent-child interactions. Our study also revealed that when the mothers' parenting practices included positive interactions and qualities, such as high levels of verbal praise for the child and frequent demonstration of physical affection (i.e., positive parenting), their children's social skills were higher on average. The study finding that positive parenting practices are positively associated with social competence is consistent with the findings of Garner (2006) and Oravec et al. (2008), which showed positive parenting practices were predictive of social competence among African American children from low-income households.

Another predictor of children's social competence was the level of parental stress, with lower levels of parental stress associated with better social skills among African American children. This finding is consistent with prior research that suggested mothers' good psychological health was associated with positive child outcomes (Deater-Deckard and Panneton 2017; Guajardo et al. 2009). Last, we found the family home environment positively influenced children's social competence at a trend level; this finding suggests children in homes with more quality and quantity of support and stimulation on average had higher social competence scores. This finding is similar to those reported by Toldson et al.' (2006) and Washington et al.' (2013), whose studies demonstrated that children with higher levels of social competence had been raised in families with a routine environment, had defined family roles, and whose family members displayed warmth and cohesiveness within the family home environment.

Our results showed a clear link between changes in the extent of parental monitoring and corresponding changes in children's social competence. Similar to Taylor et al. (2015) who found parental monitoring of children in Grade 6 (Time 2) predicted change in children's social competence at Grade 7 (Time 3), we found that children exhibited high levels of social competence during periods with high levels of parental monitoring. Our finding is also parallel to Top et al.'s (2017) study that found a greater extent of parental monitoring had positive impacts on children social skills. The importance of parental monitoring to prevent problem behaviors and promote social competence among African American children has been solidified in a report by the APA Task Force on Resilience and Strength in Black Children and Adolescent (APA 2008). In addition, Miller et al.'s (2007) study further underscored the importance of parents providing consistent parental monitoring before African American children initiated risk-taking behaviors.

Although we found a significant within-person association between family social support and children's social competence, the direction of this association was contradictory to what we had expected. For example, we found that at data collection points when the family had low levels of social support, the children had high levels of social competence. This unexpected relationship might be due to families with high levels of social support experiencing challenges that require support from formal resources (e.g., Food Stamps, daycare assistance vouchers) as well as informal support networks (e.g., family members watching children to enable parents to work double shifts for extra income). Our finding of this inverse relationship may mean that the challenges these families are experiencing could negatively affect children's competence. Moreover, perhaps the types of support the families in our study received did not prevent risk to children's social competence. Notably, our results showed that whereas parental stress only approached statistical significance at the within-person level, parental stress was a promotive factor of children's social competence at the between-person level.

When we added externalizing behaviors (i.e., risk) to the promotive model as a control variable, we found the promotive effects of the parent-child relationship, positive parenting practices, and parental monitoring remained significant predictors of children's social competence. However, in this model, the family home environment was statistically significant whereas family social support and parental stress only approached significance.

## Social Competence Protective Model

The Social Competence Protective Model assessed the extent to which each family-level factor moderated the association between externalizing behaviors (i.e., risk) and children's social competence. For social competence, we found two statistically significant interactive effects. First, positive parenting practices ameliorate the negative effects of externalizing behaviors on children's social competence. Equally important, research indicates that positive parenting practices are important influences on children's social competence regardless of risk. Our study indicates that the influence of positive parenting practices is more pronounced for African American children at risk for externalizing behavior problems. Second, parental monitoring moderated the relationship between children's externalizing behaviors and social competence. However, the direction of the moderating effects is not as we predicted, and this finding contradicts other research that found parental monitoring was protective of African American children's problem behaviors and social competence (APA 2008; Bean et al. 2006; Stanton et al. 2002). Monitoring has been found to be especially important for African American youth living in high-crime, poverty-stricken neighborhoods (Bean et al. 2006). However, rather than basing the study definition of risk on SES, our study defined risk based on externalizing behaviors and used a sample representing mixed SES strata. Therefore, given this context, perhaps parental monitoring should not be expected to be protective for our study population. Further, for this sample, and as opposed to parental monitoring buffering the effect of risk on children's social skills, it is feasible that exhibiting high levels of parental monitoring was indicative of parents monitoring children with externalizing behavior problems.

## Academic Competence Promotive and Protective Models

Our hypothesis for the academic competence promotive model was partially supported. As anticipated, the average level of academic competence of African American children was found to be related to the following three family-level factors: low parental stress, family social support, and family SES (between-person effects). Additionally, our results indicated that changes occurring over time in family's social support network were related to corresponding changes that occurred over time in children's academic competence (within-person effects). On average in our study, children with higher levels of academic competence were those whose mothers experienced low levels of stress while parenting children. This finding is consistent with those of other studies that found children had better overall academic outcomes when their caregivers were less stressed (Harmeyer et al. 2016; Tan et al. 2017). Notably, at the between-person level, family support had an inverse relationship with academic competence, whereas at the within-person level, family support had a positive relationship with children's academic competence. This finding suggests that, on average, when children's academic levels are higher, their families are receiving less social support. However, at the data collection points when levels of family social support were higher, the children had higher levels of academic competence (within-person effects). The finding that family social support can promote children's academic competence is reinforced by the risk and resilience literature, which suggests both a supportive family milieu and an external support system contribute to children's positive outcomes (Fraser et al. 2004). Moreover, this finding is consistent with research that has found a positive association between social support and children's developmental outcomes (Bradley et al. 2014). As noted, considerable research has documented the importance of teacher support for children's

academic outcomes; however, less empirical knowledge is available regarding the effects of family social support. Thus, our study makes a significant contribution to the literature by providing evidence of the ways in which family social support can have a positive impact on children academic outcomes.

Equally important, once externalizing behaviors (i.e., risk) were added to the promotive model as a control variable, all associations remained the same for all family-level factors and academic competence. In addition, the externalizing behaviors in this model had a negative relationship with children's academic outcomes. On average, children with no or low levels of externalizing behaviors had better academic competence, and therefore, the presence of risk did not affect the role of family-level factors on academic competence. For the academic protective model, no family-level factors were found to ameliorate the risk of externalizing behaviors on children's academic outcomes.

### Limitations

This study has several strengths and presents key findings; however, notable limitations must be considered when interpreting the findings. First, although the larger study (from which we obtained our study data) collected data from children at ages 5, 7, and 10 years, we were unable to use the data collected at the earliest time point (i.e., age 5) because data were missing for several family-level variables that were of primary interest in the current study. Second, the larger study did not collect data on racial/cultural variables (e.g., experiences or perceptions of racism, discrimination, and parental racial socialization). Thus, we were unable to examine racial/cultural family-level factors (e.g., parental racial socialization) to determine whether these factors served as promotive or protective factors for African American children's social and academic competence. This is a limitation given the growing body of research that has found parental racial socialization associated with a range of positive developmental outcomes, including children's socioemotional adjustment (Neblett et al. 2008) and academic achievement (Brown et al. 2009; Hughes et al. 2009). A third limitation stems from the study's reliance on the mothers as the only raters of family-level factors. This limitation is important because using multiple raters or triangulating data from multiple sources typically strengthens the validity of study findings. Also, given the flexible roles that fathers play in the African American families (Hill 1999), data from them may have provided additional knowledge. However, the original study did not include data from the fathers on all the measures of family-level factors that were used in our study.

### Future Research

Scholars have argued that African American parents need to socialize their children to their own culture as well as the mainstream culture to ensure their children have the skills and understanding needed to survive in an environment that is often hostile, prejudiced, and discriminatory (McAdoo 1997). Thus, future research should continue to explore the ways in which parental racial socialization influences children's social and academic skills. Additionally, research has documented the negative influence of racism, prejudice, and discrimination on children's developmental and academic outcomes (Neblett et al. 2006; Wong et al. 2003) such as the racial disproportionality of school discipline. The implicit bias held by many teachers and

school administrators toward African American students is reflected in the number of African American students, especially boys, who are suspended or expelled from school. This disparity is critically important because students who experience frequent suspensions from school are more likely to fall behind their peers, lack a connection to their school, and thus, more likely to drop out, creating a negative trajectory with limited opportunity (Barbarin 2010; Mallett 2016; Rudd 2014). Thus, future research should investigate the direct impact of racial/cultural factors (e.g., racism, discrimination, parental racial socialization) on children's social and academic outcomes, as well as how these factors influence the relationship between family-level factors and children's social and academic outcomes. Perhaps this line of inquiry will contribute to reducing the White/Black academic gaps. In addition, although the current study contributes to filling the gap in research examining middle-class and working-class African Americans, additional research is warranted to advance understanding of the role social context plays in influencing human development (e.g., Garner 2006).

A recent report issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC; Jones and Mosher 2013) has contributed substantially to debunking the myth that African American fathers are not involved in their children's lives. Indeed, the CDC's study found that among nonresidential fathers, African American fathers were more involved with their children than fathers of other race/ethnicities. Further, research has documented the important role of the father-child relationship in children's development, including social and academic competence (Fagan et al. 2016; Harper and Fine 2006; Washington et al. 2014). Given this emerging body of literature, we suggest further research on fathers' influence on African American children's social and academic competence.

In sum, results from this study suggest four family-level factors within African American families can positively influence African American children's social competence: the quality of the parent-child relationship, use of positive parenting practices, low parental stress, and a routine family home environment. The study also showed that two factors—low parental stress and family social support—were promotive factors of children's academic competence. Perhaps the two most salient family-level factors to emerge as having a positive influence on children outcomes were parental monitoring and social support because changes in monitoring were associated with corresponding changes in social competence, and changes in social support were associated with corresponding changes in academic competence. The findings of the current study significantly add to the literature given that historically research on African American children has not used a strengths-based approach to investigate the developmental patterns of children's adjustment and has rarely included families from various SES strata. Moreover, the findings from the current study are significant for preventive intervention work by highlighting possible points of focus when the goal is to promote African American children's social and academic competence. Equally important, although this study represents an important contribution to the literature, additional research is needed to examine other protective and promotive factors at the individual, family, and societal/community levels that impact African American children's development of competent behaviors and skills.

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