

## ABSTRACT

BLACKSON, FABRICE JANE' . Cohabiting Parents' Perceptions Concerning Parental Involvement and Academic Success: A Qualitative Review. (Under the direction of Dr. Carolyn Bird).

There are many different structural types of families that exist today. Divorce rates, the choice to cohabit, and changes in birthing trends, among other factors, have influenced the structural transformation of families. Nuclear families, consisting of a married heterosexual couple and their biological children, are no longer the only family structure. Trend data across multiple decades show that cohabitation, an alternative form of partnership, has increased for adults aged 19 to 44. With the increase in cohabiting couples, we can assume that there is greater social acceptability and less societal resistance of this family form. The likelihood for an unmarried, heterosexual couple to have and raise children in the same household (i.e., a cohabitative union) is greater today than ever before. Some research examining family structure finds that cohabitation has a negative effect on school-aged children and their ability to achieve academically in elementary and secondary school. However, few studies examine a child's success in relationship to parental involvement. This study seeks to explore the patterns of parental involvement in cohabiting biological-parent households and its impact on the academic achievement of school-aged children. It employs a qualitative research design. Fourteen themes emerged regarding the perceptions of parental involvement and academic success for cohabiting biological-parent families. Results found that some participants' perceptions were inconsistent with earlier findings for cohabiting families. The implications of these findings for practitioners and families are discussed. Results also highlight areas for additional research within this family type.

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Cohabiting Parents' Perceptions Concerning Parental Involvement and Academic Success:  
A Qualitative Review

by  
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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this to Uncle Jim – thank you for the message in my library books when I needed it the most. To Coach Mitchell (Doc) – because of you I was inspired to make this journey. To Coach Pinckney – I was probably your first official student, but your coaching session encouraged me to complete this goal. To Emory, thank you for helping me to stay awake and push through. To Mom, your love made the difference.

## BIOGRAPHY

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES.....	viii
CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1. Background.....	1
CHAPTER II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE .....	6
2.1. Introduction.....	6
2.2. Cohabitation: An Increasing Trend.....	10
A. Cohabiting Couples.....	10
B. Births Outside Marriage.....	12
C. Children Living in Cohabiting Households .....	13
2.3. The Importance of Studying Cohabitation.....	14
2.4. Cohabitation Studies and Child Academic Well-Being.....	16
2.5. Cohabitation and Racial Differences .....	21
2.6. Academic Success: Children and Adolescents .....	22
2.7. Parental Involvement .....	24
2.8. Current Investigation .....	27
2.9. Research Questions.....	28
CHAPTER III. METHODOLOGY .....	30
3.1. Introduction.....	30
3.2. The Research Design .....	30
3.3. Participant Identification Methods.....	32
A. Sampling Rationale.....	32
B. Homogeneity.....	33
C. Criterion .....	33
D. Sampling Procedure.....	34
E. Sampling Methods Process .....	35
F. Consent to Participate.....	39
3.4. Data Collection .....	40
A. Guided Interview Instrument.....	41
3.5. Methodological Approach .....	43
A. Phenomenology .....	43
1. Epoche.....	44
2. Transcendental-Phenomenological Reduction.....	45
3. Imaginative Variation .....	46
4. Synthesis of Meaning.....	46
3.6. Role of the Researcher .....	47
3.7. Data Analysis.....	48
3.8. Anticipated Ethical Issues.....	50
3.9. Assumptions.....	50
CHAPTER IV. RESULTS AND FINDINGS .....	51
4.1. Introduction.....	51
4.2. Research Participant Demographics .....	51

4.3. Results of Qualitative Study .....	56
A. Participant Textural Descriptions .....	58
1. Research Participant One (Rp1).....	58
2. Research Participant Two (Rp2).....	62
3. Research Participant Three (Rp3).....	65
4. Research Participant Four (Rp4).....	69
5. Research Participant Five (Rp5).....	72
6. Research Participant Six (Rp6).....	76
7. Research Participant Seven (Rp7) .....	81
B. Composite Textural Descriptions.....	85
4.4. Discussion of Findings.....	93
A. School-Related Behaviors of Academic Success .....	95
B. Parental Perceptions of Academic Success.....	97
C. Parental Academic Involvement Behaviors.....	99
D. Parental Academic Involvement Impact on Academic Achievement .....	101
CHAPTER V. CONCLUSION.....	104
5.1. Introduction.....	104
5.2. Conclusions.....	104
5.3. Limitations .....	108
5.4. Implications for Practice .....	109
A. Implications for Practitioners.....	109
B. Implications for Families .....	111
5.5. Recommendations for Future Research .....	112
REFERENCES .....	114
APPENDICES .....	128
Appendix A. Institutional Review Board Approval .....	129
Appendix B. Pre-Qualification and Interest Survey .....	130
Appendix C. Research Information Flyer.....	134
Appendix D. Institutional Review Board Approval – October Revision .....	135
Appendix E. Interview Request Notification.....	136
Appendix F. Interview Confirmation Notification .....	137
Appendix G. Informed Consent Form .....	138
Appendix H. Guided Interview Instrument .....	140
Appendix I. Textural Theme Quotes for Participants.....	151

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1	Cohabitation Union Definitions – Terminology and Definition.....	9
Table 2.2.1	Current Cohabitation Trends of Heterosexual Couples.....	11
Table 2.2.2	Ever Cohabited Trends of Heterosexual Couples.....	11
Table 2.2.3	Percent of Nonmarital Births by Cohabiting Status .....	13
Table 2.2.4	Living Arrangements of Children (total numbers) .....	14
Table 4.2.1	Research Participants Income Categories.....	53
Table 4.2.2	Research Participants (Rp) Demographics .....	55
Table 4.3	Textural Themes by Research Participant .....	57
Table 4.4	Textural Themes by Research Question .....	94

## CHAPTER I.

### INTRODUCTION

#### **1.1 Background**

The structure and household conditions for families have changed over the last few decades. Blau and Klaauw (2013) assert that in the United States, a traditional family structure is a home in which both biological parents are present in the home and are married. These nuclear families, characterized by married heterosexual parents, are no longer the only family structure. This is evident by the varied family formation types that currently exist. Several factors have impacted and directly influenced the structural transformation of family forms. Those factors include divorce rates, single parenthood, and changes in birthing trends, among other factors. In addition, alternative forms of partnerships, such as cohabitation, challenge the nuclear family model (Kelly, 2010). Further, research in nonmarital childbearing shows that it is increasingly common for a cohabiting woman to give birth to a child (Musick, 2007). Smock and Dorius (2011) believe that cohabitation may be a substitution for marriage, and Martin, Martin, and Martin's (2001) review of the research suggest "cohabitation stems from a societal shift in values" (p. 602). Examining this research, it is reasonable to conclude that societal perceptions about marriage may have changed.

Given these trends, it cannot be assumed that most children will be parented in nuclear families. Children are likely to grow up in different family compositions and households, with family structures that are unique to one another and separately defined. For example, single parent and cohabiting-couple households are two family types in which unwed biological parents may rear children. Waldfogel, Craigie, and Brooks-Gunn's (2010)

research involving fragile families (families where the mother is unmarried at the time of birth) and child well-being is motivated by the fact that 41% of children of children today are born into single-mother families and cohabiting-couple families. In fact when looking after the birth and considering divorce rates, a majority of children (55%) live in unmarried parent households; with 35% of children living in a single parent home and 20% living in a home where their parents cohabit. Waldfogel et al. advance that when “examining the effects of unwed parenthood on child outcomes, it is important to consider both children living with single mothers and those living in cohabiting-couple families” (p. 88). Cohabiting-couple families are of primary interest for this study; therefore, we exclude single-parent families.

Trend data in cohabitation, across two decades (1987-2010), evidence an increase in cohabitation experiences for every age group (ages 19-44) in the United States; data also show that the percentage of women (ages 19-44) who had ever cohabitated increased by 82% during this 23-year period (Manning, 2013). Studies examining family compositions reported increases in: cohabiting couples (Copen, Daniels, Vespa, & Mosher, 2012; O’Hare, Manning, Porter, & Lyons, 2009), births outside of marriage (Shattuck & Kreider, 2013), and children living in cohabiting households (Kreider & Ellis, 2011). The likelihood for unmarried couples to live together, conceive children, and raise children in a cohabitative union is greater today than ever before.

Understanding cohabitation as a family structure and its influence on child well-being and adolescent outcomes has been studied extensively (Artis, 2007; Brown, 2004; Cid & Stokes, 2012; Fomby & Cherlin, 2007; Kowaleski-Jones & Dunifon, 2006; Raley, Frisco, & Wildsmith, 2005; Tillman, 2007; Waldfogel, Craigie, & Brooks-Gunn, 2010). Studies

comparing the academic performance of children, in grades K-12, in cohabiting families with other family structural types reported:

- The cognitive test scores for kindergarten children are lower for those living in cohabiting families (stepfamilies or two-biological-parent) than married parent families (stepfamilies or two-biological-parent) (Artis, 2007);
- Children (ages 0 to 5) and youth (ages 6 to 18) who reside in cohabiting households have increased behavioral and emotional problems and lower school engagement compared to children residing with two biological married parents (Brown, 2004);
- Children (grades 7 – 12) in cohabiting stepfather families fare significantly worse than youth in other family forms, as manifested in lower grades and college expectations and higher school-related behavior problems compared to children in married stepfather families (Tillman, 2007);
- Children (ages 12 to 18) in maternal cohabiting families (defined in the study as an unwed biological mother and stepfather) had the lowest grades, lower levels of educational attainment (including a lower probability of graduating from high school and enrollment into a postsecondary program), and less academic success compared to children who reside in two-parent, divorced, or married stepfamilies (Raley et al., 2005); and
- There is an increased likelihood of repeating a grade for White teens (ages 14 to 19) living in a cohabiting-parent family compared to those living with a single parent or living with a married parent (both stepparent and biological), and White teens (ages 14 to 19) living in single-parent or cohabiting-parent family household had more

incidences of problem behavior compared to living with a married parent (Kowaleski-Jones & Dunifon, 2006). Interestingly, for Black teens (ages 14 to 19) Kowaleski-Jones and Dunifon found “there is no evidence that, compared to living with biological married parents, living in any of the other family structures [single-parent, cohabitation, stepparent] is associated with measures of youth well-being” (p. 125); thus, for Black teens community factors (i.e., neighborhood quality, residential stability, and school quality) appeared to be more predictive of youth adjustment (i.e., problem behaviors and teen depression) than family structure. Kowaleski-Jones and Dunifon controlled for race and predicted outcome measures separately for Black and White teens as the sample population on average was 20% Black and 80% non-Hispanic White.

All of these research studies consider family structure type, child well-being, and its influence on educational outcomes for children and youth. Additionally, there is evidence that South American countries, such as Uruguay, have seen comparable results to those reported in the previously mentioned U.S.-based research studies. In one Uruguay study, Cid and Stokes (2012) found that the probability for falling behind grade level and dropping out from school increases for children (ages 9 to 16) in non-traditional families (family structures outside of married two biological-parent homes). From the research, a negative relationship exists between academic success indicators and educational well-being for school-aged children (in grades K-12) in cohabiting family households.

A child’s success in school is directly affected by family structure and family changes (Cid & Stokes, 2012). Further, a positive relationship exists between parental involvement

and student academic achievement for school-aged children. Such as, improved language and literacy (Senechal & LeFevre, 2002), higher rates of school attendance (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002), and reduced grade retention (Spera, 2005) were all positively impacted by parental involvement. In a meta-analysis of 77 studies, with over 300,000 students in grades K-12, Jeynes (2005) sought to determine the overall effect of parental involvement on students' academic achievement. Jeynes' analysis of parental involvement revealed that parental investments in their child through reading and communicating with one's child had a greater impact on student educational outcomes, than having household rules or parental attendance / participation at school functions. The 77 studies included in Jeynes' investigation all focused on the level of parental involvement and differential academic outcomes for school-aged children. Yet, a review of the literature revealed few studies examining cohabiting parents' academic parental involvement experiences or the perceptions of cohabiting parents about how their investments influence the academic success of school-aged children. This study employs a qualitative research design, using a phenomenological approach, to address this gap in the literature. It further seeks to offer insight to the field of family life and youth development by exploring the academic parental involvement and experiences of cohabiting biological-parent households and the parents' perceptions of achievement for school-aged children.

## CHAPTER II.

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### **2.1 Introduction**

Prior to the 1950's, the nuclear family unit (families with a married man and woman and their biological children) was considered to be the norm (Furstenberg, 2007). However, a decline in nuclear families emerged after this post war period. The feminist movement emerged, in the decade subsequent to the 1950's, which criticized the institution of marriage. Also during this time (in 1960), the birth control pill was approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for contraceptive use. Two years after its introduction, 1.2 million American women were on the birth control pill, and after three years this number spiked to 2.3 million (Nikolchev, 2010). By 1965, the birth control pill had become the most popular form of birth control in the United States.

The consequences of the birth control pill have affected family formation. Dirk van de Kaa (2011) states, "one of the greatest achievements of mankind is the mastering of childbirth" (p. 49) as "the basic aim was to make sexual relations, particularly inside marriage, less risky and more fulfilling at a time when most couples already tried to limit the size of their families" (p. 51). As concluded by van de Kaa (2011), the narrow linkage between sexuality and marriage has been broken due to the development of the birth control pill and in turn "severed the strong traditional link between formal marriage and procreation" (p. 58). With the widespread usage of the birth control pill, it is reasonable to conclude that sex outside of marriage became socially acceptable around the same time (the mid-1960s).

Marriage rates decreased after 1970 (Cruz, 2013), and divorce rates more than doubled in the 1970's (Shiono & Quinn, 1994). While the amount of single parent homes more than doubled between 1970 and 2011, from 12% to 27% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). Living together, as an unmarried heterosexual couple (cohabiting couple) also became more common. There is growing evidence that cohabitation trends in the United States are increasing.

The focus of this paper is cohabitation due to significant increases in cohabiting couples compared to any other family form (O'Hare et al., 2009), increases in births outside of marriage (Shattuck & Kreider, 2013), the growing prevalence of children residing in cohabiting homes (Kreider & Ellis, 2011), and the fact that children today are more likely to live with cohabiting parents (42%) than experience the divorce of their married parents (24%) before the age of 12 (Wilcox, 2011).

Men and women now believe that they can have a satisfying life without marriage (Kaufman & Goldscheider, 2007). Young American couples (early 20's to mid-30's) today view cohabitation before marriage as beneficial, citing that the primary motives for choosing to cohabit include determining compatibility before marriage, sharing living expenses, and wanting to spend time together (Huang, Smock, Manning, & Bergstrom-Lynch, 2011). How long couples chose to cohabit is also growing. Copen, Daniels, and Mosher's (2013) research indicates that the duration of first premarital cohabitations increased from prior years; for women aged 15 to 44 the length of first premarital cohabitation was 22 months (in 2006-2010), compared to 13 months in 1995. The research shows that an increasing number of couples are cohabiting before marriage (Huang et al., 2011), and couples that make the

decision to cohabit are also choosing to cohabit for longer periods of time (Copen et al.). Manning (2010) also reports that in the last decade, greater than 60 percent (approximately two-thirds) of women with first marriages chose to cohabit prior to marriage.

Smock and Dorius (2011) express that for many, cohabitation is more than just a pathway to marriage, but has become a substitution for marriage or a long-term alternative. Interestingly, the National Marriage Project's 2012 "State of Our Unions" report, a public policy commentary, states that a growing number of couples live together with no plans to eventually marry. While Musick's (2007) research on cohabitation and its effect on non-marital childbearing found that "births to cohabiting women are increasingly common" (p. 267) and that "women most likely to marry are also most likely to cohabit and have a child out of marriage" (p. 268). Suggesting that cohabitation and nonmarital childbearing is no longer a social taboo, but a common practice among couples.

From the extant literature, two types of cohabiting unions emerge. One type is cohabiting parents and their biological offspring, and the second type is cohabiting stepfamilies in which one parent is not biologically related to at least one child in the family. A range of terms have emerged to describe parents, their partnering arrangements, and the relationship of the adults to the children in the family as a result of varied family composition types. Definitions of terms commonly found in the literature to describe cohabiting unions appear in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1

*Cohabitation Union Definitions – Terminology and Definition*

Terminology	Definition
Biological Parent	Defined here as the birth or natural parents of a child, in which the parents are unrelated to one another.
Cohabitation / Cohabiting	Persons who are unmarried, share the same usual address, and have a sexual relationship (Curtin, Ventura, & Martinez, 2014).  “Living together in an intimate sexual relationship outside of marriage” (Kroeger & Smock, 2014, p. 217).
Cohabiting Biological Parent Family	Families with children who reside with their biological, heterosexual parents who are not married (Brown, 2004).
or	
Cohabiting Two-Parent Biological Family	Families with children who live with their unmarried biological parents (Artis, 2007).
Cohabiting Stepfamily	A family with children where the parent is living with an unmarried heterosexual partner who is biologically unrelated to the child (Brown, 2004, 2005).
Cohabiting Stepfather	Children who reside with their unmarried biological mother and cohabiting stepfather (Tillman, 2007).
or	
Maternal Cohabitation	A cohabiting household where the child lives with their unmarried biological mother and cohabiting stepfather (Raley et al., 2005).
Cohabiting Stepmother	Children who reside with their unmarried biological father and cohabiting stepmother (Tillman, 2007).

*Note: These are interpreted definitions from the references provided, unless directly quoted.*

## **2.2 Cohabitation: An Increasing Trend**

**Cohabiting couples.** Since 1995, the number of heterosexual couples living (cohabiting) together has increased more than any other family form (O’Hare et al., 2009). Copen et al. (2012) used data published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDA), from the 2006-2010 National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG) report, to provide a statistical portrait of marriage and cohabitation in the United States. The statistical portrait provided by Copen et al. used trend data from the 1982, 1995, 2002, and 2006-2010 NSFG reports, and reviews the most current trends on cohabitation among heterosexual couples. Table 2.2.1 shows statistical data drawn from Copen et al. and reveals a significant increase ‘over time’ in the percent of men and women who currently cohabit with a partner of the opposite sex. Additional data synthesized by Chandra, Martinez, Mosher, Abma, and Jones (2005) and Mosher, Deang, and Bramlett (2003) showed an increase in those who report having ever cohabitated. This increase is visually represented in Table 2.2.2.

Table 2.2.1

*Current Cohabitation Trends of Heterosexual Couples*

Cohabitation Descriptor	1982	1995	2002	2006-2010
Females (ages 15-44) who ‘currently’ cohabit with a male partner	3.0%	7.0%	9.0%	11.2%
Males (ages 15-44) who ‘currently’ cohabit with a female partner	n/a <sup>a</sup>	n/a <sup>a</sup>	9.2%	12.2%

*Note. Researchers who compile and analyze national longitudinal reports calculate U.S. marriage rates for women and men older than age 15 who get married each year. This is also true when calculating current cohabitation rates. Drawn from “First Marriages in the United States: Data from the 2006-2010 National Survey of Family Growth” by C. E. Copen, K. Daniels, J. Vespa, and W. D. Mosher (2012), National Health Statistics Reports, Report No. 49, p. 12-13.*

<sup>a</sup>n/a – data not available because statistic not shown in source.

Table 2.2.2

*Ever Cohabited Trends of Heterosexual Couples*

Cohabitation Descriptor	1995 <sup>a</sup>	2002 <sup>b-c</sup>	2006-2010 <sup>a</sup>
Females (ages 15-44) who ‘ever’ cohabited with a male partner	41.2%	50.0%	52.0%
Males (ages 15-44) who have ‘ever’ cohabited with a female partner	n/a <sup>d</sup>	48.8%	49.0%

*Note. Data in table 2.2.2 retrieved from multiple sources. Data for ‘ever cohabited’ is disaggregated by gender, and defined as persons who are unmarried and had a sexual relationship while sharing the same usual address.*

<sup>a</sup>Drawn from special tabulations by U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics (2010). <sup>b</sup>Adapted from Chandra et al. (2005). <sup>c</sup>Adapted from Mosher et al. (2003). <sup>d</sup>n/a – data not available because statistic not shown in source.

**Births outside marriage.** An important indication of changing attitudes toward family formation is the rapidly increasing trend of births outside of marriage because births outside of marriage were extremely low in the 1960's (Haub, 2013). It is assumed that prior to the 1960's, marriage was often considered as the necessary precursor to childbirth. During this time children were predominately born to a married man and woman, and sexual intercourse was reserved for marital relationships. However, societal control over sexual behavior and marriage diminished when effective contraception (i.e., the birth control pill) was introduced (Kaa, 2011). People started having intercourse at a younger age, prior to entering marriage, and births outside of marriage began to rise.

Shattuck and Kreider (2013) reviewed the statistical portrait of the percentage of U.S. births to unmarried women (as tracked by the National Vital Statistics System and overseen by the National Center for Health Statistics [NCHS]). Shattuck and Kreider report that since the 1940's there has been a steady increase in the percentage of births to unmarried women in the United States. Current NCHS reports found that the birth rate for unmarried women in the U.S. in 2007 was higher than it was in 1980; the birth rate in 2007 of 52.9 births per 1,000 unmarried women aged 15-44 was 80 percent higher than the rate for 1980 (Ventura, 2009). The percent increase of cohabiting-couple households shown in table 2.2.1 and the rise in the percent of nonmarital births by cohabiting status summarized by Curtin, Ventura, and Martinez (2014) in table 2.2.3 suggests that 1) more couples are choosing to cohabit, and 2) cohabiting couples are likely to have and raise children. Haub (2013), a demographer at the Population Reference Bureau, expresses that births outside of formal marriage is a common pattern of childbearing in the United States. More than half of all births outside of

marriage are to cohabiting couples (as shown in table 2.2.3). Since there is an increased rate of births outside of marriage and a growth of heterosexual couples that cohabit, the proportion of children and adolescents who live with a cohabiting parent can be expected to increase.

Table 2.2.3

*Percent of Nonmarital Births by Cohabiting Status*

Births in the U.S. by cohabiting status	2002	2006-2010
Cohabiting	41%	58%
Not Cohabiting	60%	42%

*Note. Due to rounding, percentages may not add to 100. A non-marital birth is a birth to an unmarried woman. Drawn from “Recent Declines in Nonmarital Childbearing in the United States” by S. C. Curtin, S. J. Ventura, and G. M. Martinez (2014), NCHS Data Brief, Report No. 162, p. 4.*

**Children living in cohabiting households.** A child born outside of marriage is a frequent occurrence. According to Wilcox (2011), by the age of 12, more children spent time in a cohabiting family (42%) than experienced the divorce of their parents (24%). Kreider and Ellis (2011) examined 2009 data from the U.S. Census Bureau (the most recent data available) to study the diversity of children’s living arrangements. Their report captures historical data and revealed a pattern of increasing numbers of children under the age of 18 living with unmarried parents and is shown in table 2.2.4. Further, it is interesting to note that the greatest percentage of children in cohabiting households reside in rural (nonmetropolitan) rather than urban (metropolitan) areas (O’Hare et al., 2009).

Table 2.2.4

*Living Arrangements of Children (total numbers)*

	1991, total	1996, total	2001, total	2004, total	2009, total
Children, under age 18, living with unmarried parents	1.0%	2.1%	2.9%	3.0%	3.9%

*Note. Drawn from “Living Arrangements of Children: 2009” by R. M. Kreider and R. Ellis (2011), Report No. P70-126, p. 4.*

Some researchers have found that children have the best chance to grow into well-adjusted adults when raised by two continuously married parents with a healthy marriage (Amato, 2007). Yet, previously presented data show that choosing to have and raise children outside of marriage is a growing trend. Considering the increasing trends in cohabitation, which plays a major role in accounting for higher births outside of marriage, and with more children living in cohabiting households, it is beneficial to examine cohabitation and its effect on children (e.g., academically, socially, economically) to better inform the field of family life and youth development.

### **2.3 The Importance of Studying Cohabitation**

Wilcox (2011) asserts that the rise in cohabiting households threatens the quality and stability of family lives. Further explicated by Amato (2005), adolescents who grow up with two continuously married parents are less likely to experience a variety of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral problems during childhood and adulthood. From a federal standpoint, marriage matters; as a substantial proportion of federal discretionary funds invest in healthy marriage and marriage education initiatives (e.g., The Healthy Marriage Initiative, Healthy Marriage & Responsible Fatherhood programs). However, there is greater societal

acceptance of premarital sex and non-traditional living arrangements such as cohabitation (Martin et al., 2001). Kroeger and Smock (2014) state, “in the United States, the majority of young adults perceive cohabitation as an acceptable arrangement” (p. 217). This is evident by increases in the percentage of cohabiting couples (Copen et al., 2012), as well as an increase in nonmarital births within cohabiting couples (Curtin et al., 2014). Payne’s (2011) research also shows that nearly half of men (40%) and a majority of women (54%) have spent some time in a cohabiting relationship by the age of 25. Family structure differences may elicit the need for the federal government, school systems, and practitioners to recognize, understand, and respond to the emergent complexities within families.

Our nation’s family dynamic has evolved over time to include more family arrangements than just traditional nuclear families. The growth in cohabitation represents that cohabitation is here to stay (Brown, 2005); “in 1998, approximately 3.5 million U.S. children resided with unmarried cohabiting parents, a 50% increase since 1990” (Brown, 2004, p. 351). For children and youth in America, cohabitation has become a normative family form (Manning & Smock, 2005; Popenoe, 2008) and it is not stigmatized as it has been in the past. Still, research suggests that children may be less likely to thrive in cohabiting households due to lessened parental involvement. For example, studies have shown that children in cohabiting households are more likely to experience parental separation and parental instability (Osborne, Manning, & Smock, 2007), their parents spend less money on child-related goods such as education (DeLeire & Kahlil, 2005), and they are strikingly more likely to be physically, sexually, and emotionally abused (Wilcox, 2011). Of particular interest, to this study, is the research that indicates that children and youth in cohabiting households

have poorer academic outcomes and lower levels of academic success (Artis, 2007; Brown, 2004; Raley et al., 2005; Tillman, 2007), including decreased math scores (Hofferth, 2006). Further examination of cohabiting parent-child relationships and its effect on academic well-being for children and adolescents is needed for several reasons: (1) to assist educational practitioners in understanding the unique needs of cohabiting families and the potential academic disadvantages children in cohabiting households may be predisposed to; (2) to support cohabiting parents in understanding and having access to resources that their children may need; and (3) to provide professionals with information that may be beneficial in developing parent involvement / engagement strategies, federal educational initiatives, or academic services tailored to meet the needs of cohabiting families and children.

Investigating the academic needs and educational outcomes of children and youth in cohabiting households may also help to further understand child academic well-being for this specific family type.

#### **2.4 Cohabitation Studies and Child Academic Well-Being**

The following research studies have examined children and youth residing in cohabiting households, and its effect on their academic well-being and educational success. From a review of the extant literature, two types of cohabiting unions emerge: 1) families with biological parents, and 2) stepparent families. Brown's (2004) landmark research in cohabitation examined both types of cohabiting family structures and its relationship to child well-being and educational success for children and adolescents. Using the National Survey of America's Families (N = 35,938), Brown controlled for age (children, ages 6 to 11; adolescents, ages 12 to 17), gender (girls and boys), and ethnicity (Non-Hispanic Black,

Hispanic, Non-Hispanic Other, and Non-Hispanic White) for the children characteristics; Brown also considered two dependent measures, behavioral and emotional problems and school engagement. Additional controls for Brown's study included economic resources (i.e., family income as a percent of poverty and parent education) of the family and parental resources (i.e., parental psychological well-being and parenting effectiveness).

Brown (2004) defined behavioral and emotional problems as "the extent to which the child does not get along with other kids, cannot concentrate for long, and has been sad or depressed" (p. 355); school engagement assessed "the degree to which the child cares about doing well in school, only works on schoolwork when forced, does just enough schoolwork to get by, and always does homework" (p. 356). According to Brown, children and adolescents who resided in cohabiting family households (both two-biological parent households and stepfamilies) fared worse on both dimensions compared to children and adolescents in two-biological-parent married households. Evident by increased behavioral and emotional problems for children (significantly more so for children ages 6 to 11) and adolescents, when controlling for children's characteristics. As well as, lower school engagement (cognitive and educational well-being) for children and adolescents (cohabiting stepfamilies only) when controlling for children's characteristics.

Artis (2007) considered the relationship between cohabiting unions and well-being for young children. Using the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study – Kindergarten Cohort (ECLS-K), Artis attempted to understand the differences in child well-being across cohabiting family structures compared to married family structures, and the factors that may explain such differences (i.e., economic resources, stability, maternal depressive symptoms,

parenting practices). Data analyses for Artis' study included children residing in cohabiting two-biological-parent families (N = 481) and children residing in cohabiting stepfamilies (N = 379). To assess child well-being, Artis used five different outcomes, which included academic and psychosocial indicators. Academic indicators were measured through assessments in math, reading, and general knowledge prior to entry into kindergarten for sample participants. Psychosocial indicators were measured through sadness/loneliness and self-control (as reported by the child's mother). Prior to applying any controls, significant findings from Artis' study found that young children in cohabiting families (biological and step) score significantly lower on cognitive tests and exhibit significantly less self-control compared to children in married two-biological-parent households. Artis considered that child well-being is directly influenced by several factors and applied the following controls: gender, age, race, number of siblings, and the type of kindergarten program (public or private; half or full day) a child attends. Artis used three separate multivariate models to separate observed differences between cohabiting families and married families and child well-being (Model A – showed differences after controlling for child characteristics; Model B – showed differences after controlling for child characteristics and economic factors / resources; Model C – showed differences after adding three potential explanations, namely stability, parental psychosocial resources, and parenting practices). Interestingly, Artis found for participants in her study that that parental education, economic resources, controls for child characteristics, and maternal depressive symptoms account for decreased cognitive scores of children in cohabiting households compared to children in married two-biological parent households. Insights provided from this study further demonstrate that decreased

cognitive abilities exist for young children in cohabiting families. Further suggesting the potential harmful effects of cohabitation on the educational well-being of children.

Tillman (2007) considered how different family structure pathways impact grades, school related behaviors, and college expectations for adolescents in grades 7 – 12 in the United States. Using qualitative data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (N = 13, 988), Tillman examined adolescent well-being across seven family structures. Only two of the seven family structures involved cohabiting families. Adolescents in the study were either in cohabiting stepfather families (N = 335) or cohabiting stepmother families (N = 35). When comparing the weighted means of academic outcomes, by family structure, Tillman found that youth residing in cohabiting stepfamilies reported significantly 1) lower grade point averages which accounts for poorer grades, 2.) higher school-related behavior problems, and were 3.) more likely to hold lower than average college expectations compared to youth residing in married stepfamilies. Tillman further suggests that adolescents who live in cohabiting stepfamilies are at risk for poorer academic outcomes compared to adolescents who live with both biological parents. However, this study is limited because cohabiting biological families were not considered as a structured pathway. Understanding how familial environments influence academic outcomes during adolescence is an important step in developing interventions that could help young people at risk for lowered socioeconomic attainment (Tillman, 2007).

Using the National Survey of Families and Households, Raley et al. (2005) examined whether maternal cohabitation is associated with poorer educational outcomes. By testing competing hypotheses in family stability, the researchers aimed to understand the potential

effect of maternal cohabitation on the educational experiences (expectations and achievement) and attainment of children. Raley et al. measured family experiences across five family composition categories, including: 1) two-parent (defined as “children who lived with both biological or two adoptive parents and never experienced a single-parent family”), 2) always single (defined as “born to a single mother who lived with a single parent until the interview or age 18”), 3) divorced (defined as “those who were born into a two-parent family that dissolved and who never lived with a stepparent”), 4) married stepfamily (defined as “those who lived at some point with one biological parent who was married to someone who was not the biological parent, but never lived with a parent and that parent’s cohabiting partner), and 4) cohabiting stepparent (defined as “anyone who ever lived with a parent and that parent’s cohabiting partner”) (p. 150). Using a sizeable sample (n = 13,008), Raley et al. found that children ages 12 to 18 in cohabiting stepfamilies had lower grades, lower levels of educational attainment (including a lower probability of graduating from high school and enrolling into any postsecondary program), and less academic success compared to two-parent families. Suggesting that maternal cohabitation with a stepparent is associated with poorer educational outcomes for children. Raley et al. recommends, however, that this research is not evidence that decreases in children’s educational success is solely attributed to cohabitation. This is because “unmeasured factors, such as neighborhood characteristics, may affect both cohabitation and children’s school performance” (Raley et al., 2005, p. 158).

## **2.5 Cohabitation and Racial Differences**

Litcher, Turner, and Sassler (2010) help define serial cohabitation in the literature, as being the entry and exit from one co-residential cohabiting relationship to another. Adapting this definition, it is presumed that first cohabiting unions are opposite to serial cohabiting unions. Meaning, first cohabiting unions are those in which cohabiters have never previously experienced co-residential cohabitation.

There is significant disparity among black women in first cohabiting unions versus white or Hispanic women. Family configuration data, by race and ethnicity, in the 2006-2008 National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG) shows the disproportional first cohabiting union rates for black women and their children. Cohen (2011) identifies key factors for women aged 15 to 44 using the 2006-2008 NSFG report. With a national sample drawn from 110 major areas, Cohen (2011) analyzes the socioeconomic conditions and racial differences of children residing in first cohabiting unions and deduces the following: 1) increased presence of children for black women: in general, the presence of children is more predominant among black women (compared to white and Hispanic women); 2) low percentage of cohabiting unions without children for black women: the first cohabiting unions of black women that do not include children (18%) is significantly lower than white (62%) and Hispanic women (43%). Suggesting that black women have a higher propensity to have and care for children while in a first cohabiting union; and 3) varied family configuration is highest for black women: families with maternal biological children and paternal stepchildren, in first cohabiting unions, is most frequent among black women (28%) compared to white (7%) and Hispanic women (20%). Cohen's (2011) work does not specifically control for first

cohabiting unions, as it is an analysis of national survey data from NSFG, which utilized several controls during the data collection process.

Black women are also most likely to have a child out of marriage, whether they be single or in a cohabiting union. Payne, Manning, and Brown (2012), in their investigation of unmarried and single women (ages 15 and up) emphasize that over half of the births to minority women over the period of 2005 to 2010 were unmarried births (76% of births to black women, 54% to Hispanic women, and 30% to white women). If more black children are residing in first cohabiting unions (Cohen, 2011) and more black children are being born outside of marriage (Payne et al., 2012), then black children, parents, and families are most at risk for the challenges and disadvantages related to cohabitation; compared to other racial and ethnic groups, specifically white and Hispanic populations.

## **2.6 Academic Success: Children and Adolescents**

From the research, cohabitation is being directly linked to negative effects on school-aged children and adolescents' ability to academically achieve in elementary and secondary school. In the United States, there are common indicators that measure educational success for school-aged children. Gifford, Evans, Berlin, and Bai (2011) used national and state indicators of academic achievement, as published in the scientific literature, to identify ten (10) indicators of achievement and success for youth; namely, preschool enrollment, 4th grade reading proficiency, 8th grade math proficiency, 8th grade science proficiency, 9th and 10th grade promotion, high school graduation, college enrollment among young adults, participation in extracurricular activities, voting among young adults, and volunteering and service among young adults. Using some of the common indicators that measure educational

success for children, existing studies have reported that children in cohabiting families fare worse compared to their counterparts in married families (Artis, 2007; Brown, 2004; Huffman, 2013; Raley et al., 2005; Tillman, 2007).

Research on family structure type and educational outcomes for school-aged children (both elementary and secondary) is extensive, and several studies have largely reported that children in married families perform better academically than those children in cohabiting households. Artis (2007) finds that cognitive assessments in reading, math, and general knowledge for kindergarten children are lower for those living in cohabiting families, both cohabiting stepfamilies and cohabiting two-biological-parent households, compared to those residing in married parent families. Brown (2004) finds that children and adolescents in cohabiting households have lower rates of school engagement and increased behavioral and emotional problems, compared to children residing in married parent families. Huffman (2013) acknowledges that family arrangements, other than that of a child living with both married biological parents, often result in poor attendance for students, lower grades, and a higher occurrence of school discipline. Raley et al. (2005) finds that children in maternal cohabiting households have the lowest grades, lower levels of educational attainment and less academic success. While Tillman (2007) finds that adolescents in grades 7-12 have lower GPA's, higher school-related behavioral problems, and lower than average college expectations. Additional research by Hofferth (2006) finds that children, ages 3 to 12, who reside in cohabiting households have lower average math scores than their peers residing in intact families (or more commonly referred in the research as married two-biological-parent households).

Children and youth with lessened rates of educational success have an increased chance of becoming identified as “academically high risk” which can lead to decreased academic well-being. For cohabiting families, this is of major concern. Understanding the experience of cohabiting families, and whether or not children in cohabiting parent families are at risk to be disadvantaged academically is becoming increasingly more important and relevant. Practitioners may want to understand the implication of cohabitation on children’s educational well-being, and policy makers must attempt to recognize the implications this has on policy for families of different family structures. Ultimately, practitioners will benefit from research that articulates meaning in what children in cohabiting families need to succeed academically.

## **2.7 Parental Involvement**

One of the greatest influences for academic success for children and youth is parental involvement (Rivera, 2011). Parental involvement, as defined by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 (as reauthorized in 2013) defines “parental involvement” as:

The participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities including: (a) ensuring that parents play an integral role in assisting their child’s learning; (b) that parents are encouraged to be actively involved in their child’s education at school; (c) that parents are full partners in their child’s education and are included, as appropriate, in decision-making and on advisory committees to assist in the education

of their child; and (d) the carrying out of other activities, such as those described in section 1118 of the ESEA. (Section 9101(32), ESEA)

An expansive body of literature reports positive outcomes associated with parental involvement. These positive effects hold true for children and adolescents across multiple socioeconomic backgrounds, across racial/ethnic backgrounds, and across parent educational backgrounds, resulting in: higher reported grade point averages (Oyserman, Brickman, & Rhodes, 2007); improved math test scores (Marschall, 2006); decreased behavioral problems (Domina, 2005); and secondary school adolescents having a greater likelihood of enrolling into college (Perna & Titus, 2005). For minority students in particular, academic achievement is positively impacted by parental involvement (Smith & Fleming, 2006), including African-American students (Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein, 2008; Williams & Sanchez, 2011). Jeynes (2007) conducted a meta-analysis, drawn from 52 studies using 300,000 students, to examine the relationship between parental involvement and academic achievement for urban secondary school students. Findings from this meta-analysis showed statistically significant results for minority students relative to parental involvement and academic success. Jeynes found that an increased rate of parental involvement is positively associated with improved grades, standardized test scores, and overall achievement. Prior to this study, Fan and Chen (2001) conducted a meta-analysis, drawn from 25 studies, and also found a strong positive relationship between parental involvement and student's academic achievement.

Still, several barriers to parental involvement in education exist when the parents' belief system acts as a barrier to their involvement (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). According to

Hornby and Lafaele's model, parental beliefs about parent involvement such as how they view their role in their child's education, whether they believe they have the ability to help their child succeed, and their views about the child's intelligence and ability to learn are all potential barriers to parent involvement. Of special interest to this study are those barriers or factors that exist, or are perceived to exist, that may contribute to cohabiting parents' academic uninvolvement. As Wu, Costigan, Hou, Kampen, and Schimmele (2010) examined change and stability in cohabitation for Canadian children. Wu et al. illustrate that:

Cohabitation may be associated with the types of direct parental involvement that are most associated with achievement compared to the types of emotional involvement that may be more strongly related to school engagement. That is, although there are two parents in the home, cohabiting relationships may not translate into the same level of direct parental involvement in schoolwork that is found in married families and that is linked with enhanced achievement. For example, compared to married parents, cohabiting parents may spend less time learning about children's school activities, assisting with the selection of courses, monitoring homework completion, or communicating with school personnel (p. 573).

Brown (2005) states "children's well-being is not determined entirely by the family form in which they live" (p. 35) because parenting effectiveness (among other indicators) shapes child well-being outcomes. For example, Wu and Musick's (2008) research on union stability for cohabiting couples points out that the commitment levels of parents to their children, the ways in which they parent, and the emotional and financial resources parents provide to children, can influence the child well being far greater than just the union status of

a child's parents. Even with this study, the current body of research that examines the relationship between parental involvement and family structure for cohabiting households is limited and even more so for cohabiting two-biological-parent households. Parental involvement has a direct influence on educational outcomes, but the level of parental involvement varies by family structure type. This study seeks to examine the relationship between a parent's perception of parental involvement and its relationship to academic well-being for children and adolescents in cohabiting two-biological-parent households. Understanding the relationship between the two will aid educators, social service providers, and family life and youth development practitioners by identifying the parental involvement practices and activities that are perceived to influence positive academic outcomes for school-aged children for this particular family type.

## **2.8 Current Investigation**

Taken as a whole, research results in cohabitation, academic well-being, and educational outcomes suggest that experiences in cohabiting families may be harmful to children and adolescents compared to married families. From what was reviewed in the literature, existing studies on cohabitation, child educational well-being, and academic success have been quantitatively designed using large samples and data from national longitudinal studies (e.g., Artis, 2007; Brown, 2004; Raley et al., 2005; Tillman, 2007). Qualitative studies, by design, offer an opportunity to explore areas that have received little or no attention to gain a better understanding of the factors at work. Manning and Smock (2005) state that data collection and analyses for qualitative studies are necessary and important to better understand how cohabitation affects an increasing number of adults and

children. In reviewing the literature, we were not able to find any studies that examine parental involvement, child academic well-being, and academic success for children living in cohabiting biological-parent households.

Investigating the relationship between parental involvement and academic success for children and youth expands the body of cohabitation research currently available and this research further informs practice. In doing so, practitioners and educators may be able to better serve academically at-risk students and otherwise improve educational outcomes and success indicators for elementary and secondary school students. Understanding the association between parental cohabitation and educational success for children and youth is critical to the field and of growing importance in the U.S. as this family structure continues to increase. Qualitative analyses of the relationship between parental involvement (perceptions, experiences, and values) and its impact on the academic well-being (educational success) on school-aged children in cohabiting biological-parent households is of particular interest as a means to address a gap in the literature.

## **2.9 Research Questions**

This research examines perceptions of parental involvement, experiences, and values in cohabiting biological-parent households and its influence on the academic well-being (success) of school-aged children, through the following primary questions:

- (1) What are the school-related behaviors of academic success for school-aged children (K-12) in cohabiting biological-parent households?
- (2) What parental perceptions or beliefs do cohabiting biological-parents have about academic success?

(3) What are the parental academic involvement behaviors for cohabiting biological-parent families?

(4) How does parental academic involvement in cohabiting biological-parent families impact academic achievement for school-aged children and youth?

CHAPTER III.  
METHODOLOGY

**3.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to understand parental academic involvement perceptions of cohabiting biological-parent family households in relationship to academic well-being for school-aged children (grades K-12). This qualitative phenomenological study used data gathered from the population of interest through personal interviews to respond to the research objectives of the study. Personal interviews were conducted in person (face-to-face) or by telephone with consenting adults who met the criteria established under the Pre-Qualification and Interest Survey. This chapter describes the: research design, sampling technique and participant identification process, the role of the researcher, processes used for data collection and data analysis, strategies for validating findings, anticipated ethical issues, assumptions of the study, and limitations.

**3.2 The Research Design**

Qualitative research is one of three research designs. Qualitative research is most appropriate when there is little prior work of a specific issue or problem and it needs to be explored (Creswell, 2013). Leedy and Ormrod (2005) characterize the different qualitative research designs (or approaches) to include case studies, ethnographic studies, phenomenological studies, grounded theory studies, and studies involving content analysis. A phenomenological study allows a holistic account of the research question, while providing rich and contextual meaning. According to Leedy and Ormrod, the purpose of a phenomenological study is to understand an experience from a participants' point of view as

it is lived and perceived by human beings. Additionally, Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun (2012) illustrate that phenomenological studies investigate various reactions to, or perceptions of, a particular phenomenon.

While phenomenological studies recommend the researcher interviews from 5 to 25 individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon (Polkinghorne, 1988, as cited by Creswell, 2007, p. 61), qualitative studies are still considered as small-scale studies. Therefore, the knowledge acquired through the study is only relative to the few people in the study and results are limited to the population under study. However, it is important to note that this is the primary intent of qualitatively designed research studies.

Phenomenological analysis aids the researcher in understanding the lived experiences of the phenomenon being studied through data collection in interviews or self-reported reports. Through the phenomenological approach, the researcher is able to achieve understanding about a phenomenon through subjective experience and gain insight into people's motivations and actions (Lester, 1999). Lester states that phenomenological studies are well suited for investigations in instances of limited available data; questions and objectives of the study encourage the participants to express their experiences in consideration of their thoughts, feelings, and past memories for a greater holistic understanding of the topic being studied. It is important to remember that a phenomenologist generally assumes that there is some commonality to how people perceive and interpret similar experiences; therefore, as a researcher they seek to identify, understand, and describe the commonalities (Fraenkel et al., 2012). In phenomenological studies, the researcher seeks to describe rather than to explain. Lester suggests that pure phenomenological methods have

the ability to highlight the perceptions of individuals, from personal perspectives, to find meaning.

### **3.3 Participant Identification and Methods**

Sampling rationale, homogeneity of the sample, and participant identification were key considerations in developing the methods process for this study.

**Sampling rationale.** Within the taxonomy of sampling strategies and procedures in the social and behavioral sciences, purposive sampling is considered to be one of four broad sampling categories (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). Patton (1990) posits that purposive sampling is the most commonly used sampling method in qualitative research. As defined by Maxwell (1996), purposive sampling is “a strategy in which particular settings, persons, or events are selected deliberately in order to provide important information that can’t be gotten as well from other choices” (p. 70). A purposive sample is selected because it possesses the specific traits and/or experiences that are the focus of the study. There are at least nine types of sampling techniques categorized within purposive sampling according to Fraenkel et al. (2012), including homogeneous sampling. Fraenkel et al. define a homogeneous sample as “one in which all of the members’ posses a certain trait or characteristics” (p. 436).

Homogeneous sampling was the purposive sampling technique best suited for the research study. The sampling rationale for homogeneous sampling suggests that for participant selection, only the selection of a small and homogeneous set of cases is needed for intensive study. As such, smaller samples are appropriate if the population is reasonably homogeneous (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Common practice for homogeneous sampling

suggests that an adequate sample size for purposeful sampling is 5-25 individuals (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005).

**Homogeneity.** Purposive sampling techniques are designed to: 1) generate a sample that will address research questions, 2) focus on the depth of information generated, 3) allow small and informal sampling frames (usually 30 cases or less), 4) allow the researcher to identify cases that he/she can learn the most from, and 5) address specific purposes related to research questions (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). Fraenkel et al. (2012) describe homogeneous sampling as a type of purposive sampling technique in which all of the members of the research study possess a certain trait or characteristic. For qualitative studies specifically, the literature suggests that individuals within a sample should be selected based on who will yield the most in-depth information about the investigated topic and those with the best understanding of the topic to be investigated (Fraenkel et al., 2012; Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). When using homogeneous sampling, homogeneity is achieved through the sharing of expressed variables. When used within qualitative research, homogeneous sampling focuses, reduces variation, simplifies analysis, and facilitates group interviewing (Patton, 1990). The homogeneous variable for this study was family composition type; namely, participants must meet the definition of a cohabiting biological-parent family. Defined by Brown (2004), cohabiting biological-parent families are families with children who reside with their biological, heterosexual parents who are not married.

**Criterion.** Additional criteria were used to achieve uniformity among research participants. Respondents were selected to participate in the research study if, after initial

screening and sampling, all eligibility criteria were met. The criteria used for screening and inclusion in the research study included:

1. Marital status – subject can not be married or legally separated at the time of the survey;
2. Residence – subject must reside in the continental United States of America (geographic area selected in alignment with national trend data);
3. Age – at the time of the survey, subject must be 19 to 44 years of age (*note: this is congruent with nationally reported cohabiting trends of heterosexual couples; as previously cited by Manning (2013)); and*
4. Number and Age/Grade of Biological Children – subject must reside with one (1) or more biological children who are school-aged (K-12) in the cohabiting household (*note: if a subject resides with one (1) or more children that are not biological to both domestic heterosexual partners in the home, he/she is considered to reside in a cohabiting stepfamily and therefore ineligible for the study).*

**Sampling procedure.** Participant identification is defined as ‘who’ will be observed during the research study (Fraenkel et al., 2012). There are several sampling strategies available in qualitative study design. As explained by Creswell (2007), researchers may use one or more sampling strategies in a single qualitative study. Multiple sampling strategies were utilized for this qualitative research study; all were consistent with the frameworks of criteria sampling.

An electronic database of survey respondents was generated using responses from the Pre-Qualification and Interest Survey. The survey was administered online using software recommended by the institution and faculty sponsor (i.e., Qualtrics, selected for its no-cost utilization and reliability). Using the electronic database of survey responses generated from the Pre-Qualification and Interest Survey, a nameless (unique) identifier was assigned to each survey respondent. Homogeneous sampling was the first sampling technique applied to select subjects who would feed the pool of possible interview participants. The homogeneous trait used to sample the total survey population was household composition type. Each survey respondent who indicated that cohabiting biological-parent family best defined their household type was selected and transferred to the pool of possible interview participants.

Using the pool of possible interview participants, criteria sampling was the second sampling technique applied to select participants for the actual interview. Criteria sampling is a sampling strategy in qualitative inquiry in which all cases meet some criterion (Creswell, 2007). Under this sampling strategy, subjects from the pool of possible interview participants were selected for future contact if they had 1) expressed an interest to participate in the study, and 2) their survey responses indicated that they met all study criteria as previously described (e.g., marital status, age, etc.). This sampling process was chosen because it would provide the greatest insight to the social phenomenon in question.

**Sampling methods process.** The North Carolina State University Institutional Review Board reviewed and approved the methods process for this study (IRB # 3746, see Appendix A). A link to the Pre-Qualification and Interest Survey (see Appendix B) was disseminated using the Research Information Flyer (see Appendix C) to parents with school-

aged children and youth in 1) college access programs, 2) after school programs, 3) other community-based and faith-based children and youth serving institutions, and 4) charter schools. To recruit subjects for participation in the actual research study, a two-step recruitment process was utilized as articulated below.

- Step One: A list of parental contacts and their known email addresses was developed by the researcher using source information from personal and other acquired contacts (n = 374, as of September, 2014). Contacts were collected through area college access programs, after school programs, and other community-based and faith-based children and youth serving programs in Durham County, NC. Written consent was obtained from each organization indicating authorization for the researcher to use the organizations list of parental contacts; a representative from the organization who has the authority to commit the organization signed each organizational authorization letter.

The researcher also provided recruitment materials (information flyer, consent information, and link to pre-qualification and interest survey) to third-party organizations, including local school districts, to disseminate to parents. Third-party organizations that consented to distribute the survey directly to their parent community provided the researcher with a numeric value for the number of parents contacted. Using this method, an additional group of parent contacts (n = 702, as of September, 2014) received access to the pre-qualification and interest survey link.

- Step Two: Contacts from these various institutions were merged to create a pre-formed directory. Using the pre-formed directory, an information flyer about the research study was electronically distributed, by the researcher, to all email contacts (n = 374). The email distribution method utilized a blind carbon copy (bcc) method to prevent the display of other email addresses to survey recipients. This recruitment email was the initial alert to potential participants about the research study. This recruitment email included: 1) an information flyer with a solicitation of interest message, incentive details, and a direct link to the online pre-qualification and interest survey, 2) the consent information included in the email body, and 3.) instructions to click on the appropriate link to access the Pre-Qualification and Interest Survey. Additionally, each consenting organization that opted to disseminate the recruitment material directly to its parent community electronically distributed the same recruitment materials using similar processes and procedures (i.e., parent list serve, etc.) to parental contacts (n = 702). A total of 1,076 parent contacts received access to the Pre-Qualification and Interest Survey in September 2014. The period of access for the Pre-Qualification and Interest Survey was 12 days under this first administration.

The Pre-Qualification and Interest Survey was used as a tool to identify the homogeneous sampling frame, in order to randomly identify up to 20 participants needed for the research study. Objectives of the pre-qualification survey were to:

1. Collect basic demographic data to identify relevant family and household characteristics (e.g., marital status, age, number of biological children, etc.);

2. Collect expressions of interest for actual interview and participation in the research study; and
3. Obtain additional contact information for follow-up communications for research participation.

Parents were contacted to participate in the actual research study if they identified an interest to do so in the Pre-Qualification and Interest Survey, and met the study criteria for the homogeneous and criteria sample. Of the 1,076 parents contacted in September 2014, a total of 81 survey responses were received. After applying all sampling techniques, only five met the qualifications of the study and indicated an interest to participate in the interview process. In consideration of a low percentage yield of families, after following all approved protocols, the researcher formally requested a study revision to the Institutional Review Board to encourage a sufficient sampling frame for the qualitative study.

Revised methods for the study were reviewed and approved by the North Carolina State University Institutional Review Board in October 2014 (see Appendix D). In consideration of the approved revisions, recruitment materials were revised and expanded. After the revision of the recruitment materials, the survey was revised and launched. To establish an expanded pool of possible research participants, subjects were recruited through community-based organizations, schools, referrals from other qualifying participants, and word of mouth from institutions serving children and youth, and personal contacts. The researcher also displayed the Research Information Flyer, with the survey link embedded within the flyer, in public venues frequented by parents and families (including posting flyers in public libraries and restaurants). Under the revised recruitment strategies and protocols, an

additional 2,456 parents received electronic notification of the research study in October 2014. A total of 77 new survey responses were received, in addition to 3 referrals from other qualifying participants. After applying all sampling techniques during the second wave of the survey launch, a total of 10 subjects met the qualifications of the study (marital status, age, etc.) and indicated an interest to participate in the interview process.

All of the 15 individuals contacted from the first ( $n = 5$ ) and second ( $n = 10$ ) wave of the survey distribution received an interview request notification via electronic mail (see Appendix E). In this initial notification, the researcher provided the name and purpose of the study, the interview scheduling specifics (dates and times), and all applicable consenting information. Of the 15 subjects contacted for a follow-up interview, 13 confirmed and received an interview confirmation notification (see Appendix F) via electronic mail. The remaining two (of the 15) failed to respond after multiple requests made by the researcher. From the 13 interview confirmation notifications disseminated, seven participants were interviewed for the study; two participants were interviewed but deemed ineligible during interview screening; and four individuals failed to attend their scheduled interview even after multiple attempts to reschedule.

**Consent to participate.** A total of seven interviews were completed, and each interview lasted approximately 30 to 60 minutes. Participation in the study was voluntary and participants had the right to choose not to participate, omit responding to a question, or to stop participating at any time. Prior to beginning the interview, participants were informed of the purpose of the research study and their rights concerning participation using the Informed Consent Form for Research (see Appendix G). Interviews were conducted using in-person

(face-to-face) or telephone communications, at the request and preference of the research participant.

### **3.4 Data Collection**

A phenomenological study is one type of qualitative research design. Potential methods for data collection in phenomenological studies include in-depth interviews, observations, documents, and focus groups (Creswell, 2013; Fraenkel et al., 2012; Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). In-depth interviews were used in the current qualitative study for phenomenological inquiry to understand the experiences and perspectives of cohabiting biological-parent families. Interviews took place through the month of November 2014 in person or by telephone. Participants were allowed to select their preferred interview method (either in-person or via telephone communication), date, and time. In-person interviews were conducted face-to-face in public areas that could accommodate private meetings. Telephone interviews were conducted in private areas suitable for audio recording, as selected by the researcher and interview participant.

All interviews were conducted in noise reduced, private locations. Interviews were recorded using a digital audio recording device provided by the faculty sponsor, and the duration of each interview was between 30 and 60 minutes. Every interview began with an introductory statement describing the purpose of the study and reviewing the informed consent. Prior to recording the interview, each participant was required to provide verbal agreement and/or sign the Informed Consent Form. After securing consent and discussing the research interview procedures, participants were provided the opportunity to ask questions.

The researcher was available to respond to any question regarding the study or the interview process. After this time, the audio recording was initiated and the guided interview began.

**Guided interview instrument.** Fraenkel et al. (2012) suggests that researchers undertaking a phenomenological study are responsible for “investigating reactions to, or perceptions of, a particular phenomenon” (p. 432). Researchers may use an instrument in qualitative research design, but Creswell (2013) recommends “the instrument be designed by the researcher using open-ended questions as to not rely on questionnaires or instruments developed by other researchers” (p. 45). Therefore, a guided interview template was developed by the researcher and used as a framework for each interview conducted. The guided interview questions used during the data collection process are provided in Appendix H.

The questions used in the guided interview script were designed to understand the 1) school-related behaviors of academic success, 2) parental perceptions or beliefs about academic success, 3) the types of parental academic involvement behaviors, and 4) how parental academic involvement impacts academic achievement for school-aged children in cohabiting biological-parent families. There were four research questions established at the beginning of the study, and the interview questions were written to gain exploratory (to investigate) and explanatory (to explain) detail for each question. Every question was intentionally formulated under one of the primary research questions, and designed using indicators grounded in the literature for parental involvement and academic success. Questions were written and revised, after consultation with the faculty sponsor, to ensure that the words used were clear and aimed to understand the problem framed.

Creswell (2007) states that “qualitative research questions are open-ended, evolving, and non-directional; restate the purpose of the study in more specific terms; start with words such as “what” or “how” rather than “why”; and are few in number (five to seven)” (p. 107). Therefore, the interview instrument was developed using mostly open-ended questions that progressed from simple to more complex ideas. No more than seven sub-questions were presented under each primary research question. Questions generally began with “what” or “how” only after establishing the applicability and personal connection of the question. For example, first inquiring “How often does the participant’s child receive homework in a regular school week?” before further inquiring as to “Where do they usually complete homework?” and “What does that area look like?” This was to ensure that the subject had the opportunity to express their lived experience in the context of the question and to give meaning to each response.

The interview questions were designed to provide descriptive and comprehensive responses for the broad research question. To understand the school-related behaviors and academic background of each participant’s school-aged child(ren), questions such as “What activities does your child participate in at school?” and “How often does your child receive homework in a regular school week?” were examined with each participant. Questions such as “What educational attainment goals do you have for your child?” and “What educational performance expectations do you have for your child?” were used to explore parental perceptions and belief systems related to academic success. Additional questions presented to each interview participant investigated parental values, contributions, or behaviors for cohabiting biological-parent households. Questions that began with “can you tell me about”,

“can you give me an example of”, and prompts such as “please describe a time when” were also woven into the interview script. These prompts / questions were posed in various forms to probe further and provide additional insight or clarity of meaning for the phenomenon being studied. Developing the interview template in this manner enabled the researcher to find commonalities among the experiences of the cohabiting biological-parent families being studied.

### **3.5 Methodological Approach**

Data analysis involves the analyzing, synthesizing, and reducing of information from data collection – as obtained through various sources (Fraenkel et al., 2012). In the definition of qualitative research, Creswell (2013) articulates, “data analysis is both inductive and deductive and establishes patterns or themes” (p. 44). There are several approaches to inquiry in qualitative research design. This research study follows a qualitative methodological approach for phenomenological research design.

**Phenomenology.** In Creswell (2007), two approaches to phenomenology are highlighted including hermeneutic phenomenology (van Manen, 1990), and transcendental phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994). Hermeneutic phenomenology, according to van Manen, is a qualitative research approach that is focused on interpreting the ‘texts’ of life (hermeneutical) and lived experiences (phenomenology). Moustakas defines transcendental phenomenology, using Husserl’s conceptual framework as a guide, as a phenomenological approach where the researcher sets aside prejudgments and relies on intuition, imagination, and universal structures to obtain a picture of an experience. According to Creswell, hermeneutic phenomenology does not approach phenomenology with a set of rules or

methods but an interplay among six research activities; while transcendental or psychological phenomenology focuses more on the described experiences of the research participants and follows a set of procedures to convey the essence of the experience. The qualitative methodological approach for this study follows transcendental phenomenology, as outlined by Moustakas (1994). Transcendental phenomenology was selected since it is most appropriate when searching for an understanding of the meaning of a participant's experience (Moustakas) and the detailed data analysis steps are ideal for a less experienced researcher (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004).

Transcendental phenomenological research investigates the lived experiences of a concept (or phenomenon) for several individuals (Creswell, 2007). Moustakas (1994) explains that phenomenology, in a broad sense, “provides the impetus for experience and for generating new knowledge” (p. 26) and that the core processes in transcendental phenomenology that facilitate derivation of knowledge include Epoche, Transcendental-Phenomenological Reduction, and Imaginative Variation. The Synthesis of Meaning for the experience being investigated takes place after the core processes have been applied. Each step is described in the sections below.

***Epoche.*** The first step in transcendental phenomenology is the Epoche, which means to refrain from judgment and requires a new way of looking at things; everyday understandings are set aside in order to describe and distinguish what we see (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas illustrates that Epoche is a reflective-meditative process where no position is taken, every quality has equal value, and the researcher must concentrate and find a quiet place to review thoughts and feelings on some specific situation, person, or issue. He

explains that in practicing the Epoche, one must set aside biases and prejudgments and return with an intention to see the person, situation, or issue with new and receptive eyes in order to observe and understand the phenomenon from its appearance and presence. Epoche involves reflection and self-dialogue. Moustakas finds that Epoche is where the pre-judgments enter consciousness, are written out, and then reflected upon until its hold on the researcher's consciousness is released.

***Transcendental-phenomenological reduction.*** The second step is Transcendental-Phenomenological Reduction, which “derives a textural description of the meanings and essences of the phenomenon” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 34). According to Moustakas, the researcher must perceive and describe the experience in its totality and consider each experience singularly during Transcendental-Phenomenological Reduction. The task during this step, as articulated by Moustakas, is to describe, in textural language, what one sees in terms of the external object and the internal act of consciousness. Creswell (2007) explains that the textural description focuses on what the participant experienced. It is the “what” of the experience.

Transcendental-Phenomenological Reduction requires that the qualities of the experience become the focus, and the researcher must repeatedly look at and describe the experience using reflective descriptions that are horizontal and thematic (Moustakas, 1994). The steps of Transcendental-Phenomenological Reduction, as provided by Moustakas (1994), include 1) *bracketing* in which the focus of the research is placed in brackets, 2) *horizontalizing* in which every statement is treated as having equal value, 3) deleting every irrelevant, repetitive, or overlapping statement in order to only leave *horizons* (the textural

meanings), 4) clustering the horizons into *themes*, and then 5) organizing the horizons and themes into a coherent *textural description*. Moustakas' modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen's method of organizing and analyzing phenomenological data for qualitative studies was used for this study. The application of phenomenological reduction to identify the textural descriptions is described under data analysis.

***Imaginative variation.*** The third step is Imaginative Variation and aims to understand and explain the structural essences of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). During Imaginative Variation, the researcher must “present a picture of the conditions that precipitate an experience and connect with it” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 35). Creswell (2007) further explains that structural essences (descriptions) are concerned with how one experiences the phenomenon in terms of the conditions, situations, or context. It is the “how” of the experience.

***Synthesis of meaning.*** Moustakas (1994) describes the final step in phenomenological research as the integration between textural (the “what”) and structural (the “how”) descriptions into one unified statement. This becomes the essence of the study. Creswell (2007) states that the “essence” of phenomenological research is “the reduction of the textural (what) and structural (how) meanings of experiences to a brief description that typifies the experiences of all of the participants in the study” (p. 235). Creswell (2007) further explains “all individuals experience it; hence, it is invariant, and it is a reduction to the essentials of the experience” (p. 235).

### **3.6 Role of the Researcher**

Merriam (2009) describes that “qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they contribute to their experiences” (p. 5), and that “the research is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis” (p. 15). Appreciating the role of the researcher in qualitative research (and especially phenomenological research) design is critical. Creswell (2013) articulates that the researcher is the key instrument in qualitative research because he or she collects the data themselves through observing behavior and interviewing participants. To avoid bias, the researcher should suspend all personal beliefs about the study, the phenomenon, and the participants being interviewed (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). This was achieved early on when the researcher applied the first step (Epoche) in the data analysis processes, as described below.

The researcher’s association with the topic emerges from personal experience with cohabitation. Although the researcher is not a parent, nor the caregiver to any children, understanding cohabitation as a family unit was of personal significance due to current lived experiences. To ensure that the researcher remained unbiased and open to the experience, the researcher listed out all known pre-judgments before and after the interview. After listing them out, the researcher suspended these beliefs during the data analysis process. This was achieved by continuously reflecting on the understanding that the data from the recorded interviews were to be used to expand the field and practice of family life and youth development.

### **3.7 Data Analysis**

This study sought to bring insight on the parent involvement experiences of cohabiting parents and their perceptions of how involvement impacts the academic achievement for school-aged children in cohabiting biological-parent families. The researcher used Moustakas' (1994) adaptation of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen's model of phenomenological analysis in which textural descriptions are used to analyze data. The processes involved in this model aid in identifying both textural and structural themes. However, for the purpose of this study, the researcher focused on providing textural descriptions in consideration of the limited data available on the phenomenon under study. To identify the textural descriptions of the phenomenon being studied, the researcher used recorded verbatim transcripts and a software program to code and review the transcripts.

MAXQDA is a unique qualitative data analysis software program that allows users to systematically organize, evaluate, and interpret textual and multimedia data. MAXQDA is ideal for qualitative data analysis and allows the researcher to code and categorize responses, work with multiple types of data (audio, video files, text, etc.), and import data that can be coded and visually represented. MAXQDA is user friendly and designed for qualitative text and content analysis (Kuckartz, 1989).

Following the phenomenological methodological approach for this study, the researcher first listened to the recorded interviews and then followed the steps outlined in Epoche by listing out all known / recognizable preconceived biases, reflecting on those biases and prejudgments, and releasing them from the researcher's consciousness. The researcher then proceeded to the transcendental-phenomenological reduction stage, using

Moustakas (1994) modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method, to begin the data analysis process. To do so, the researcher imported the audio dictated file into the transcription software provided by the faculty sponsor and converted the dictated file into a transcribable format. Using the transcription software and kit, the file was transcribed from audio to text format. Once in text format, to ensure validity of the transcribed file, the researcher reviewed the transcribed file against the original audio file.

The coding guide for this study was developed after coding the first three interviews. To do so, the transcribed text files from the first few interviews were imported into the document system of the MAXQDAplus 10 software and then opened in the document browser. Once in the document browser, every statement was reviewed and treated equally (horizontalizing). After reviewing the interview transcript in the document browser, the transcribed text file was put in edit mode so that every irrelevant, repetitive, or overlapping statement could be removed. This was to help identify the textural meanings (horizons) from each transcript. Once the horizons emerged, they were grouped into relevant themes. A code was applied for every coherent theme that emerged from the interviews. The organization and clustering of these horizons into themes became the coding guide for the study. After the remaining interviews were conducted and transcribed from audio to text files, they were uploaded into the document browser and coded against the established coding guide. Therefore creating a coding segment of textural themes for individual participants and the group. From the document browser, responses could be reviewed and compared against each other. The summation of these thematically based codes created the textural descriptions for this study.

To triangulate the analysis of the data, the thematic codes from the transcribed interviews were grouped, exported into excel, printed, and provided to a peer of the researcher. This peer, who is currently a masters student pursuing a degree in career counseling, reviewed the data files under each coded segment. To guide their work, the peer was instructed to examine each thematic code and highlight any unclear statements. Once reviewed, the peer returned the printed excel file and notes to the researcher. In doing so, the peer assisted the researcher by checking the transcribed interviews for clarity of thought and accuracy of thematic associations.

### **3.8 Anticipated Ethical Issues**

There were no anticipated ethical issues for the research study.

### **3.9 Assumptions**

This study was based on the assumption that cohabiting participants resided and financially contributed to only one household and shared parenting and caretaking responsibilities. An additional assumption is that cohabitation is the main influence identified in this study, rather than the myriad of other factors that could be considered (i.e., family stability).

## CHAPTER IV.

### RESULTS AND FINDINGS

#### **4.1 Introduction**

The current phenomenological study examines parental academic involvement experiences, perceptions, and the academic success of school-aged children in cohabiting biological-parent families. The results and findings of the data acquired through guided interviews with seven parents from cohabiting biological-parent households are reported in this chapter. Simon (2006) recommends, for qualitative studies, that following the introductory paragraph in chapter four the researcher should begin with a section on the demographics (age, gender, etc.) of the sample. Therefore, the next section contains a narrated summary of the demographics of the research participants. In the subsequent sections, the application of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method of analysis (as adapted by Moustakas, 1994) of the phenomenological data in this study is presented. This chapter also includes textural descriptions for each individual in the study with verbatim responses from the recorded interviews. Chapter four ends with a composite of all of the individual textural descriptions into a universal description that represents the group as a whole, and a discussion of findings.

#### **4.2 Research Participant Demographics**

A total of 3,532 Pre-Qualification and Interest Surveys were documented as being distributed to parents in September and October 2014. However, the amount of time available for parents to access and complete the survey was short due to the narrow amount of time that the survey remained opened. Only a limited amount of persons completed the

Pre-Qualification and Interest Survey (n = 161) from both survey rounds, with a smaller amount of those surveyed being identified with having an interest to participate in a follow-up study and meeting all sampling criteria (n = 15). A smaller number confirmed their interview details and received an interview confirmation notification (n = 13), with less than this completing the interview process (n = 7). Fraenkel et al. (2012) states that a “sample should be as large as the researcher can obtain with a reasonable expenditure of time and energy” (p. 102). While additional participants were sought, the objectives of the research study were met with the smaller sample size.

Seven parents from cohabiting biological-parent families participated in the research study with a gender distribution of four females and three males. The study consisted of three participants between the ages of 30 and 34 (one female and two males), three participants between the ages of 25 to 29 (two females and one male), and one participant between the ages of 20 to 24 (female). Responses to the number of people living in each participant’s home and the total household income assisted the researcher with defining the socio-economic status of each participant as low-income or not. Socio-economic status was established using current year low-income levels established for youth-serving discretionary grants under the U.S. Department of Education. The respondent’s report of household size and these income guidelines were used to create the income categories in table 4.2.1. In sum, three participants were defined as low-income in the study and four participants were not.

Table 4.2.1

*Research Participants Income Categories*

Number of Participants	Household Size	Income Range	Income Category
1	5 persons	\$17,505 - \$23,594	Low-Income
4	4 persons	\$60,135 or more	Not Low-Income
		\$47,955 - \$54,044	Not Low-Income
		\$41,865 - \$47,954	Not Low-Income
		\$29,685 - \$35,774	Low-Income
2	3 persons	\$41,865 - \$47,954	Not Low-Income
		\$29,685 - \$35,774	Low-Income

Of the seven participants in the sample, two participants completed in-person interviews and five requested to complete telephone interviews. It was observed, from the two in-person interviews, that two of the study participants were of African-American descent. While not a structured demographic question for the study, the remaining five participants who conducted telephone interviews expressed their ethnic background as being African-American (four participants) and Caucasian (one participant).

All seven participants only had biological children residing in their home as required by study inclusion criteria. The number of children in the home ranged from one to three. Two participants had two school-aged children in the home; two participants had two children in the home with only one being school-aged; two participants had one child only in

the home and that child was school-aged. One participant had three children in the home with one child being school-aged.

As previously stated in table 2.1, Brown (2004) defines cohabiting biological-parent families as families with children who reside with their biological, heterosexual parents who are not married. The sample consisted only of parents in cohabiting biological-parent families, who affirmed that they were not legally married at the time of the study and were in dating (sexual) relationships with a heterosexual partner. The duration of cohabitation for the sample included: six years or more but less than seven years for one participant, five years or more but less than six years for one participant, four years or more but less than five years for two participants, three years or more but less than four years for two participants, and three months or less for one participant and is provided in table 4.2.2. Further, all of the participants resided in the United States of America.

A descriptive summary of each research participant is presented in Table 4.2.2 below. To protect the anonymity of the study informants, the researcher should assign numbers or alias to individuals (Creswell, 2007). An alias of “Rp” followed by numbers one through seven were assigned to identify each participant.

Table 4.2.2

*Research Participant (Rp) Demographics*

	Gender	Age	Socio-Economic Status	Ethnicity	Number of Children in Home	Grade Level of Children in Home	Duration of Cohabitation <sup>b</sup>
Rp1	Female	30-34	Not Low Income	African-American	2	3 <sup>rd</sup> grade; and Not in school	6 years or more but less than 7 years
Rp2	Male	30-34	Not Low Income	African-American	2	3 <sup>rd</sup> grade; and Not in school	3 years or more but less than 4 years
Rp3	Female	25-29	Not Low Income	African-American	2	4 <sup>th</sup> grade; and 2 <sup>nd</sup> grade	3 months or less
Rp4	Male	25-29	Low Income	African-American	2	3 <sup>rd</sup> grade; and 2 <sup>nd</sup> grade	4 years or more but less than 5 years
Rp5	Male	30-34	Not Low Income	African-American	1	Kindergarten	4 years or more but less than 5 years
Rp6	Female	25-29	Low Income	African-American	1	Kindergarten	3 years or more but less than 4 years
Rp7	Female	20-24	Low Income	Caucasian	3	2 <sup>nd</sup> grade; Pre-Kindergarten; and Not in School	5 years or more but less than 6 years

*Note. In addition to the data provided above, all research participants 1) were not legally married, 2) had never married, 3) attested to being in dating (sexual) relationships with their domestic heterosexual partners, and 4) resided in the United States of America at the time of the interview.*

*<sup>a</sup>Socio-Economic status determined in table 4.2.1. <sup>b</sup>Duration of Cohabitation determined in this study using the participants' response to "How long have the two of you and your children lived in the same household together as a family?"*

The use of open-ended questions encourages participants to share their experiences in vivid detail (Simon, 2006). Open-ended questions presented during this study explored parental involvement perceptions (i.e., beliefs, attitudes, and experiences) and the academic success of school-aged children in cohabiting biological-parent family households. The next section represents the responses collected from the seven guided-interviews.

### **4.3 Results of Qualitative Study**

According to Leedy and Ormrod (2005), methods of data analysis for a phenomenological qualitative study requires: 1) the search for meaning units (or themes) that reflect various aspects of the experience, and 2) integration of the meaning units into a typical experience. Moustakas' (1994) adaptation of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method of data analysis was used to identify the textural themes derived from the perceptions and experiences of participants in this study. After identifying each nonrepetitive and nonoverlapping statement from the text transcripts in MAXQDAplus 10, the invariant horizons (meanings) emerged and were clustered into themes. The textural themes from the study, by research participant, are shown in table 4.3.

Table 4.3

*Textural Themes by Research Participant*

Textural Theme	Research Participant
(1) School Engagement Activities	Rp1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7
(2) Academic Performance and Student Expectations	Rp1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
(3) Homework Environment and Practices	Rp1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
(4) Reward Systems	Rp1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
(5) Student Behaviors	Rp1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
(6) Parental Expectations of Student Behaviors	Rp1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
(7) Plans for Future and Educational Attainment Goals	Rp1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
(8) Perceptions of Parent Contributed Resources	Rp1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
(9) Parental Involvement Activities at Home	Rp1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
(10) Parental Involvement Activities at School	Rp1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
(11) Parent-Teacher Interactions	Rp1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
(12) Perceptions of Cohabitation and Influence on Academic Success	Rp1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
(13) Perceptions of Cohabitation and Influence on Parental Involvement at School	Rp1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
(14) Perceptions of Cohabitation and Influence on Parental Involvement at Home	Rp1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7

A narrative description of each textural theme, by research participant is provided in the section below. A summary of the textural theme quotes from each participant appears in Appendix I.

### **Participant textural descriptions.**

**Research participant one (Rp1).** Research Participant One (Rp1) is an African-American female between the ages of 30 and 34. The total number of persons living in her household is four and includes her unmarried heterosexual (male) partner, herself, and two children (one of whom is in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade). She has remained in a cohabiting biological-parent family household for six years or more but less than seven years. Rp1 currently resides in Lawrenceville, Georgia.

School engagement activities for Rp1's child were the first theme to emerge. "*She's in her chorus at school. And, I guess she goes to girl scouts at school.*" As she continued in the conversation she stated "*she's in chorus because she likes to sing so I decided to put her in that.*" Following up with "*girl scouts, that's something I did when I was younger; I wanted her to be in it and she's been in it since kindergarten; she likes it, so she's in it.*" The participant described her daughter's participation in these activities for one month in chorus and multiple years for girl scouts.

Rp1's daughter is engaged in activities provided by the school, which led to the second theme. Under this second theme, academic performance and student expectations, her daughter's grades were described as "*mostly A's and B's*" and "*she got two C's in the last grading period.*" In her opinion of her daughter's perceptions about school and grades, she conveyed "*I believe she would be happy if she had just A's and B's*". As for grade retention

and school attendance, the child has never repeated a grade in school nor has she missed a day of school in the current school year.

An established, at-home learning environment was discovered during theme three. This theme, homework environment and practices, includes a system for homework completion. Homework is regularly received *“Monday through Thursday”* and is completed *“Soon as she gets home from school, so about 3:30.”* When her daughter arrives home each day during the week she completes her homework *“At the dining room table”* and *“It’s in kind of a small room.”* This dining room is where homework for school is finished and *“It has four chairs at the table.”*

The fourth theme, reward systems, was identified when discussing academic performance in school. Research participant one began to explain and talk about when her child performed well in school. She stated, *“I remember in second grade. They always have and end of the year like little awards ceremony. I think she got a helping hands award or something like that.”* Later explaining that the award was seen as a reward because *“I guess she’s a good helper. She always helps the teacher out.”*

Behaviors that cause her child to do well in school became the fifth theme (student behaviors) found during the interview. Those perceived behaviors include *“I think getting enough rest. That helps her to be better in school, to do well in school.”* Not only is it physical behaviors but also *“To know that it is somewhat expected at home that she’s suppose to do well. Because her parents always want her to do her best and I think it makes her feel good as a person too when she’s being praised that she’s getting good grades and stuff.”*

In the next theme, parental expectations of student behaviors, research participant one conveyed the types of behaviors she expected from her child (related to school). For her alone she said, *“I expect her to go to school and be on time everyday. I expect her to get good grades. Be the best that she can. I expect her to always follow the rules to her teachers. Just in general. Just to be a good student all the way around, just follow the rules. Get good grades. Do what she needs to do. Learn all that she can.”* Further clarifying similar expectations from the child’s birth father. *“I believe he expects the same things that I expect. I think we’re pretty much on the same page when it comes to her school, schoolwork and stuff. We always want her to do her best.”*

Plans for future and educational attainment goals (theme seven) and perceptions of parent contributed resources (theme eight) were described as research participant one shared her parental perceptions and beliefs about academic success. In the home academic environment, plans for future are explained through the educational attainment goals Rp1 has for her child (theme seven). Including, *“I would like her to always get A’s and B’s and I would like for her to eventually go to college one day and become something she wants to be.”* How she supports these goals is presented through the types of resources she and the birth father supply to her child (theme eight). Such as *“I always provide her the technology she can use that can help her out, like the computer or the tablet. I take her to the library and I try not to let her be on the tablet too much that’s not educational cause they just get too much technology overload or whatever.”*

Parental involvement behaviors that encourage academic success include the themes of parental involvement activities at home (theme nine), parental involvement activities at

school (theme ten), and parent-teacher interactions (theme eleven). Rp1 participates in multiple activities and home (theme nine). For example, *“I let her do all of her homework, what she can do first. And then I go and help her try to figure out the ones that she doesn’t know how to do. Sometimes mommy doesn’t remember all of the third grade stuff. So mommy has to Google stuff on her phone, to look up stuff.”* Through parent-teacher interactions (theme eleven) and attending activities at the school (theme ten), research participant one believes that *“Her main teacher, yes, her main teacher knows me. She does not know her father because I am the one that always goes to the conferences and stuff because dad is always at work.”* Other school-based activities that Rp1 attends include a curriculum night at her child’s school. *“It’s where you go and they talk about the rules in their classroom. What they’re learning in their classroom. What they’re getting ready to learn. The expectations.”*

For the final themes, the perception of cohabitation and marital status and its influence on academic success (theme twelve), parental involvement at school (theme thirteen) and parental involvement at home (theme fourteen) were revealed. Not being married is not affecting her daughter’s academic performance according to research participant one. During the interview she verbalized *“I don’t think it affects her because whether we are married or not we both have the same expectations for her and she knows what those expectations are. So I don’t think it really affects her schoolwork.”* Expectations about performance are unchanged as well. Additionally, according to Rp1, not being married is not affecting the level of involvement that she has at her child’s school or home. She explains, *“Dad would still be at work during the day all the time. Mom currently doesn’t*

*work during the daytime. So, sometimes mom can do those extra things. But, if we were married it would still be the same things. Either mom would be working full time or still doing what she is doing now. And dad, of course, would still be working full time. So it would still be the same.”*

**Research participant two (Rp2).** Research Participant Two (Rp2) is an African-American male between the ages of 30 and 34. The total number of persons living in his household is four and includes his unmarried heterosexual (female) partner, himself, and two children (one of whom is in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade). Rp2 has remained in a cohabiting biological-parent family household for three years or more but less than four years. He also currently resides in Lawrenceville, Georgia.

The first theme to emerge with research participant two was school engagement activities. Rp2 identified his third grade daughter’s involvement in extracurricular activities as choir and the girl scouts. In his opinion, his child participates in choir *“Because she thinks she can sing”* and girl scouts because *“She likes to interact with girls her age.”* Later articulating that she has been participating in these school sponsored activities for multiple years. Further clarifying that *“The choir, this is her first year”* and *“Girl scouts, this is her second year.”*

When asked about the academic background of his child, the second theme appeared during Rp2’s interview. This theme was academic performance and student expectations, and his daughter’s background included never repeating a grade. Her grades for the year included A’s, B’s, and C’s, while he also believes that his daughter’s expectations for grade

performance is *“She’s satisfied with just passing.”* As for attendance patterns during the current school year, Rp2 expressed that *“She hasn’t missed school at all this year.”*

The third theme for Rp2’s interview was homework environment and practices. During a regular school week, his daughter receives homework everyday. Homework is completed in the afternoon and *“She starts working on it right after she gets out of school; around 3:30.”* To complete homework each day, research participant two’s daughter sits *“At the dinner table, at the dining room table”* that is downstairs and articulates, *“It’s a small room.”*

Research participant two was very clear about what causes his daughter to do well in school. When asked what her motivation to perform well would be, he responded with *“She gets rewards.”* Explaining those rewards as being *“She gets to go places, do things. Monetary rewards.”* This is when the fourth theme, reward systems, was recognized during the interview.

The ability to achieve in school and school-related behaviors that promote academic success were identified during Rp2’s interview under theme five. This theme, student behaviors, emerged as he talked about his daughter not performing well in school. *“When she does poorly in school its because she is being lazy.”* Being lazy is perceived as a behavior that deters her academic success. His beliefs were apparent when he provided an example of such behaviors as *“She’s just trying to get it done and not really reading on what’s going on with the homework or something.”*

The sixth theme was parental expectations of student behaviors. In this theme, research participant two communicated the behaviors he expects from his daughter regarding

her educational performance. Those behaviors include *“I expect her to graduate. Get a diploma out of high school and I expect her to graduate from college, as an honor student. Be top of the class.”* When asked if his child was aware of those expectations he replied with *“I don’t think so. Because I haven’t really spoke to her about those expectations, but I have spoke to her about what I would like for her to do.”*

Plans for future and educational attainment goals (theme seven) and perceptions of parent contributed resources (theme eight) were described as research participant two shared his parental perceptions and beliefs about academic success. Rp2 explained his plans for future through the degree attainment goals he has for his child. Those goals being *“Completing College and get a degree”* and *“Because you really can’t get a job without a college degree. You can’t get a job without a high school diploma now.”* How Rp2 supports these goals is presented through the types of resources (theme eight) he and the birth mother supply to the child. Such as *“The Internet”* and *“Taking her to the library”* or the mother *“Makes sure she helps her with her homework. She goes over her homework with her.”*

Parental involvement behaviors that encourage academic success include parental involvement activities at home (theme nine), parental involvement activities at school (theme ten) and parent-teacher interactions (theme eleven). Research participant two discussed what parental involvement is at home through example. *“She had a subtraction problem. She was struggling. So, we used our hands. I help them figure out answers by not just giving it to them. I help them figure it out on their own.”* While parental involvement activities at school included *“I do go to orientations. I go to choir performances. The father-daughter dance.”*

From his perspective, Rp2 believes that the teachers know both him and the child's mother by going to orientations at the school.

In the next themes, research participant two described his perception of not being married and its influence on academic success (theme twelve), parental involvement at school (theme thirteen) and parental involvement at home (theme fourteen). When asked about whether marriage would affect his child's academic performance he replied with "*No. Because I think in her eyes she sees us as being married. It's just not on paperwork, from what I can see per se.*" The same thematic expressions were made regarding parental involvement at school and at home. Rp2 comes from the opinion that "*Its about the child. Me being married to her mother wouldn't affect how I interact with her mother*" and "*It's about the child, it's not about being married or not to me.*"

**Research participant three (Rp3).** Research Participant Three (Rp3) is an African-American female between the ages of 25 and 29. The total number of persons living in her household is four and includes her unmarried heterosexual (male) partner, herself, and two children (one of whom is in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade and the other being in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade). She has remained in a cohabiting biological-parent family household for three months or less. Rp3 currently resides in Indianapolis, Indiana.

In the interview, the first theme that appeared was school engagement activities. When asked about the school activities that her two school-aged son's participate in at school, her response was "*None.*" After identifying the lack of participation in extracurricular activities provided by the school, understanding the academic performance and background of both of her children arose (i.e., theme two).

For the second theme, academic performance and student expectations, Rp3 described the current educational background for both of her sons. For her children, their grades in school were *“The oldest, A’s and B’s”* and the youngest *“Is around B’s and C’s.”* While also stating that both the oldest and the youngest child had never repeated a grade, nor have the two of them missed school for the current academic year. To provide an understanding of what she believes her children’s academic standards are, Rp3 was asked about the grades that her sons are satisfied with receiving. She responded that for the oldest it is *“A’s and B’s”* and for the youngest it is *“C’s”*.

Academic assignments are completed at home. Therefore, the third theme of homework environment and practices became clear during Rp3’s interview. For her household, her son’s receive homework *“Four days out of a week”* and that would be *“Monday through Thursday.”* Homework is worked on between the hours of five and seven in the evening for both sons. Rp3’s elementary aged children complete their homework in the living room and described as *“It has a couch; it has a TV that’s off when he’s doing his homework and there is a small table and chair.”* While both sons complete their homework in the same area, at the same time, homework for each is completed separately.

Rp3 explained reward systems, theme four in the interview, when she mentioned her oldest son making the honor roll at school. *“He got the academic honor roll. A-B honor roll that he received at school.”* This award, seen as an expression of doing well in school, made her son feel *“excited.”* She too felt the same, articulating during the interview *“I was extremely excited.”*

Several school-related behaviors were discussed during research participant three's interview. Using these student behaviors theme five exists because the research participant is of the belief that *"Not comprehending what he's learning in the classroom"* is a deterrent for academic success. The inability to comprehend would be cause for her child to struggle or not perform well in school. Additionally, she is able to measure when her child will perform poorly if *"The interest level is not there"* and *"They're not interested in anything."* She also alluded to signs of poor performance being able to physically manifest within her children. For example, *"They're not smiling about it"*, *"They're not asking for help"*, and *"They're very shut off from what they have to do, the things they have to get done."*

The sixth theme was parental expectations of student behaviors. In this theme, research participant three communicated the behaviors she expects from her sons regarding their educational performance. She expressed those behaviors and performance expectations as *"I expect them to come to school. I expect them to be in attention. I expect them to follow directions and to do their best at everything. Even if they don't like it, they have to try."* Similar expressions were made for what Rp3 perceived the children's father to believe. Stating *"The same. To go in there and to do your best."* Confirming the shared values and performance expectations for both biological parents in the home.

When research participant three shared her parental perceptions and beliefs about academic success, plans for future and educational attainment goals (theme seven) and perceptions of parent-contributed resources (theme eight) were identified in the interview. In the home academic environment, plans for future are explained through the educational attainment goals that Rp3 has for her sons (theme seven). Including, I *"Want them to go on*

*to college. Make it to college and what they decide to do from there is on them as far as a career.”* These postsecondary education goals are further supported through the types of resources she and the birth father supply to her children (theme eight). Such as *“They have programs that we have for them on the Internet that they do for reading. We bought them these large workbooks that follow the curriculum for their age group. And anything else they need we make a point to get it so that the process can be a little smoother for them as far as learning and getting things done”*, and the father *“Engages with them also just on a one-on-one level. He makes sure that he walks them through and shows them how things need to be done. And if there is anything they need for a project or any type of schoolwork he obtains it for them.”*

Rp3 participates in activities at home (theme nine) for educational success. For example, *“I just sit with them and watch them. If they have a question I try to answer it. More of a moral support type of thing rather than me just talking to them.”* When describing parental activities at school (theme ten) and parent-teacher interactions (theme eleven), research participant three said she was involved with her children’s school by *“I attend all of the parent-teacher conferences, faithfully. Whenever there is any activities, like math night or science night at the school I make a point for them to go.”* Additionally, the teachers are aware of both her and the children’s father because *“We go up to the school and eat lunch with the kids. We attend all of the parent-teacher conferences”* and *“They keep in touch through email.”*

For the final themes, the perception of cohabitation and marital status and its influence on academic success (theme twelve) is viewed as having no affect in the short term,

*“But for long-term reasons I would say yes. Just for short term, I don’t think they really understand. But long term, as they begin to progress and get a little bit older, it will be important for them to see that and to know that”* [marriage that is]. The level of parental involvement at school (theme thirteen) and parental involvement at home (theme fourteen) is seen as not being different if Rp3 was married. This is justified by responses like *“Because I’m still doing now what I would do if I were married. I’m still deeply involved with everything they do at school. So that wouldn’t change.”*

**Research participant four (Rp4).** Research Participant Four (Rp4) is an African-American male between the ages of 25 and 29. The total number of persons living in his household is four and includes his unmarried heterosexual (female) partner, himself, and two children (one of whom is in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and the other being in the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade). He has remained in a cohabiting biological-parent family household for four years or more but less than five years. Rp4 currently resides in Indianapolis, Indiana.

The first textural theme in Rp4’s interview was school engagement activities. With two sons in elementary school, and no other children, Rp4 expressed that his children participate in sports at school. Specifically, participating in football and basketball for approximately one to two years. While the *“Oldest son likes basketball and football”* and the *“Youngest likes football.”* Both children participate in sports because *“They like those two sports”* and *“They love to play sports.”* The expressed desire to play sports while in school gave depth to the second theme of academic performance and student expectations.

Academic performance and student expectations were the second textural theme from the interview with Rp4. During his interview, Rp4 stated that the grades for his eldest child

was “*A’s and B’s*” and the youngest child receives “*B’s and C’s*”. Which mirrors what grades he believes his sons are satisfied with receiving, as the oldest is satisfied with receiving “*A’s and B’s*” and the youngest is satisfied with “*C’s*”. In addition to his children’s grades, neither child has repeated or been retained in a grade and they have yet to miss a day of school in the current year (i.e., perfect attendance).

As the interview progressed, Rp4 began to articulate the homework habits of his children. This is when theme three, homework environment and practices became evident. The homework routine of his children includes receiving homework during a regular school week “*Four times maybe in a week*” and this is “*Monday through Thursday.*” Homework is completed at home “*In the living room*” and the location is “*On the couch and sometimes on the floor.*” The oldest child begins to complete his homework “*Around six o’clock*” in the evenings, while the youngest child initiates his homework “*Around six thirty*”.

Early on in the interview, research participant four mentioned that his children enjoy and play sports. When asked about an example when his children performed well in school, he described his oldest child making the honor roll. In this example, the fourth theme (reward systems) was discussed. Rp4’s opinion is that “*If they don’t do well in school, they can’t play sports.*” Sports are used as a reward for doing well in school and are a personal motivator for his sons to achieve.

In the next theme, student behaviors, the research participant provided thorough examples of what may cause his youngest child to perform poorly. For example “*If he has a lot of energy*” or “*My youngest performs poorly in the morning times at school.*” To give a more detailed account regarding behaviors and time of day, he responded with “*Yes, it’s just*

*time of day. The breakfast, that I guess the school serves, it's sweetening and you know he's active in the morning.*" As a father, he believes that he is able to measure when his child is performing poorly in school *"If he is not having a good day or a good morning."*

The sixth theme was parental expectations of student behaviors. In this theme, research participant four communicated the behaviors he expects from his two sons regarding their educational performance. He expressed those behaviors and performance expectations as *"I expect them to do their schoolwork because it involves academics, sports, and to graduate."* He later articulated that he speaks to his sons everyday about his expectations and *"They have a wanting to do it, and want to do the work, and follow directions, and want to graduate and perform at their best."* Similar expressions were made for what Rp4 perceived the children's mother to believe, stating that she believed *"The same."*

When research participant four shared his parental perceptions and beliefs about academic success, plans for future and educational attainment goals (theme seven) and perceptions of parent-contributed resources (theme eight) were identified. In the home academic environment, plans for future are explained through the educational attainment goals Rp4 has for his sons (theme seven). Including, *"I want them both to have college degrees"* and *"To understand medicine. To understand the scientific part of it, the nature."* These educational attainment goals are encouraged through the types of resources Rp4 and the birth mother supply to their children (theme eight) and the parental involvement activities at home (theme nine). Such as, *"By spending time with them to practice their work; to support them and to encourage them to follow the directions of the school. Talking with them. Reading with them."* As well as *"I'll be helping one of my children and she'll be*

*helping the other, and you know, together me and her are here to do academics with them.”* Parental involvement activities at school (theme ten) were *“In the involvement, with the football, stand there and make an appearance. Let them know that I am there watching them and there for them.”* Parent-teacher interactions (theme eleven) mentioned in the interview were *“Parent teacher conferences, and we talk with them. At least twice a week.”* By *“Both phone and email.”*

For the final themes, the perception of cohabitation and marital status and its influence on academic success (theme twelve), parental involvement at school (theme thirteen) and parental involvement at home (theme fourteen) were described as well. He stated that *“We’re together and we’re happy and we’ll be married.”* While research participant four expressed a desire to be married, under his current family union state (a cohabiting biological-parent home), he believes that not being married is not affecting his children’s academic performance. Further, his level of involvement at school would be *“About the same”* if he were married, and his level of parental involvement at home would not change. *“You know, me and my fiancé’ we have that love bond and I feel like we will be the same people [we] were before. They [children] didn’t have a problem with it before and they still should, so it’ll be the same.”*

***Research participant five (Rp5).*** Research Participant Five (Rp5) is an African-American male between the ages of 30 and 34. The total number of persons living in his household is three and includes his unmarried heterosexual (female) partner, himself, and one school-aged child in kindergarten. He has remained in a cohabiting biological-parent family

household for four years or more but less than five years. Rp5 currently resides in Lithonia, Georgia.

During the interview, Rp5 voiced that he had only one female child and she was in kindergarten. The first theme of the interview, school engagement activities, was apparent when he expressed *“They play outside the classroom; the games she play like ballerina.”* Games such as *“Children’s games”* and *“They play a lot of musical chairs at their school; they do a lot of coloring; learning the alphabet.”* Most of the activities his daughter engages in at school are the classroom, but he did express that ballet is provided by the school, *“It’s extracurricular”* and she has participated in ballet *“I would say maybe a few months, but less than a year.”*

As for the second theme, academic performance and student expectations, Rp5’s daughter has all satisfactory grades. The grading system for his kindergarten daughter, from his understanding, is *“All that I have seen is they go by like a smiley face; a smiley face, if green, that’s good; yellow is so-so and red is a bad smiley face.”* In his opinion *“she would want all green.”* While just starting school, his daughter has not repeated a grade and no days of school have been missed.

Homework environment and practices was the third theme identified during the interview for research participant five. For his child *“As far as receiving homework, they may have to fill out an alphabet or some sentences, but there is no grade for that homework.”* However, schoolwork is sent home in folders to be completed at home and this is done weekly. When take-home schoolwork is received, it is completed *“At the same time; like*

*when she get's home from school. I would say maybe six, seven.*" His daughter goes to her room to complete this work, as *"She has a child's desk"* that she works on.

Research participant five believes that his daughter performs well because of rewards, which is theme four in the interview. When asked, "why do you think your daughter performs well?" Rp5 replied with *"Incentives. I tell her that if she does well I will reward her, or buy a reward for her."* Examples of rewards given to his daughter for her academic achievements include *"Toys, candy, pretty much just toys and candy."*

In the next theme, student behaviors, research participant five was unable to describe a time when his daughter performed poorly school. However, being able to measure if she was performing in school was assessed by school-related behaviors (behaviors that would emerge from his daughter attending school). When asked how he would measure if his child was performing poorly in school, Rp5 replied with *"Maybe like a mood swing, or something would bother her; she's not really talking to me or her mother."* Expressing additional behaviors later in the interview such as, *"Maybe like a friend, or maybe like another child in the class. Say, they may distract her or something, or maybe someone would do something else that wouldn't be what she is suppose to be doing."*

The sixth theme was parental expectations of student behaviors. In this theme, research participant five had transparent educational performance expectations for his daughter. He expressed those behaviors and performance expectations as *"I expect her to do her schoolwork. Be nice and polite to people. That's pretty much it. Just stuff like that."* Similar expressions were made for what Rp5 perceived the child's mother to believe. Stating *"Pretty much the same."* He also mentioned how these expectations are communicated to his

daughter by saying *“We express it. I tell her. Her mother tells her. And she knows that if she doesn’t do well then we will be unhappy with her.”*

Plans for future and educational attainment goals (theme seven) were explained as follows, *“I want her to achieve and strive to be the best all the way up to the top until she graduates. Once she gets out of school, I want her to achieve in college.”* How Rp5 supports the educational attainment goals he has for his daughter is presented through the types of resources (theme eight) he and the birth mother supply. Such as *“Crayons, coloring book, a pencil if she needs, and use the tablet”* and the mother *“She gives her a computer. She helps out with some supplies if she needs paper. She bought her a book bag.”*

As a father, Rp5 participates in parental activities at home (theme nine) like *“I’ll talk to her. I’ll sit down with her and help her with her handwriting, handwriting, and pronouncing each of the words.”* Parental involvement activities at school (theme ten) were also described in the interview and included *“I attend the PTA meetings. Like if they are having a party, or if a child is having a party, I’ll go in the kitchen or give something to bring with my daughter.”* Parent-teacher interactions (theme eleven) come *“From the PT meetings and the school orientation.”*

For the final themes, the perception of cohabitation and marital status and its influence on academic success (theme twelve), parental involvement at school (theme thirteen) and parental involvement at home (theme fourteen) is not being affected by not being married. After being asked whether marriage is affecting his child’s academic performance, research participant five expressed *“I believe since she sees us together, at her age, she doesn’t really know full detail. She’s too young. But she sees us together so she*

*thinks everything is fine.*” As for parental involvement at school and at home, this wouldn’t be any different if he were married according to Rp5.

**Research participant six (Rp6).** Research Participant Six (Rp6) is an African-American female between the ages of 25 and 29. The total number of persons living in her household is three and includes her unmarried heterosexual (male) partner, herself, and one school-aged child in kindergarten. She has remained in a cohabiting biological-parent family household for three years or more but less than four years. Rp6 currently resides in Baltimore, Maryland.

The first theme in the interview with Rp6 was school engagement activities. Her daughter *“Doesn’t participate in any extracurricular activities at this moment at least not until the end of this month, and she’ll be starting gymnastics.”* The gymnastics program is a *“Recreational program from the school”* and it is offered afterschool. For her child in particular, Rp6 believes that *“She’s a ball of energy; she loves to sprint, jump, toss around; anything that maybe is physical.”* When asked about the desire to participate in this type of activity, Rp6 continued to express that *“She’s very active and I feel that it’ll be something very intriguing for her to do.”* Gymnastics is viewed as a positive experience for Rp6’s daughter.

Academic performance and student expectations, the second theme, became obvious when Rp6 gave insight to the school’s grading structure for her daughter. Her daughter is in five classes and *“She has a proficient in all of them actually, except for gym; it’s odd but she has a satisfactory in gym for some reason.”* She adamantly stated that *“She has great, excellent grades actually; I haven’t gotten a bad grade yet.”* Later commenting *“We are very*

*strict on schoolwork when it comes down on schoolwork and getting schoolwork done.*” As for her daughter’s internal view of performance, Rp6 expressed *“Probably if she got a satisfactory she would probably be alright with it but she more so likes to have proficient.”* Confirming that Rp6 believes that her daughter holds similar expectations about academic grade performance. Research participant six’s daughter is in kindergarten and hasn’t repeated a grade, but for the current school year *“She has missed school two times; one for a dentist appointment and one for a doctor’s appointment.”*

Research participant six informed the researcher that her daughter receives homework and that *“She gets homework Monday through Friday.”* When the researcher inquired more about this, the third theme was established as homework environment and practices. The theme was presented when she said that homework is *completed* *“As soon as she gets home from school”* from *“About three thirty, sometimes four, if we, if she has a school project.”* It is *“At the kitchen table or sometimes at the dining room table”* when homework gets completed. When describing this environment in detail, Rp6 responded with *“For the dining room table, it is set up in the middle of the floor. It has four chairs in it. We do have a television in the dining room, but we barely have that on. In the kitchen, there is just a table and a few chairs. It’s more so an island, if you want to say, that is up against the wall. The kitchen table, if she sits there, she will be facing towards the wall so that she doesn’t have any distractions. And the dining room table, depending on the way she sits, she’ll either face the kitchen or the living room or one of the walls.”*

Remembering a time when her daughter performed well in school, Rp6 said, *“She won the award for best behaved in her school.”* For this academic achievement, Rp6

rewarded her daughter with *“We took her out to dinner”* and *“I took her to the store and let her pick two things that she wanted. Whether it was toys, or something for school, whatever she wanted because she earned that.”* Reward systems, the fourth theme of the interview, included things provided by Rp6 due to her daughter’s academic achievements. Rp6’s partner, and the child’s father, also rewards academic success. Rp6 communicated during the interview *“He’s ready to scream it to her. He’ll go out and get her things. He’ll take her to the movies. Whatever it is that she wants...”* like *“One of the incentives for her was they had the Disney on Ice that just came. This past weekend we took her to that and we had a great time there.”*

Explaining a time when her daughter didn’t do as well in school, Rp6 spoke about the transition from pre-kindergarten to kindergarten. *“This was when the school year first had begun. By her being so young, she, she didn’t really want to be in the class that she was in because all of her friends, pre-kindergarten, were in another class and she felt alone in her class and she really wasn’t motivated because she was worried about friends.”* From this detailed account emerged the fifth theme, student behaviors. In the example provided above she was able to discuss the situation with her daughter and correct the issue. However, as a parent she wants to *“See class work from her teacher everyday. So, if there is ever an assignment that is not completed fully or she was slacking on it, then I need to know what’s going on.”* Rp6 also acknowledged that *“More than likely, sometimes, she likes to be a bit of a class clown, and she’ll like to goof off with other children, she likes to talk and all that, so, sometimes she will not get the work done in class.”* These are the school-related behaviors

identified during the interview that impact how well her daughter is able to perform in school.

The sixth theme was parental expectations of student behaviors. For this theme, research participant six provided a full account of the performance expectations for her daughter. *“Well for me, that, she strives for the best. Never give up. There’s always hope. If you did it wrong the first time, there is five more. If you feel as though you can’t go do it, then ask for help. There is no wrong answer. There is no stupid question. You just got to be motivated. You have to be self-motivated.”* As for the father, *“For him everything is just try. Just try. He’s happy with whatever the outcome is as long as she tries. So, good or bad, as long as she puts some effort in it, that’s all he wants is the effort.”* Research participant six also believes that her daughter is aware of both parental expectations. Saying *“You can tell the difference especially during homework time. Because whenever her and I do homework, she is on it, she knows what she’s doing. If there is an extra something, she got it. But, if I sit back and let her dad help her with her homework, she goes that she barely knows anything; or, she doesn’t remember; or she can’t find the answer, or stuff like that.”*

Rp6 identified with plans for future and educational attainment goals (theme seven) and perceptions of parent contributed resources (theme eight) when defining her parental perceptions and beliefs about academic success. Her educational attainment goals include *“My goals for her would be to graduate college with masters, bachelors. I feel like education is endless to me. I feel like I can’t put a bracket on it because before you go, you should never put a limit on yourself.”* Research participant six is able to support these goals by contributing resources (theme eight) to her child. For example, *“She has her own tablet. I*

*have, I actually have her signed up for ABCmouse.com I really think that's an awesome, awesome, awesome tool for early learning education. There's endless things for them to learn. We have flash cards and wordbooks. I have study posters hanging. I have a couple of books that tell me how to write up a couple of assignments for her to do in her spare time when she is not playing or something like that, and we take that hour out of the day to just sit and read. Just read a book. No electronics. No outside. You always want to be ahead of the game. And, me, I have to make sure that I put forth the effort in anything that she needs."*

The subsequent themes, parental involvement activities at home (theme nine), parental involvement activities at school (theme ten) and parent-teacher interactions (theme eleven) emerged in the same context. Parental involvement activities at home (theme nine) include *"Well during homework time I don't like it to be, I guess, not fun especially since she is so young. So, I will make it fun, or make up games, we'll do memory test. We will, I will make flash cards for her."* Parental involvement activities at school (theme ten) overlapped with the parent-teacher interactions (theme eleven). As research participant six said that her and the child's father *"Met her teacher during the pre-kindergarten screening before school even started. Where they were showing them the school, and their classroom. But, her teacher was one of the ones doing the screening. And then both of us took her up there, and I guess she remembered us from that day from how excited and pumped we were for her. And, from there, I am at the school. And not to mention when you pick the child up you have to physically go to the classroom and sign out. So, you get the additional contact. So, like I said, I like to get daily reports. But, they know us."*

The last and final themes follow similar experiences to the previously mentioned theme. Research participant six believes that not being married is not affecting her child's academic performance because *"Marriage, to me, that's for me. Were both very much involved in her academic career and that has nothing to do with us not being married. Because like I said, we're still together and if anyone was on the outside looking in, you would never know that were weren't."* Similarly, her level of involvement at her child's school at home would not be different if she were married. Explaining there would be no change at school because *"To me, marriage is just a piece of paper and a last name change."* Additionally, believing that parental involvement at home would not experience a change if married *"Because education is still going to be there, with or without a marriage."*

**Research participant seven (Rp7).** Research Participant Seven (Rp7) is a Caucasian female between the ages of 20 and 24. The total number of persons living in her household is five and includes her unmarried heterosexual (male) partner, herself, and three children (one of whom is in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, a child in pre-kindergarten, and one child who is not of school age). She has remained in a cohabiting biological-parent family household for five years or more but less than six years. Rp7 currently resides in Adel, Georgia.

It was when Rp7 began to discuss her oldest daughter's interest in music that the first theme, school engagement activities, emerged. Her daughter *"Likes to do the music and performance"* because it's *"Something she loves to do; she walks around our home singing; always doing the pretend like playing programs at home, putting on shows."* For about two years her daughter has been in the choir at school and *"They sing and they put on performances during the holiday or special events."*

The academic background and student expectations, theme two of the interview, for her daughter includes her beliefs about grades, her current grades, and grade progression. In her opinion, Rp7's daughter *"Seems to be absolutely satisfied with B's."* As a parent, she tries to set goals for her *"So as long as she reaches those good high 80's and event 90's she seems satisfied."* Currently, her daughter's grades are *"I would say A's and really high B's."* Further, her daughter is in the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade and has never repeated a grade.

While Rp7 has three biological children living in her home, only one child is of school age. This eldest child receives homework during the week, and the established practices at home to get it done became the third theme in this interview. Homework environment and practices (theme three) for Rp7 consists on her oldest daughter having homework *"... three nights out of five"* and it is completed *"Usually the same nights of the week; Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday"*. After arriving home around six o'clock her daughter sits at the dining room table to complete her homework. This area is *"Just a dining room away from the kitchen, away from the living room. No TV distractions. There's four chairs that belong to the table and we have the high chair that sits at the table with us."*

Theme four of the interview was reward systems. For Rp7 particularly, the school rewarded her daughter for her academic performance. Rp7 commented that her daughter had been rewarded a few times for her successes. Expressing *"She's been nominated for things such as exemplary student, or student citizen where she helps throughout and she's a really good helper."*

Understanding an experience when her daughter performed poorly on her first progress report allowed the fifth theme, student behaviors, to emerge during the interview.

Research participant seven provided an example of why her daughter didn't do so well at the beginning of the school year. She stated *"When she first started school this year, math was a little bit more challenging for her because it was a step up from first grade. So she seemed a little nervous maybe, a little scared that she didn't know how to do it. It was harder to get her to sit still and focus on it."* Suggesting that being nervous about school, or a subject in school, is one cause for performing poorly in school".

The sixth theme was parental expectations of student behaviors. In this theme, research participant seven detailed the educational performance expectations for her daughter. The in-school performance expectations she has, as well as the viewpoint of the child's biological father. She expressed those expectations through personal experience as *"I do believe that they have a color code thing were they maybe move a clothespin from, you know, green, to yellow, to red. Whatever the color is. And I do expect her to stay in the green. And the other one is at the end of each day when we get home. I check her book bag. And they carry school agendas, and what I do know they do is, depending upon the day she's had, they'll be a smiley face inside the agenda, on a certain day, or it'll say good day, or bad day, talking too much, or something along those lines. I don't ever want to see anything in there that says bad day. I do expect all those to be smiley faces, or a good day, no trouble. I don't want anything in their saying she was in trouble."* The child's father performance expectations, as articulated by Rp7 (the child's mother) are *"For her to mainly go to school, pay attention, and behave."* In their home there are shared perceptions of performance by both parents. Rp7 said *"I feel like him and I are really on the same times. That we both kind of have the same expectations out of her."*

In the home academic environment, plans for future (theme seven) are explained through long-term educational attainment goals Rp7 has for her daughter. These goals were both educational and career based such as, *“I want to see her just go to the top. I want her to graduate. I want her to love the school and I want her to enjoy it. I want her to be able to get a great job and not have to depend on anyone. I want her to understand that it is okay to be an independent person.”* Research participant seven invests in these goals by providing parent-contributed resources (theme eight). She states, *“I come from where we had to do it all on pen and paper, so I feel like using the old method is still helpful and like using flash cards and things. Her father bought a tablet. There’s learning games on there, there’s little note pad things where she can practice cursive writing or do math.”* All of these resources are provided to support the educational achievement and development of her daughter. Continuing with parental behaviors and contributions, parental activities at home (theme nine) included *“If it helps her, I’ll even let her teach to me what her teacher taught to her”* and *“I’ll let her tell me what she was taught.”*

The themes parental involvement activities at school (theme ten) and parent-teacher interactions (theme eleven) were also conveyed during the research interview. Research participant seven said that she goes to *“Every thing that they have that is parent welcome. Like if they have the PACT time, if one of us cant go, I go; or if he wants to go to PACT time I’ll let him go; I try, sometimes we go together, but then sometimes we go separate. That way she has the one on one time with both of us at a different time. But, everything that they make public for parents, any party, or special lunch, I’m there.”* Additionally the teachers know both her and the child’s father very well, as Rp7 described the story of how she first came to

meet her child's teacher. Stating *"This is a crazy story and I get looked at weird when I tell it. I had a teacher in high school that became like my best friend. We hung out together outside of school and so I met my child's second grade teacher through my friend and it just so happened that my child ended up in her second grade class."*

For the final themes dealing with the perception of cohabitation and marital status and its influence on academic success (theme twelve), parental involvement at school (theme thirteen) and parental involvement at home (theme fourteen) the participant did not feel that marriage would have a changing affect. She provided a simple explanation *"No. I don't believe so."* Further expanding that statement by saying *"Some people think marriage is important when you have kids. I feel like as long as you are in it for not only for your kids, but yourself, are you happy. Is your household happy? Do you have problems? I mean, are you angry all the time. And if not, that's fine. And for instance, with us, were always positive. We don't let not being married affect how we treat and raise our children."*

**Composite textural descriptions.** Epoche was the first step in the data analysis process. Once Epoche was completed, the interview transcripts were analyzed and the data was separated according to meaning (or themes). These themes became the textural descriptions for each research participant. Using the universal elements from each participant's transcript resulted in the shared (composite) experiences among all participants in the study. The composite textural descriptions for participants included: 1) school engagement activities 2) academic performance and student expectations, 3) homework environment and practices, 4) reward systems, 5) student behaviors, 6) parental expectations of student behaviors, 7) plans for future and educational attainment goals, 8) perceptions of

parent contributed resources, 9) parental involvement activities at home, 10) parental involvement activities at school, 11) parent-teacher interactions, 12) perceptions of cohabitation and influence on academic success, 13) perceptions of cohabitation and influence on parental involvement at school, and 14) perceptions of cohabitation and influence on parental involvement at home.

School Engagement Activities, the first textural theme, was present for six participants (Rp1, Rp2, Rp4, Rp5, Rp6, and Rp7). For the interviews in which this theme was present, participants discussed the extracurricular activities their children engaged in at school. Research participant one and two shared that their child participated in “*Girl scouts*” and “*Chorus.*” Choir was also an activity for Rp7’s child as a form of performance and arts. Participant four was the only parent who shared that his children participated in athletics, specifically basketball and football. Ballet (participant five) and gymnastics (participant six) are activities that involve the performance of an art and are physically inclined, and were of common interest between these two participants. Interests in these particular activities, as previously mentioned by the participants, come from a desire to be physically active “*She loves to sprint, jump, toss around. Around that maybe is physical*” (Rp6) to an inherent talent “*Because she thinks she can sing*” (Rp2).

Academic Performance and Student Expectations, the second textural theme, was described through grades in school, perceived expectations of acceptable grades, grade retention (the lack of), and attendance at school. Generally, all participants expressed that their children had very high grades. For example, mostly A’s and B’s (Rp1, Rp3’s oldest child, Rp4’s oldest child, and Rp7) or the highest mark for their individual grading system

(satisfactory / green for Rp5 and proficient for Rp6). When asked what grades their child would be satisfied with receiving similar expressions about high grades were made. For example, “*She seems to be absolutely satisfied with B’s*” (Rp7), “*A’s*” (Rp4), “*A’s and B’s*” (Rp3), or “*I believe she would be happy if she had just A’s and B’s*” (Rp1). Grade retention was determined by inquiring if a child had repeated a grade and every participant responded with “*No*”. Only one participant (Rp6) indicated that their child missed a day of school in the current year, otherwise every participant identified no school days missed.

The third theme, Homework Environment and Practices, dealt with the frequency in which work was received from the school to complete at home, the time in which this work (homework) was completed, and the descriptive environment where homework was completed. Homework was received “*Everyday; Monday through Friday*” for participants two and six, “*Monday through Thursday*” for participants one, three, and four, and “*Weekly*” for participant five. Regardless of how often homework may have been received it would be completed at the same time each day. For example, most of the participant’s children completed homework in the evenings around five or six o’clock (Rp3, Rp4, Rp5, and Rp7) while other participants communicated that homework was initiated earlier in the afternoon, around three or three o’clock (Rp1, Rp2, and Rp6). A sense of regularity was perceived and embraced by all participants for homework completion. The majority of participants also shared the location in which homework was completed, as several participants confirmed that their children completed homework in the dining room or kitchen table (Rp1, Rp2, Rp6, and Rp7). A small number expressed that homework was completed in

the living room, whether it be on the couch or the floor (Rp3, Rp4). While one outlier, Rp7, expressed that their child had a desk in their bedroom to complete homework.

The next theme, Reward Systems (theme four) was most prominent for participants two, five, and six. No negative experiences were shared related to reward systems, but some reward systems were initiated by the parent and used as a motivator for academic achievement. Participant two shared a reward system of getting to “*Go places. Do things. Monetary rewards.*” Participant five expressed a reward system of “*Toys. Candy*” if his daughter does well in school. While participant six’s reward system included taking her daughter out to dinner, buying her “*Anything she wants*”, taking her to the movies, and a more elaborate incentive such as Disney on Ice (a high cost, ice skating performance for children with figure skaters dressed as popular Disney characters). Other participants mentioned reward systems offered by the school such as the “*Helping hands award*” (Rp1), “*A-B honor roll*” (Rp3), or the “*Exemplary student, or student citizenship where she helps throughout and she’s a really good helper*” (Rp6). One parent in particular, Rp4, also expressed that the ability to participate in extracurricular activities of interest (e.g., sports) was used as a motivator for success. Stating, “*If they don’t do well in school, they can’t play their sports.*”

The fifth theme, Student Behaviors were considered as being child behaviors that affect how well he or she performs in school. Every participant was able to communicate when their child performed well in school. Participant one stated that she believes her child performs well in school when she gets enough rest and “*Also to know that it is somewhat expected at home that she’s suppose to do well.*” Of particular interest for this theme is the

shared expression of different behaviors that cause the participant's children to perform poorly in school. For example, participant two quoted "*Being lazy*"; participant three said "*Not comprehending*" or "*Interest not being there*"; participant four stated "*Time of day*" and "*The breakfast, that I guess the school serves, it's sweetening, and you know he's active in the morning*"; participant five articulated "*A distracting friend*"; participant six noted "*Being a class clown*", "*Goofing off with other children*", "*Too talkative*" and "*Not paying attention*"; while participant seven expressed "*Nervousness*" and "*Not retaining information*".

The sixth theme, Parental Expectations of Student Behaviors, can be understood through the expectations that parents had for in-school behaviors (i.e., actions their children should take or show while in the school). Behaviors that were most prominently mentioned included going to school (Rp1, Rp3, Rp7) and doing schoolwork (Rp4, Rp5); following the directions, rules or paying attention (Rp1, Rp3, Rp7); and being at the top of the class (Rp2) or striving for the best (Rp6). All of these behavior expectations were believed to promote positive academic performance while a child is at school, according to the participants in this study. However, research participant six was the only participant who expected for her child to be self-motivated, and further expressed "*If you feel as though you can't do it, then ask for help.*" Implying that the child should take an active approach in her learning environment at school.

All participants shared a distinct commonality in theme seven, Plans for Future and Educational Attainment Goals. One educational goal was repeatedly reflected in participant's experiences, and it was the participant's desire for his or her children to enroll or complete

postsecondary education. Those participants who wanted their child to go to college included participant one, three, five, and seven. For participants two, four, and six, the parents emphasized the expectation for their child to not only attend college but to get a degree. With statements like *“Complete college and get a degree”* (Rp2), *“Both to have college degrees”* (Rp4), or *“You’re not finished with school until you graduate college”* (Rp6). Educational attainment goals were linked to assumptions that degree attainment resulted in careers (Rp1), getting a job (Rp2), and the ability to be an independent person (Rp7).

All of the participants and their partners contributed resources to encourage and support the academic growth and development of their children. The eighth theme, Perceptions of Contributed Resources, were viewed as technological supplies, web-based programs, and/or other consumable items such as paper, pens, flash cards, crayons, and so on are made available to the child by the parent. Every parent participant indicated that his or her child had access to and used the Internet, whether it is via tablet, laptop, or computer. Some participants mentioned the use of technology for learning programs on the Internet (Rp3) or shared the use of online curriculum tools like ABCmouse (Rp5 and Rp6). In a technologically driven society, the Internet was the only resource continuously mentioned by every participant. While some participants mentioned that Internet access was available via a computer and a tablet (Rp1 and Rp5), a computer only (Rp2), or a tablet (Rp6 and Rp7). Interestingly, research participant six identified that *“I understand technology is like a big part of today’s society. But, then again I come from where we had to do it all on pen and paper, so I feel like using the old method is still helpful like using flash cards and things”*.

The next themes involved Parental Involvement at Home (ninth theme) and Parental Involvement Activities at School (tenth theme) and were present for all participants. At home, parental involvement activities included using search engines like Google to assist with homework (Rp1), helping them to figure out answers rather than just giving it to them (Rp2), reading books (Rp4, Rp7), sitting down and helping with handwriting (Rp5), or making up games or memory test (Rp6). When asked about parental involvement activities at school, participants placed the most importance on parent meetings, parent or school orientations, or curriculum nights. No matter the school activity, all participants shared that they actively attended school-sponsored events. Attending these activities contributed to feelings that teachers were aware of the participants. In attending these events, the eleventh theme found in the data emerged as Parent-Teacher Interactions. Parent participants were able to interact with their child's teachers by "*going to the conferences*" (Rp1), attending school events together like "*going to the orientation*" (Rp2), talking to the teacher via "*both phone and email*" (Rp4), or parent-teacher (PT) meetings (Rp5).

The last three themes involved the perceptions of cohabitation and whether being married would affect academic success (theme twelve), parental involvement at school (theme thirteen), or parental involvement at home (theme fourteen). None of the participants felt that not being married is affecting their children's academic performance. Despite this common expression among all research participants, Rp3 counters this thought when applying it to futuristic outcomes for her children. When providing greater detail, participant three shared that "*For basic reasons, I would say no. For long-term reasons I would say yes. Just for short term, I don't think they understand*". For parental involvement at school, there

was a shared consensus that the level of parental involvement at home as well as the level of parental involvement at school would be the same if each parent were married. The cohabiting biological-parents in this study had strong family ties. Feelings of support and strong familial engagement were evident, regardless of marriage status. While sharing additional insight into how cohabitation may affect children's academic success, participants responded with *“As long as the parents are, whether they're married or not, as long as the parents are on the same page about things, about goals, expectations for the child and everything, then it will work out”* (Rp1), or *“I think it affects them positively. Because they have a two-parent household that is diligent in making sure that they have what they need. They can hear that they are successful in everything that they do”* (Rp3), or *“To me it doesn't matter as long as the love is there. The love. The support. The encouragement. The willingness, then there is no difference. Not at all”* (Rp6).

Every participant in the study shared distinct experiences. They all were parents, had a least one school-aged child (with five of the seven participants having two or more school-aged children in the home), had never been married, were not currently married at the time of the study, and resided with their heterosexual domestic partner and all of the shared biological children from that union. From the literature, each participant in this study was defined as a cohabiting biological-parent family household. From the experiences shared, all participants seemed to have an encouraging and supportive relationship with their partners and their children. The participants' shared several different academic engagement activities for their children, discussed their individual parental perceptions about academic success, provided insight for the parental involvement behaviors in cohabiting biological-parent

families, as well as personal beliefs about the influence of cohabitation on parental involvement and its impact on academic success. In conclusion, all participants' spoke positively about the cohabiting experiences for themselves and their children.

#### **4.4 Discussion of Findings**

Phenomenology tries to understand how phenomena present themselves and uses description to articulate the *intentionality* of an experience; it is a process of describing what takes place rather than interpreting what happens (Giorgi, 2012). This research study sought to identify parental involvement perceptions and experiences in cohabiting biological-parent households and its impact on the academic achievement and well-being for school-aged children. In the composite textural descriptions, written in the section above, extensive discussion takes place on the common experiences of the research participants collected from recorded interviews. In the subsequent section, the researcher provides a discussion of findings in this study that connects the four primary research questions for the study and links findings back to the literature. Table 4.4 shows the textural themes associated with each primary research question.

Table 4.4

*Textural Themes by Research Question*

Textural Theme	Research Participant
(1) School Engagement Activities	RQ1 – School-Related Behaviors
(2) Academic Performance and Student Expectations	RQ1 – School-Related Behaviors
(3) Homework Environment and Practices	RQ1 – School-Related Behaviors
(4) Reward Systems	RQ1 – School-Related Behaviors
(5) Student Behaviors	RQ1 – School-Related Behaviors
(6) Parental Expectations of Student Behaviors	RQ2 – Parental Perceptions
(7) Plans for Future and Educational Attainment Goals	RQ2 – Parental Perceptions
(8) Perceptions of Parent Contributed Resources	RQ2 – Parental Perceptions
(9) Parental Involvement Activities at Home	RQ3 – Parental Behaviors
(10) Parental Involvement Activities at School	RQ3 – Parental Behaviors
(11) Parent-Teacher Interactions	RQ3 – Parental Behaviors
(12) Perceptions of Cohabitation and Influence on Academic Success	RQ4 – Parental Involvement Impact
(13) Perceptions of Cohabitation and Influence on Parental Involvement at School	RQ4 – Parental Involvement Impact
(14) Perceptions of Cohabitation and Influence on Parental Involvement at Home	RQ4 – Parental Involvement Impact

*Note. Research questions are stated in Section 2.9*

Trend data in cohabitation evidenced an increase in cohabitation experiences for every age group ages 19 to 44 (Manning, 2013) and reported increases in cohabiting couples (Copen et al., 2012; O'Hare et al., 2009). Family configuration data, by race and ethnicity, shows increased rates of cohabitation among black women and their children (Cohen, 2011; Payne et al., 2012). The literature reports a negative relationship between cohabitation and child educational well-being (Artis, 2007; Brown, 2004; Tillman, 2007; Raley et al., 2005; Kowaleski-Jones & Dunifon, 2006). Importantly, Rivera (2011) alludes that parental involvement is one of the greatest influences for academic success. Parental involvement has been positively associated with grade point averages (Oyserman et al., 2007), math scores (Marschall, 2005), and decreased behavioral problems (Domina, 2005). For the seven participants in this study, the parents believed that their cohabitation status did not impact their level of involvement. Parents in this study collectively reported that cohabitation had no effect on the level of academic success for their child(ren), and their involvement would be the same if married.

**School-related behaviors of academic success.** Research indicates that school behaviors, like participation in extracurricular activities, may increase achievement-related functioning (Prelow & Loukas, 2003). Mahoney, Cairns, and Farmer (2003) further posit that consistent extracurricular activity is positively linked to educational success and educational aspirations. Yet, Brown (2004) finds that children and adolescents in cohabiting households have lower rates of school engagement and increased behavioral and emotional problems, compared to children residing in married-parent families. In this study, school engagement was considered through the level of engagement in extracurricular activities in school. All

seven participants had children who participated in extracurricular activities such as choir, basketball, football, gymnastics, and so on. Further, their children's participation in such activities was consistent and long-standing as illustrated by the number of years of activity. For the participants' children in this study, one may conclude that interest in an extracurricular activity is driven by the child's individual desires and motivation. Additionally, conversational tone of the seven participants in this study appeared to be supportive for the extracurricular activities presented. Anderson, Funk, Elliott, and Smith (2003) claim that perceived parental support of extracurricular activities affect a child's enjoyment and performance in extracurricular activities. From the experiences of the cohabiting biological parents in this study, the researcher may conclude that participant's children continue to participate in these types of activities due to strong parental support.

Academic indicators that have been shown to have a significant relationship with academic achievement include the correlation between grade point average and course performance (Pyzdrowski et al., 2013), grade retention used as a strategy for students who are not prepared for the next grade (Schnurr, Kundert, & Nickerson, 2009), and attendance having predictive capability on GPA and subject test performance (Gottfried, 2010). Similar to these findings, all seven participants in this study shared indicators of high academic performance for their children. For example, their children had favorable grades, consistent grade progression, and reported minimal to no absenteeism at school for the current school year. Another predictor of grades cited in the literature is homework completion (Bang, Suarez-Orozco, Pakes, & O'Connor, 2009) and homework has a positive relationship to academic achievement during adolescence (Cooper, Jorgianne, & Patall, 2006). Participants

from this qualitative study felt that their children regularly completed their homework and had established areas for homework completion. Overall, the indicators for academic success in the cohabiting biological-parent families from this study are positively reflected in comparison with the academic literature. The experiences from the participants in this study opposes findings in the literature (Artis, 2007; Brown, 2004; Raley et al., 2005; Tillman, 2007) that children and youth in cohabiting households have poorer academic outcomes and lower levels of academic success.

Davis, Winsler, and Middleton's (2006) study found that rewards from parents and teachers could positively motivate students to perform. Therefore, reward systems can be used as extrinsic motivators to encourage desired behaviors. Children may be motivated to academically achieve if reward structures are in place and consistently applied. A prominent theme that emerged in this study is the incentives provided for academic achievement. Through reward systems developed by the participants themselves as well as those operated by the school system. These incentives included toys, candy, money, and so on and were applied as an academic achievement and motivation strategy for school-aged children with the intent to discourage negative behaviors (e.g., if you don't perform well you can't participate in a sport) or support positive behaviors (e.g., academic awards at school for high grades) that may promote learning.

**Parental perceptions about academic success.** In the present study, the researcher sought to understand cohabiting biological-parents' perceptions about academic success. A recent study in the literature showed that there is a positive association between parental expectations and educational expectations for children; meaning, higher parental expectations

are related to increased levels of child educational expectations (Schmitt-Wilson, 2013). Schmitt-Wilson's (2013) findings demonstrate that "students who perceive that their parents have high educational expectations for them are more likely to have increased expectations themselves" (p. 235). The findings from the themes from data collected in this study show that parents, irrespective of family form, appear to have high educational attainment expectations for their children. Another interesting expression that emerged from this study appeared during the interview for research participant six. Rp6 expressed how the child's birth father held more lenient measurements of academic success. She described, through personal experience, how the child's approach to school assignments differed according to each parent's measurement or standard of academic success. This variance in the child's behavior, according to each parent's rules or standards, mirrors that found in nuclear families (a married man and wife and their children) (Grolnick, Benjet, Kurowski, & Apostoleris, 1997). Overall, parental educational expectations (e.g., completing schoolwork, enrolling or completing postsecondary education, and so on) were a shared and pervasive theme among all parenting experiences in this study.

In their research-based school success profile, Bowen and Richman (2005) measure parental educational support and involvement through a scale that measures whether adults in the home encourage and support school/work activities, help get needed supplies, and offer help with homework or special assignments. Similarly, Baker, Goesling, and Letendre (2002) found that students with more resources have increased learning opportunities that they capitalize on which leads to improved academic performance. Parental educational support represented through the acquisition of supplies was of interest in this study. Likewise, parent-

contributed resources emerged as a theme found in the data. Perceived experiences of parental support and resources for the seven cohabiting biological-parents in this study included technological resources, books at home, paper supplies, one-on-one interactions, and dedication of time among others. Further, multiple parent-contributed resources were made available in the homes of cohabiting parents in this study; including, time, supplies (technological supplies and consumable materials), and so on. Based on these respondent summaries, the experiences of cohabiting biological-parent families appear as if they may not be congruent with findings from the literature. As, DeLeire and Kahlil (2005) found that parents spend less money on child-related goods in cohabiting families.

**Parental academic involvement behaviors.** Riveria (2011) suggests that one of the greatest influences for academic success among children and youth is parental involvement. From this study, positive parental involvement behaviors in cohabiting biological-parent families exist at home, at school, and in the interactions between parents and teachers. The type of parental involvement activities varies, but several activities were mutually expressed across all research participants (e.g., assistance with schoolwork; attendance at school functions like curriculum nights and parent teacher meetings; or direct contact with classroom teachers through email or phone).

Prior research shows that parental involvement in school directly impacts student success (Jeynes, 2005, 2007; Sirvani, 2007). The themes from the seven participants show that parents in cohabiting biological-parent families in this study regularly participate in activities at their child's school. Research participants identified at least one activity, but most often multiple activities, that they attend at their child's school. Suggesting that

participants in this study have taken an active and engaged approach towards being involved in their child's school, or providing direct support to their child. A majority of the research participants also maintained that both parents often attend parental involvement activities at the school. Interestingly, participants in this study did share that they are unable to be involved at their child's school due to schedule conflicts, workloads, or other parental responsibilities like having to care for a younger child.

According to the research synthesis of Patall, Cooper, and Robinson (2008), homework is an important factor that increases achievement for school-aged children. A positive relationship exists between homework and academic achievement (Cooper et al., 2006), as homework completion has been cited as a predictor of grades (Bang et al., 2009). Another study from the extant literature found that parents might influence a child's attitude related to homework (Xu, 2005). The seven participants interviewed during this study shared several different parental academic involvement activities at home. From the parental experiences of the seven interviewed, it appeared that most of the participants engaged with their children through homework completion and assistance tasks. Either through working out problems with their child, helping their child research an academic topic, or allowing their child to "teach back" material learned during the school day. These findings of interest for the seven participants, especially succinct, seem to be opposite to prior research on parental activities at home for cohabiting families. For example, Wu et al. (2010) found that cohabiting parents, compared to married parents, may spend less time learning about children's school activities, assisting with the selection of courses, monitoring homework completion, or communicating with school personnel. In theme three of this study,

homework environment and practices, the experiences of the seven research participants were that parents are actively engaged during the homework completion process at home.

Hughes and Kwok (2007) contribute that, for children in early grades, parent-teacher relationship quality is important. From the literature it is understood that parent-teacher relationship quality is assessed by the interpersonal connection and quality of communication between parent and teachers. From the work of Hughes and Kwok, it is inferred that parent-teacher interactions emerge from the intensity of the relationship shared between both the parent and the teacher. For this study, every participant expressed frequent or routine parent-teacher interactions and communication. For example, the seven parent participants shared that teacher interactions were experienced during parent-teacher meetings, curriculum nights, orientations, and routine school visits.

**Parental academic involvement impact on academic achievement.** In a meta-analysis of 25 studies, Fan and Chen (2001) found a strong positive relationship between parental involvement and student's academic achievement. The same holds true for Jeynes (2007) analysis of parental involvement, in which a meta-analysis of 52 studies revealed specific parental involvement behaviors (e.g., parental style and parental expectations) that have a significant impact on student educational outcomes. Parental involvement for this study considered parents participation in activities at school and at home, while exploring how perceptions of parental involvement may impact academic achievement for cohabiting biological-parent families.

According to the research, school-related parental involvement is particularly important in affecting academic achievement for school aged children (Hill & Craft, 2003;

Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2013). Findings from Brannegan (2014) found that when an adult cohabitant is added to the home, parental involvement in school increases; including increased rates of attendance at open houses, parent-teacher association (PTA) meetings, and at extracurricular events. Themes in the data across the seven research participants may suggest the same. For example, the participants in cohabiting biological-parent homes in this study expressed that they attended parental academic activities at school including: parent meetings, parent orientations, curriculum nights, school music performances, athletic events, and other activities. Another theme that emerged from the seven participants in this study consistently described that the level of parental involvement at school would not differ if the cohabiting participant were married.

In the literature, parental activities at home have been longstanding and proven to positively effect academic achievement for students. For example, Sui-Chu and Willms (1996) review of the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988 found that parental involvement in school-related activities at home had a particularly strong effect on a student's level of academic achievement. Most recently, Hayes (2012) study of parental involvement found that home-based involvement was a predictor of academic success (i.e., grades and number of days missed form school). Yet, the literature does show that barriers still exist that distract parents from being involved in activities at home that promote educational success. From a parent's perspective, there are three major barriers that prevent them from being involved: (1) time and life demands, (2) lack of knowledge of what is expected of them and in what ways they can help their children at home, and (3) various factors in the school environment (Center on Innovation and Improvement, 2008). From

themes expressed in this study, the seven research participants did express participation in at-home learning activities or providing other means of academic support (i.e., resources) at home. For example, all participants were actively engaged in school-related behaviors in the home with their children, including assisting with homework and/or reading with their child. Further, a common expression across all seven participants in this study was that the level of parental engagement in the home would not differ if the participant were married.

Exploring perceptions of parental involvement and its impact on the academic success of children in cohabiting biological-parent families was of primary interest for this study. A review of the literature did not reveal any findings specific to this research question. This study sought to provide some insight on this phenomenon through the real world experiences of seven parent participants in cohabiting biological-parent households. From the seven parental perspectives of this study, subjects universally described that children in cohabiting biological-parent families have the same level of support of children in married heterosexual parent families. Additionally, a limited number of parental experiences in this study expressed that the level of support was greater in cohabiting biological-parent families compared to married families.

## CHAPTER V. CONCLUSION

### **5.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this study is to explore cohabiting parents' perceptions concerning parental involvement and academic success. This is explored through a qualitative phenomenological research design. Key findings in the literature, as previously aforementioned, indicate that cohabitation has become a normative part of the life course (Manning & Smock, 2005; Popenoe, 2008). The current literature also finds that rises in cohabiting households threaten the quality and stability of family lives (Wilcox, 2011) and children and youth in cohabiting households have poorer academic outcomes and lower levels of academic success and well-being (Artis, 2007; Brown, 2004; Raley et al., 2005; Tillman, 2007). Yet, from what was reviewed, few studies examine parental involvement experiences or parental perceptions of cohabiting biological-parent families and the academic success of their school-aged children. Therefore, it is important to understand the cohabiting biological-parent family context and the life experiences of parental involvement and its influence on academic success. Chapter five provides the conclusions of the findings, limitations, and implications of this research study.

### **5.2 Conclusions**

This study makes several important contributions to the literature, including the establishment of fourteen themes to guide the examination of child academic success in the context of cohabitation; no prior instrument was found in the literature. Four primary research questions were established to examine the perceptions of parental involvement and

its influence on academic well being for cohabiting biological-parent households. The first goal of the study was to define academic success for children as perceived by parents in cohabiting biological-parent households. To achieve this objective, the researcher aimed to identify specific school-related behaviors for academic success in cohabiting biological-parent homes. The second goal of the study was to understand parental perceptions about academic success. To do so, the researcher sought to identify what the indicators of academic success were perceived to be from the perceptions of parents in cohabiting biological-parent families. The third goal of the study was to describe the types of parental involvement behaviors portrayed by cohabiting biological-parent families. Activities or experiences considered as supporting academic achievement outcomes for school-aged children. The last goal of the study was to explore the impact of parental involvement on academic achievement, by examining the lived experiences and belief systems of cohabiting biological-parent families.

Based on the level of parental engagement and the type of parental expectations expressed during this study, it is reasonable to conclude that families share similar expression of parental involvement among cohabiting biological-parent families. However, the *frequency* and individual *parental perceptions* of parental involvement behaviors and methods were not uniform across all of the participants. Suggesting that there is not a one size fit all approach for parental involvement and academic success, based on the lived experiences of cohabiting biological-parent families in this study. From the researcher's perspective, this is one of the greatest discoveries that emerged from this study.

An explicit expression derived from this study is that, regardless of marital status, children in cohabiting biological-parent households are supported in meaningful ways that promote academic achievement and success. This is a unique contribution to the literature and may be the most significant contribution to the field as it captures, from a qualitative perspective, the essence of what the seven parents in the cohabiting biological-parent households believe to be true about their family. From the expressed experiences of the research participants, marriage would not change the parental involvement behaviors that promote academic success for children and youth in cohabiting families. As defined by one of the participants, a cohabiting family is simply defined as *“Just being together. The mother raises and I raise the child together, the best we can, to our abilities”* (Rp7).

This study expressed several school-related behaviors, perceived by the seven-cohabiting biological parents in this study, which are believed to promote academic achievement for their school-aged children. For the cohabiting biological-parent family households in this study, the salient ideas about positive school behaviors include: (1) participation in extracurricular activities at school, (2) high academic performance standards and expectations (e.g., grades, attendance, etc.), (3) having an established environment and routine for completing homework, (4) providing rewards and incentives for positive educational outcomes (e.g., getting good grades, etc.), and (5) practicing behaviors that encourage school success while being aware of the behaviors that mitigate success (e.g., being lazy, not paying attention, etc.). The findings discussed above appear to be consistent with behaviors grounded in the literature that are known to promote academic achievement for any student, married or not.

Parents in cohabiting biological-parent families perceive that educational achievement emerges when (6) parents have clear expectations for behaviors that encourage school success, (7) the academic home environment includes plans for future that involve postsecondary educational attainment goals, and (8) parents contribute resources and educational support services to their child for academic growth and development. Expected school-related behaviors include paying attention in school, following directions, completing schoolwork, and getting good grades were also expressed in this study. Further, parents in this study expressed having futuristic plans for their child. Parental plans that included goals of postsecondary enrollment and degree completion. Another observation from this study is the ability for the seven cohabiting biological-parents to provide resources at home that support academic success, as well as the parents belief that an active partnership exist between both domestic partners to support the academic performance of their children.

Types of parental involvement behaviors favorably viewed and routinely expressed by parents in cohabiting biological-parent families in this study include (9) parental involvement activities at home, (10) parental involvement activities at school, and (11) parent-teacher interactions. Research on parental involvement shows positive associations between parental involvement activities and academic success for school-aged children and youth. In this research study, similar to previous studies, parental involvement activities were favorably viewed as behaviors that encourage academic success. Parent activities at home include assisting with homework, bringing home books, moral support, or spending time with the child. Parent activities at school include attending parent orientations, athletic games, and school performances. Further, the frequency of parent-teacher interactions is

largely associated with how often the parent goes to the school or attends school-sponsored functions.

### **5.3 Limitations**

Results from phenomenological studies are easily influenced by researcher personal bias. In this research design, the potential for research bias exists. This is one limitation of the study. However, using the methodological approach for data analysis in this study, the researcher sought to present perspectives directly from the participant, rather than from the perspective of the researcher. In the early stages of the data analysis process, the researcher used protocols to buffer against potential researcher bias (during the Epoche phase).

Another limitation of the study is that participants were concentrated at the lower end of the age spectrum, therefore the diversity of perspectives and experiences may have been truncated. Further, parent education attainment was not measured and it is possible that the participants in this study have higher education levels as compared to the study participants in the literature. An additional limitation of the study is geographic concentration. Meaning, the majority of the study participants ( $n = 7$ ) were drawn from mostly metropolitan areas, areas that might have a greater density of constituents of higher education. Lastly, the families in this study were composed of younger children only. Therefore, there was no opportunity to explore how parental involvement in biological cohabiting families might be different at other age groups. It also limits the type of resources parent may report. Additional limitations in interpreting the results include: selection bias (i.e., it is likely that participants with positive attitudes and experiences around parenting in cohabiting families

are those that responded to the Pre-Qualification and Interest Survey) and social desirability on participants' responses (e.g., Hawthorn Effect; Delgado-Rodriguez & Llorca, 2004).

#### **5.4 Implications for Practice**

As previously discussed, the purpose of this study is to explore cohabiting biological-parents' perceptions concerning parental involvement and academic success. Family structures vary and it is important for practitioners, especially those in family life and youth development, to recognize the needs and implications of different familial types. Findings from this study may benefit the field of practice and inspire future scholarly research for cohabiting families. The following section includes implications for practitioners and families.

**Implications for practitioners.** The results of this study have meaningful and rich implications for practitioners. While the literature finds that there is a negative relationship that exists between cohabitation and academic well-being for children and youth (Artis, 2007; Raley et al., 2005; Tillman, 2007), this research demonstrates that this may not be true to the lived experiences of parents in cohabiting biological-parent families in all cases. Findings from this research study suggest that parents perceive cohabitation positively and it is reasonable to presume that there would be no observable difference in parental involvement practices if parents were indeed married. Further, cohabitation does not always result in a lack of parental involvement; or lesser expectations for children co-parented in this family structure type.

As a practitioner, one must remember that the needs of families come first. Under this consideration, human service workers in family life and youth development may want to

reflect upon the advocacy and system structures in place for all family types. These structures should advocate or build the internal resource capacities of cohabiting families by providing the necessary support to both biological parents and their children. Field workers should consider if their systems are family-centered and support cohabiting families at the individual, familial, and community level. For example, evaluating whether or not the same processes exist for families with married parents compared to families with cohabiting parents, if parent-training programs embrace the personal belief systems of all family types, or if there are unique resources that should be made available to cohabiting parents in consideration of their household living arrangement. The decision not to marry is most often of personal choice, but cohabiting parents shouldn't be subordinated nor should services be diluted because of this choice in family formation structure.

Based on the findings from this research, and the presence of parental involvement behaviors among cohabiting parents, practitioners in the schools may want to consider whether they engage and reach out to cohabiting parents equally. Case in point, parents in cohabiting families commonly have different last names and the child usually takes the surname of one parent. One could reasonably conclude that a parent may not be biologically connected to the child, but in the case of this study's framework, this would not be the case. Further, in a cohabiting biological-parent family, both parents may actively be involved in their child's academic performance. Practitioners in the schools may want to take this into account, and examine what potential mechanisms are in place to exchange interaction with both birth parents. One should not simply deduce a "one-side" relationship in terms of

biological connections or level of involvement. This shift may lead to increased parent-teacher interactions in cohabiting biological-parent families.

Practitioners in community-based programs may want to provide parent trainings on best practices for parental involvement. These development activities should incorporate evidenced based practices that build upon a parent's understanding of the behaviors that are proven to be effective and promote academic success. In addition, the resources and strategies introduced should not be predicated on the assumption that both parents are married. Lastly, since research (Perna & Titus, 2005) suggest that parental views influence plans for the future (of the child), community based youth-serving programs should consider allocating resources that promote parental involvement for non-traditional families and those who are cohabiting couples.

**Implications for families.** Family engagement activities and parental involvement practices matter for all family types. For cohabiting families in particular, academic success indicators include strong parental expectations for school success, having educational attainment goals, and parents being actively involved both at home and in school. To ensure positive educational outcomes and academic well-being, cohabiting families must keep the needs of the child and parent at the forefront and not the family status type. Since there is no perceived difference between parental involvement for cohabiting parents and married parents, in this study, families should remember that there are parenting behaviors and practices that yield the greatest academic outcomes for school-aged children. For example, plans for future, reward systems, and parent-contributed resources. Additionally, parents

should help facilitate learning by establishing and setting goals and holding their children accountable to such goals, if they desire higher achievement outcomes.

Parents in cohabiting biological-parent homes must remember this, and strive to be actively engaged at school and at home. In conclusion, the results of this study suggest that there are parental behaviors, activities, and beliefs that are perceived to support academic success. Families should be encouraged by this understanding and strive to employ these parental practices at home and at school.

### **5.5 Recommendation for Future Research**

Considering the small-scale approach of this study, future research may want to consider a quantitative approach by developing a survey that would investigate parental involvement practices in cohabiting biological-parent families. Results from a quantitative approach may help determine whether the parental involvement practices under this study are commonly seen across a generalizable population, or if there are others yet to be explained. Another recommendation would be to focus on a specific geographic area of interest to ascertain patterns in parenting practice relative to geographic region. Another future study may collect data to distinguish whether there are differences in parental involvement practices across neighborhood characteristics (e.g., metropolitan versus rural areas), and controlling for factors that may impact parental involvement and support; including, parental education or economic resources.

Anecdotal insights from this study suggest that male parents may be somewhat “competitive” in their expectations for their child’s future. Fathers indicated experiences such as “*Be top of the class*” (Rp2); “*I want them both to have college degrees*” (Rp4); or “*I*

*want her to achieve and strive to be the best all the way up to the top until she graduates”*

(Rp5) more often than mothers in this study. Future research should explore the gender differences in parental expectations (i.e., male versus female). Additionally, a future study may investigate possible paternal differences in the child-centered expectations relative to cohabiting family types (i.e., cohabiting biological versus cohabiting stepparent families). This type of study would examine paternal cohabitation to discern if expectations about academic success for school-aged children are congruent across cohabiting family types. This study may help to discern if it is a male expectation issue or a cohabitation issue, regardless of which parent is the biological parent.

Finally, it is reasonable to conclude based on anecdotal references, that several respondents within the study perceive low value in the institution of marriage relative to their expectations of parental involvement. What emerges from this research is the question of how family of origin impacts parenting practices for cohabiting couples. This would be another area for future research.

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## APPENDICES

## Appendix A. Institutional Review Board Approval

<small>North Carolina State University is a land-grant university and a constituent institution of the University of North Carolina</small>		<small>Office of Research and Innovation Division of Research Administration</small>
<b>NC STATE UNIVERSITY</b>		<small>Campus Box 7514 Raleigh, North Carolina 27695-7514  919.515.2444 (phone) 919.515.7721 (fax)</small>
From:	Deb Paxton, IRB Administrator North Carolina State University Institutional Review Board	
Date:	February 4, 2014	
Title:	Academic Success and Parental Involvement Perceptions in Cohabiting Families: A Qualitative Review	
IRB#:	3746	
Dear Fabrice Blackson,		
The project listed above has been reviewed by the NC State Institutional Review Board for the Use of Human Subjects in Research, and is approved for one year. <b>This protocol will expire on 1/29/2015 and will need continuing review before that date.</b>		
NOTE:		
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. You must use the attached consent forms which have the approval and expiration dates of your study.</li><li>2. This board complies with requirements found in Title 45 part 46 of The Code of Federal Regulations. For NCSU the Assurance Number is: FWA00003429.</li><li>3. Any changes to the protocol and supporting documents must be submitted and approved by the IRB prior to implementation.</li><li>4. If any unanticipated problems occur, they must be reported to the IRB office within 5 business days by completing and submitting the unanticipated problem form on the IRB website.</li><li>5. Your approval for this study lasts for one year from the review date. If your study extends beyond that time, including data analysis, you must obtain continuing review from the IRB.</li></ol>		
Sincerely,		
		
Deb Paxton NC State IRB		

## Appendix B. Pre-Qualification and Interest Survey

Qualtrics Survey Software 10/20/14, 10:42 AM

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Cohabiting Parents' Perceptions Concerning Parental Involvement and Academic Success: A Qualitative Review (Pre-Qualification and Interest Survey)

**Default Question Block**

**Q1. What is your first name?**

---

**Q2. What is your last name?**

---

**Q3. As of today, is your age between 19 and 44 years of age?**

---

No - I am under the age of 19  
 Yes  
 No - I am over the age of 44

**Q4. What city and state do you currently live in?**

---

**Q5. As of today, are you legally married?**

---

Yes (as of today I am legally married)  
 No (as of today I am not legally married)

<https://login.qualtrics.com/ControlPanel/Ajax.php?action=GetSurveyPrintPreview&T=4sWJpt> Page 1 of 3

**Q6. Are you a parent (hint: you are a father or mother, or act as a mother or father to someone)?**

---

- Yes  
 No

**Q7. Do you have children who currently live with you?**

---

- Yes  
 No

**Q8. Are all of the children that live with you your biological children?**

---

- Yes, all of the children that reside with me are my birth (biological) children  
 No, some of the children that reside with me are not my biological children  
 Not applicable, I do not have any children that live with me

**Q9. How many school-aged children (i.e. children in grades K-12) currently live with you?**

---

- 0 (no school-aged children live with me)  
 1 or more (at least one or more school-aged children live with me)

**Q10. What family structure below BEST DESCRIBES your current household?**

---

- A married man and woman, who live in the same house with only their BIOLOGICAL children (nuclear family)  
 A married man and woman, who live in the same house with 1 or more ADOPTED children (adoptive family)  
 A man and a woman who live together, but are NOT MARRIED, and only have their biological children living in the home (cohabitating biological parent family)  
 Gay or lesbian partners and their biological or adopted children (gay / lesbian family)  
 Children living in their grandparents home without their parents (grandparent family)  
 Father or mother only, and his or her biological or adopted children (single parent family)

- A man / woman and their married spouse, and children from a previous relationship and any other children born into this union (stepparent family)
- Other - family type not described above

**Q11. Would you be willing and interested to participate in a follow-up interview about Parental Involvement and Academic Success for Children and Youth?**

---

- Yes - I am willing to participate (please contact me)
- No - I am not interested

**Q12. If you answered "yes" to the previous question, what is your preferred method for a follow-up interview? (Please check all that apply)**

---

- In-person interview (Please write your email address in the space provided)
- Phone interview (Please write your 10-digit phone number in the space provided)

Cohabiting Parents' Perceptions Concerning Parental Involvement and Academic Success: A Qualitative Review (Pre-Qualification and Interest Survey)

Thank you for completing this survey! Your responses are greatly appreciated.

This Pre-Qualification and Interest Survey will be used as a tool to identify, recruit, and select participants needed for my research study (to help me complete my degree). By completing this survey, you are automatically entered to win a visa gift card. The winner will receive the gift card at the conclusion of the study.

Should you be selected to participate in the actual research study, you will be contacted directly.

Your participation in the study will help us learn more about how parents in cohabitating families perceive parental involvement and its relationship to academic success for school-aged children.

Fabrice J. Blackson, Graduate Student  
North Carolina State University  
Department of Youth, Family, and Community Sciences

# A NEW PARENT STUDY

# NC STATE University

## ATTENTION PARENTS

Do you live together but are not married?

Do you have children in grades K-12?

Would you like to help **MAKE A DIFFERENCE** by providing your feedback about parental involvement?

We need your help!



## TO PARTICIPATE PLEASE

- 1) Go to (insert url here)
- 2) Complete the interest survey by answering a few basic questions
- 3) Please complete the survey by (insert date here)

\*\*\*\*Get entered to win a \$25 gift card by completing the survey, and a \$50 gift card by completing the interview



**IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS, PLEASE CONTACT**

Ms. Fabrice Blackson, Graduate Student  
North Carolina State University  
fjblacks@ncsu.edu

Dr. Carolyn Bird, Faculty Sponsor  
North Carolina State University  
carolyn\_bird@ncsu.edu

**IRB APPROVAL NUMBER 3746**

Appendix D. Institutional Review Board Approval – Revision (October 2014)

<small>North Carolina State University is a land-grant university and a constituent institution of the University of North Carolina</small>	<small>Office of Research and Innovation Division of Research Administration</small>
<hr/>	
<b>NC STATE UNIVERSITY</b>	<small>Campus Box 7514 Raleigh, North Carolina 27695-7514  919.515.2444 (phone) 919.515.7721 (fax)</small>
<b>From:</b>	Deb Paxton, IRB Administrator North Carolina State University Institutional Review Board
<b>Date:</b>	October 13, 2014
<b>Title:</b>	Cohabiting Parents' Perceptions Concerning Parental Involvement and Academic Success: A Qualitative Review
<b>IRB#:</b>	3746
	Dear Fabrice Blackson,
	Your addendum to the study named above has been reviewed by the IRB office, and has been approved. Changes include revised pre-qualification and interest survey, revised information flyer, expanded recruitment methods, expanded participant criteria, expanded method of data collection to add telephone interviews, and changed title of study. This approval does not change the original IRB approval expiration of the project.
	If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact the IRB office at 919.515.4514.
	Sincerely,
	
	Deb Paxton NC State IRB

Appendix E. Interview Request Notification for Research Participation

# NC STATE UNIVERSITY

Dear [insert name here]:

Thank you for completing the Pre-Qualification and Interest Survey and expressing interest to participate in the research study entitled "Cohabiting Parents' Perceptions Concerning Parental Involvement: A Qualitative Review".

**Congratulations!** You have been selected to participate in the actual research study and interview process. The purpose of this study is to investigate parent's perception of involvement in cohabitating households, and its relationship and impact on the academic achievement and well-being of school-aged children (grades K-12). By completing the study you will be entered to win a \$50.00 visa gift card. Your raffle ticket number is [insert ticket number / unique identifier here], so please save for your records.

Your participation in this research project is to aid in the completion of my Masters of Science Degree at North Carolina State University, and I am currently scheduling interviews.

The following dates / times have been identified for your interview.

- Option A [insert date and time here]
- Option B [insert date and time here]
- Option C [insert date and time here]

Please reply back to this email indicating which interview option works best for your schedule. Upon approval of your interview time, a follow up Interview Notification Confirmation will be sent to you.

Thank you for your assistance and cooperation!

Sincerely,

Fabrice J. Blackson  
Graduate Student  
North Carolina State University  
Department of Youth, Family, and Community Sciences  
[insert researcher's email address here]  
[insert researcher's phone number here]

## Appendix F. Interview Confirmation Notification for Research Participation

# NC STATE UNIVERSITY

Dear [insert name here]:

Thank you for selecting your interview slot to participate in the research study entitled "Cohabiting Parents' Perceptions Concerning Parental Involvement and Academic Success: A Qualitative Review".

Your interview confirmation details are as follows:

[insert date here]

[insert time here]

[insert location here]

Your interview should take no longer than 60 minutes. Prior to the interview the informed Consent Form will be reviewed with you, along with the qualitative interview protocol.

By successfully participating in this research study, you will be entered into a raffle to win a \$50.00 visa gift. The gift card will be awarded to one person / cohabitating household who completes the interview. This award will be made within 30 days of the completion of the interview of the last research participant. Your raffle number is [insert raffle number here] and should be maintained for your personal reference.

Should you have any questions prior to your scheduled time, please feel free to contact me by phone or email as listed below.

I look forward to meeting you soon.

Sincerely,

Fabrice J. Blackson  
Graduate Student  
North Carolina State University  
Department of Youth, Family, and Community Sciences  
[insert researcher's email address here]  
[insert researcher's phone number here]

## Appendix G. Informed Consent Form



**North Carolina State University  
Family Life and Youth Development  
Department of Youth, Family, and Community Sciences  
INFORMED CONSENT FORM for RESEARCH**

Title of Study Cohabiting Parents' Perceptions Concerning Parental Involvement and Academic Success: A Qualitative Review

Principal Investigator Fabrice J. Blackson Faculty Sponsor Dr. Carolyn Bird

---

***You are being asked to take part in a research study.*** Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to be a part of this study, to choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to investigate parent's perception of involvement in cohabitating households, and its relationship and impact on the academic achievement and well-being of school-aged children (grades K-12).

**What will happen if you take part in the study?**

If you agree to participate in this study and meet the parameters of the study, as identified in the Pre-Qualification and Interest Survey, you will be asked to complete an interview. Participation in the actual research interview is anticipated to take a time commitment of 60 to 90 minutes. By signing below, I understand that the proposed use of this research project is to aid in the completion of the Masters of Science Degree at North Carolina State University for the principal investigator listed above.

**Risks**

The probability of incurring harm or discomfort associated with participating in this study is believed to be very minimal. The researcher will make every attempt to ensure that each subject is comfortable during the research and interview process.

**Confidentiality**

Information gathered from the study will be used for academic purposes only. The researcher understands the potential sensitivity of collected information, and expresses appreciation for the subject's full participation. The information in the study records will be kept confidential to the full extent allowed by law. Data will be stored securely on one (1) encrypted flash drive, maintained by the researcher. A back up CD or flash drive of the research data will also be provided to the faculty sponsor. This backup copy will be secured in a locked file cabinet in the faculty sponsor's office at the University. No reference will be made in the final manuscript, which could personally link you to the study, as all research participants will receive a unique (nameless) identifier.

**Benefits**

We will use the information from the interview to better understand cohabitating parents and families. Your feelings and experiences are valuable to us. While you may not directly benefit from this research, your participation in the interview may help us to better understand parental perceptions and involvement, and its impact on the academic success of children in youth.

**Compensation**

By completing the study you will be entered to win a visa gift card as a token of the researchers appreciation. If you withdraw from the study prior to its completion, you will be automatically ineligible to win.

**Contact Information**

If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Deb Paxton, Regulatory Compliance Administrator,

Box 7514, NCSU Campus (919-515-4514). If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Ms. Fabrice J. Blackson at [fjblacks@ncsu.edu](mailto:fjblacks@ncsu.edu).

**Consent To Participate**

I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study with the understanding that I may choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled.

**Participant's Name (Please Print):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Participant's Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

Appendix H. Guided Interview Instrument

**Cohabiting Parents' Perceptions Concerning Parental Involvement  
and Academic Success: A Qualitative Review**

Instrument Prepared by Fabrice J. Blackson  
IRB Approval # 3746

**GUIDED INTERVIEW INSTRUMENT**

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Participant Identifier:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Introduction Script**

Hello. My name is Fabrice Blackson and I am a graduate student at North Carolina State University in Raleigh, NC. As a part of my degree completion requirements under the family life and youth development program I am studying under, I must write a thesis. A thesis can be described as a graduate school project that requires an idea, an investigation of a topic, and collecting data about that topic to help expand what is known about that topic.

The project that you are being asked to participate in *explores parental involvement perceptions and experiences in cohabiting biological-parent households and its impact on the academic achievement and well-being for school-aged children*. Specifically, you are being asked to participate in a 60 minute interview that will be carried out for the project.

To participate in this study I must review the consent form with you. *(if a face-to-face interview, secure written consent on the spot; if a telephone interview, consent should be secured via electronic communication first (see telephone interview request notification) and secure verbal consent by phone)*

*(Proceed once consent is secured)*

Thank you for agreeing to participate.

Please note that the responses you provide will be accessible to the researcher (myself), my research committee, and the school. Your responses and the data secured from this interview will only be used for academic research.

To assist me during the interview process I will be using an audio recording device and will follow all protocols and procedures as approved by the research board at North Carolina State University.

The interview consists of a series of questions broken into four distinct areas, a group of open-ended closing questions, and a few general information questions to help me broadly

describe each participant. It is hoped that you will enjoy taking part in this project.

Your agreement to participate is greatly appreciated, as we intend to grow our understanding of cohabiting families. As an expression of appreciation, upon successfully completing this interview you will be entered in a raffle to win a \$50.00 gift card.

Before we begin, do you have any questions?

Are you ready to begin? (Wait for response; proceed if yes)

*I will now turn on the audio recording device.*

**General Information Questions:**

*Hello. We will begin the interview with a series of general questions. These questions are to collect basic background information on your family household.*

***For audio recording purposes, your participant identifier is:***

---

*Are you ready to begin? (Wait for response, proceed if yes)*

**1. What is your gender?**

- Male
  - Female
  - Other (please describe)
- 

**2. Using the notecard in front of you, what age bracket best describes your current age?**

- Below 19
- 20 – 24
- 25 – 29
- 30 – 34
- 35 – 39
- 40 – 44
- 45 +

**3. Using the notecard in front of you, how many people currently live in your home?**

- 1
- 2
- 3

- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9 or more

**4. Using the notecard in front of you, which bracket best describes your total household income each year?**

- \$17,504 or less
- \$17,505 - \$23,594
- \$23,595 - \$29,684
- \$29,685 - \$35,774
- \$35,775 - \$41,864
- \$41,865 - \$47,954
- \$47,955 - \$54,044
- \$54,045 - \$60,134
- \$60,135 or more

**5. What city and state do you live in?**

---

**6. As of today, are you legally married?**

- Yes
- No
- Other (please describe)

---

**7. Have you ever been married?**

- Yes
- No
- Other (please describe)

---

**8. Do you currently live with the birth mother/father of your child (or children)?**  
*(to verify that the birth parents live in a home with their children)*

- Yes
- No

**Do all of the children that the two of you biologically share together permanently live with you in the same home?**

- Yes

(If yes, how many live in the home? \_\_\_\_; What grade(s) are they in? \_\_\_\_\_)

No

(If no, how many live in the home? \_\_\_\_; What grade(s) are they in? \_\_\_\_\_)

(If no, how many live outside the home? \_\_\_\_; What grade(s) are they in? \_\_\_\_\_)

**Are there any children living in your home that are not biological to you and your domestic partner?** *(to verify that there are no step children in the home)*

Yes

No

**9. Using the notecard in front of you, how long have the two of you and your children lived in the same household together as a family?**

3 months or less

4 – 11 months

1 year or more, but less than 2 years

2 years or more, but less than 3 years

3 years or more, but less than 4 years

4 years or more, but less than 5 years

5 years or more, but less than 6 years

6 years or more, but less than 7 years

7 years or more, but less than 8 years

8 years or more, but less than 9 years

9 years or more, but less than 10 years

10 or more years

**10. Are you and the birth mother/father of your child (or children) in a dating relationship?**

Yes

No

Other (please describe)

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### **Primary Research Question 1 (RQ1)**

[Goal: Define academic success for children in cohabiting biological-parents]

**What are the school-related behaviors of academic success for school-aged children and youth in cohabiting biological-parent households?**

#### RQ1 Introduction:

*Hello. I would like to start with the first group of questions. In the first group of questions, I will ask you about your child's academic behaviors and/or background. For example, their progress in school, how they complete, schoolwork, etc. Every child is different and unique.*

*These questions will assist me in understanding some basic information about **your child's school-related behaviors and academic background.***

*Are you ready to begin? (Wait for response, proceed if yes)*

RQ1 - 1 of 5:           What activities does your child participate in at school (in the classroom like a teachers assistant, or outside the classroom like on a sports team, or in a music program, etc.)? Why do they participate in these activities? How long have they participated in these activities?  
*[Indicator: Academic (School) Engagement]*

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RQ1 - 2 of 5:           What are your child's grades? What grades is your child satisfied with receiving (for example: all A's, or B's, or A's, B's, and C's)?  
*[Indicator: Academic Expectations / Performance]*

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RQ1 - 3 of 5:           *During the current school year, how often has your child missed school? What was the reason (or reasons)?*  
*[Indicator: Attendance]*

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RQ1 - 4 of 5:           Has your child ever repeated a grade? If yes, which one? Why do you think your child had to repeat a grade?  
*[Indicator: Grade Retention (the lack of)]*

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RQ1 - 5 of 5:           How often does your child receive homework in a regular school week? When does your child complete his/her homework (i.e., time of

day)? Where do they usually complete their homework (i.e., please describe the location)? What does that area look like?  
[Indicator: Homework Completion]

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RQ1 Expanded Questions (to be used for further inquiry if necessary)

RQ1 - E1: Please describe a time when your child performed well in school (for example: got an academic award, had the highest test grade, etc.). How do you measure (or assess) when your child is doing well in school? What causes your child to perform well in school?

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RQ1 - E2: Please describe a time when your child performed poorly in school (for example: didn't complete an assignment, expressed that they had difficulty in a subject, etc.). How do you measure (or assess) when your child is performing poorly in school? What causes your child to perform poorly?

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**Primary Research Question 2 (RQ2)**

[Goal: Understand how cohabiting biological-parents perceive and communicate academic success]

**What parental perceptions or beliefs do cohabiting biological-parents have about academic success?**

*RQ2 Primer / Introduction:*

*Thank you for answering the first group of questions. We will now proceed to the second group of questions. There are many different ways that parents communicate academic success. The next few questions focus on your own **perceptions and belief systems** (as well as the child's other birth parent) as it relates to your child's academic success. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions.*

*Are you ready to begin? (Wait for response, proceed if yes)*

RQ2 – 1 of 3:           What educational attainment goals do you have for your child? (Follow up, if needed: Can you give me an example, as in graduate from high school, get a master’s degree, etc.?) What are the child’s (birth mother/birth father) educational attainment goals for your child? (Follow up, if needed: Can you give me an example?) Why these goals? How are these goals discussed with your child?  
*[Indicator: Home Academic Environment – Plans for Future]*

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RQ2 – 2 of 3:           What educational performance expectations do you have for your child (for example: do you expect child to do schoolwork, attend classes, follow school rules, etc.)? What are the child’s (birth mother/birth father) educational performance expectations? Is your child aware of these expectations? How do you know?  
*[Indicator: School Behavior Expectations]*

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RQ2 – 3 of 3:           Do you and the child’s (birth mother/birth father) contribute resources to your child’s academic development or performance? Can you give me some examples of how you contribute (for example: purchase needed supplies, support them in their schoolwork, etc.)? Can you give me an example of how the child’s (birth mother/father) contributes?  
*[Indicator: Parent Educational Support]*

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RQ2 Expanded Questions (to be used only if necessary):

RQ2 – EQ1:           Is the child’s (birth mother/birth father) an active partner in supporting your child’s academic success? Can you give me an example of that?

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RQ2 – EQ2:            If the two of you disagree about something concerning your child’s education, how do you resolve your differences? Can you give me an example of that?

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**Primary Research Question 3 (RQ3)**

[Goal: Define the type of parental involvement behaviors and/or experiences in cohabiting biological-parent households]

**What are the parental involvement behaviors for cohabiting biological-parent families?**

*RQ3 Primer / Introduction:*

*Thank you for answering the second group of questions. We are now halfway through the interview process. You will know be asked the third group of questions. During the third group of questioning, you will be asked about your parental experiences. These questions attempt to better understand **parental involvement behaviors**.*

*Are you ready to begin? (Wait for response, proceed if yes)*

RQ3 – 1 of 4:            Do you assist your child with schoolwork and/or homework? How often do you work with your child to complete academic assignments (for example: daily, weekly, sometimes, never, etc.)? Can you tell me about the things that you do to assist them?  
*[Indicator: Family Togetherness]*

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RQ3 – 2 of 4:            In what ways are you involved with your child’s school? What specific activities do you attend and/or participate in at your child’s school (parent orientations, curriculum nights, athletic games, etc.)? How often do you attend?  
*[Indicator: Parent Involvement at School]*

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RQ3 – 3 of 4:

Can you give me an example of how you encourage and support your child’s academic success (for example: providing educational activities at home, or limitations on the amount of non-educational activities while at home such as talking on the phone, etc.)? Can you tell me how the child’s (birth mother/birth father) encourages and supports your child’s academic success? How has this encouragement and support affected the child (for example: increased confidence in school work, increase in academic activities at home like reading, etc.)?

*[Indicator: Parent Support]*

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RQ3 – 4 of 4:

Do the child’s teachers know you and the child’s (birth mother/birth father)? How did they come to know you and him/her? Does you attend school events together or separately? Can you give me an example of that?

*[Indicator: Parent-Teacher Relationship Quality]*

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#### **Primary Research Question 4 (RQ4)**

[Goal: Understand the influence (or impact) of parental involvement on academic success in cohabiting biological-parent households]

**How does parental involvement in cohabiting biological-parent families impact academic achievement for school-aged children and youth?**

*RQ4 Primer / Introduction:*

*Thank you for answering the third bracket of questions. We will now proceed to the fourth group of questions before the final closing questions for this study. Virtually all parents have a direct influence on their child. These questions will assist by helping to understand what impacts academic success for children in cohabiting families, in relationship to parental involvement.*

*Are you ready to proceed? (Wait for response, proceed if yes)*

RQ4 – 1 of 3: Do you believe that not being married is affecting your child's academic performance? Please explain.

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RQ4 – 2 of 3: Would your level of involvement at your child's school be different if you were married? If yes, how so? If no, why not? How would this affect your child?

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RQ4 – 3 of 3: Would your level of parental involvement at home be different if you were married (for example: how often you talk about school to the child, how often you help with homework)? Please explain. How would this affect your child?

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### **Closing Questions**

[Goal: Allow participants to provide additional general feedback for the study]

*Closing Questions Introduction:*

*Thank you for answering the questions under each research question group. I would now like to conclude by asking you three general questions to support the research questions previously presented.*

*Are you ready to begin? (Wait for response, proceed if yes)*

CQ – 1 of 3: In your own words, how would you define a cohabiting family?

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CQ – 2 of 3: Do you feel that your child has the same level of support as children who have married heterosexual parents? Please explain.

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CQ – 3 of 3: Is there anything else that you would like to share about how cohabitation may or may not affect your child’s academic success?

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***Final Closing Statement:***

*Your interview is now complete. Thank you for taking the time to participate in this study. This is the end of your interview.*

*I will now turn off the audio recording device.*

*Your feedback is greatly appreciated and will help expand the field of family life and youth development. Now that you have completed your interview, you will be entered to win a \$50.00 visa gift card. The winner will be randomly selected and notified at the conclusion of the research study (which is anticipated to be before December 1, 2014).*

*Thank you again and have a great day.*

## Appendix I. Textural Theme Quotes from Participants

### **Textural Themes for Research Participant One (Rp1)**

#### *School Engagement Activities*

1. “She’s in her chorus at school. And, I guess she goes to girl scouts at school.”
2. “She’s in chorus because she likes to sing so I decided to put her in that.”
3. “Girl scouts, that’s something I did when I was younger; I wanted her to be in it and she’s been in it since kindergarten; she likes it, so she’s in it.”

#### *Academic Performance and Student Expectations*

1. “Mostly A’s and B’s.”
2. “She got two C’s in the last grading period.”
3. “I believe she would be happy if she had just A’s and B’s.”

#### *Homework Environment and Practices*

1. “Monday through Thursday.”
2. “Soon as she gets home from school, so about 3:30.”
3. “At the dining room table.”
4. “It’s in kind of a small room.”
5. “It has four chairs at the table.”

#### *Reward Systems*

1. “I remember in second grade. They always have an end of the year like little awards ceremony. I think she got a helping hands award or something like that.”
2. “I guess she’s a good helper. She always helps the teacher out.”

#### *Student Behaviors*

1. “I think getting enough rest. That helps her to be better in school, to do well in school.”
2. “To know that it is somewhat expected at home that she’s suppose to do well. Because her parents always want her to do her best and I think it makes her feel good as a person too when she’s being praised that she’s getting good grades and stuff.”

#### *Parental Expectations of Student Behaviors*

1. “I expect her to go to school and be on time everyday. I expect her to get good grades. Be the best that she can. I expect her to always follow the rules to her teachers. Just in general. Just to be a good student all the way around, just follow the rules. Get good grades. Do what she needs to do. Learn all that she can.”
2. “I believe he expects the same things that I expect. I think we’re pretty much on the same page when it comes to her school, schoolwork and stuff. We always want her to do her best.”

*Plans for Future and Educational Attainment Goals*

1. "I would like her to always get A's and B's and I would like for her to eventually go to college one day and become something she wants to be
2. "I always provide her the technology she can use that can help her out, like the computer or the tablet. I take her to the library and I try not to let her be on the tablet too much that's not educational cause they just get too much technology overload or whatever."

*Perceptions of Parent Contributed Resources*

1. "I would like her to always get A's and B's and I would like for her to eventually go to college one day and become something she wants to be."
2. "I always provide her the technology she can use that can help her out, like the computer or the tablet. I take her to the library and I try not to let her be on the tablet too much that's not educational cause they just get too much technology overload or whatever."

*Parental Involvement Activities at Home*

1. "I let her do all of her homework, what she can do first. And then I go and help her try to figure out the ones that she doesn't know how to do. Sometimes mommy doesn't remember all of the third grade stuff. So mommy has to Google stuff on her phone, to look up stuff."

*Parental Involvement Activities at School*

1. "It's where you go and they talk about the rules in their classroom. What they're learning in their classroom. What they're getting ready to learn. The expectations."

*Parent-Teacher Interactions*

1. "Her main teacher, yes, her main teacher knows me. She does not know her father because I am the one that always goes to the conferences and stuff because dad is always at work."

*Perceptions of Cohabitation and Influence on Academic Success*

1. "I don't think it affects her because whether we are married or not we both have the same expectations for her and she knows what those expectations are. So I don't think it really affects her schoolwork."

*Perceptions of Cohabitation and Influence on Parental Involvement at School*

1. "Dad would still be at work during the day all the time. Mom currently doesn't work during the daytime. So, sometimes mom can do those extra things. But, if we were married it would still be the same things. Either mom would be working full time or still doing what she is doing now. And dad, of course, would still be working full time. So it would still be the same."

## **Textural Themes for Research Participant Two (Rp2)**

### *School Engagement Activities*

1. "Because she thinks she can sing"
2. "She likes to interact with girls her age."
3. "The choir, this is her first year."
4. "Girl scouts, this is her second year."

### *Academic Performance and Student Expectations*

1. "She's satisfied with just passing."
2. "She hasn't missed school at all this year."

### *Homework Environment and Practices*

1. "She starts working on it right after she gets out of school; around 3:30."
2. "At the dinner table, at the dining room table."
3. "It's a small room."

### *Reward Systems*

1. "She gets rewards."
2. "She gets to go places, do things. Monetary rewards."

### *Student Behaviors*

1. "When she does poorly in school its because she is being lazy."
2. "She's just trying to get it done and not really reading on what's going on with the homework or something."

### *Parental Expectations of Student Behaviors*

1. "I expect her to graduate. Get a diploma out of high school and I expect her to graduate from college, as an honor student. Be top of the class."
2. "I don't think so. Because I haven't really spoke to her about those expectations, but I have spoke to her about what I would like for her to do."

### *Plans for Future and Educational Attainment Goals*

1. "Completing college and get a degree."
2. "Because you really can't get a job without a college degree. You can't get a job without a high school diploma now."

### *Perceptions of Parent Contributed Resources*

1. "The Internet."
2. "Taking her to the library."
3. "Makes sure she helps her with her homework. She goes over her homework with her."

*Parental Involvement Activities at Home*

1. "She had a subtraction problem. She was struggling. So, we used our hands. I help them figure out answers by not just giving it to them. I help them figure it out on their own".

*Parental Involvement Activities at School*

1. "I do go to orientations. I go to choir performances. The father-daughter dance."

*Perceptions of Cohabitation and Influence on Academic Success*

1. "No. Because I think in her eyes she sees us as being married. It's just not on paperwork, from what I can see per se."

*Perceptions of Cohabitation and Influence on Parental Involvement at School*

1. "It's about the child, it's not about being married or not to me."

*Perceptions of Cohabitation and Influence on Parental Involvement at Home*

1. "Its about the child. Me being married to her mother wouldn't affect how I interact with her mother"

**Textural Themes for Research Participant Three (Rp3)**

*Academic Performance and Student Expectations*

1. "The oldest, A's and B's."
2. "Is around B's and C's."
3. "A's and B's."
4. "C's."

*Homework Environment and Practices*

1. "Four days out of a week."
2. "Monday through Thursday".
3. "It has a couch; it has a TV that's off when he's doing his homework and there is a small table and chair."

*Reward Systems*

1. "He got the academic honor roll. A-B honor roll that he received at school
2. "Excited."
3. "I was extremely excited."

*Student Behaviors*

1. "Not comprehending what he's learning in the classroom"
2. "The interest level is not there
3. "They're not interested in anything."
4. "They're not smiling about it"
5. "They're not asking for help"

6. "They're very shut off from what they have to do, the things they have to get done."

*Parental Expectations of Student Behaviors*

1. "I expect them to come to school. I expect them to be in attention. I expect them to follow directions and to do their best at everything. Even if they don't like it, they have to try."
2. "The same. To go in there and to do your best."

*Plans for Future and Educational Attainment Goals*

1. "Want them to go on to college. Make it to college and what they decide to do from there is on them as far as a career."

*Perceptions of Parent Contributed Resources*

1. "They have programs that we have for them on the Internet that they do for reading. We bought them these large workbooks that follow the curriculum for their age group. And anything else they need we make a point to get it so that the process can be a little smoother for them as far as learning and getting things done"
2. "Engages with them also just on a one-on-one level. He makes sure that he walks them through and shows them how things need to be done. And if there is anything they need for a project or any type of schoolwork he obtains it for them."

*Parental Involvement Activities at Home*

1. "I just sit with them and watch them. If they have a question I try to answer it. More of a moral support type of thing rather than me just talking to them."

*Parental Involvement Activities at School*

1. "I attend all of the parent-teacher conferences, faithfully. Whenever there is any activities, like math night or science night at the school I make a point for them to go."

*Parent-Teacher Interactions*

1. "We go up to the school and eat lunch with the kids. We attend all of the parent-teacher conferences" and "They keep in touch through email."

*Perceptions of Cohabitation and Influence on Academic Success*

1. "But for long-term reasons I would say yes. Just for short term, I don't think they really understand. But long term, as the begin to progress and get a little bit older, it will be important for them to see that and to know that" [marriage that is].

*Perceptions of Cohabitation and Influence on Parental Involvement at School*

1. "Because I'm still doing now what I would do if I were married. I'm still deeply involved with everything they do at school. So that wouldn't change."

## **Textural Themes for Research Participant Four (Rp4)**

### *School Engagement Activities*

1. "Oldest son likes basketball and football."
2. "Youngest likes football."
3. "They like those two sports."
4. "They love to play sports."

### *Academic Performance and Student Expectations*

1. "A's and B's."
2. "B's and C's."
3. "A's and B's."
4. "C's."

### *Homework Environment and Practices*

1. "Four times maybe in a week."
2. "Monday through Thursday."
3. "In the living room."
4. "On the couch and sometimes on the floor."
5. "Around six o'clock."
6. "Around six thirty".

### *Reward Systems*

1. "If they don't do well in school, they can't play sports."

### *Student Behaviors*

1. "If he has a lot of energy."
2. "My youngest performs poorly in the morning times at school."
3. "Yes, it's just time of day. The breakfast, that I guess the school serves, it's sweetening and you know he's active in the morning."
4. "If he is not having a good day or a good morning."

### *Parental Expectations of Student Behaviors*

1. "I expect them to do their schoolwork because it involves academics, sports, and to graduate."
2. "They have a wanting to do it, and want to do the work, and follow directions, and want to graduate and perform at their best."
3. "The same."

### *Plans for Future and Educational Attainment Goals*

1. "I want them both to have college degrees."
2. "To understand medicine. To understand the scientific part of it, the nature."

*Perceptions of Parent Contributed Resources*

1. "By spending time with them to practice their work; to support them and to encourage them to follow the directions of the school. Talking with them. Reading with them."
2. "I'll be helping one of my children and she'll be helping the other, and you know, together me and her are here to do academics with them."

*Parental Involvement Activities at School*

1. "In the involvement, with the football, stand there and make an appearance. Let them know that I am there watching them and there for them."

*Parent-Teacher Interactions*

1. "Parent teacher conferences, and we talk with them. At least twice a week."
2. "Both phone and email."

*Perceptions of Cohabitation and Influence on Academic Success*

1. "Were together and were happy and we'll be married."

*Perceptions of Cohabitation and Influence on Parental Involvement at School*

1. "About the same."

*Perceptions of Cohabitation and Influence on Parental Involvement at Home*

1. "You know, me and my fiancé' we have that love bond and I feel like we will be the same people were before. They [children] didn't have a problem with it before and they still should, so it'll be the same."

**Textural Themes for Research Participant Five (Rp5)**

*School Engagement Activities*

1. "They play outside the classroom; the games she play like ballerina."
2. "Children's games."
3. "They play a lot of musical chairs at their school; they do a lot of coloring; learning the alphabet."
4. "It's extracurricular."
5. "I would say maybe a few months, but less than a year."

*Academic Performance and Student Expectations*

1. "All that I have seen is they go by like a smiley face; a smiley face, if green, that's good; yellow is so-so and red is a bad smiley face."
2. "She would want all green."

*Homework Environment and Practices*

1. "As far as receiving homework, they may have to fill out an alphabet or some sentences, but there is no grade for that homework."

2. "At the same time; like when she get's home from school. I would say maybe six, seven."
3. "She has a child's desk"

#### *Reward Systems*

1. "Incentives. I tell her that if she does well I will reward her, or buy a reward for her."
2. "Toys, candy, pretty much just toys and candy."

#### *Student Behaviors*

1. "Maybe like a mood swing, or something would bother her; she's not really talking to me or her mother."
2. "Maybe like a friend, or maybe like another child in the class. Say, they may distract her or something, or maybe someone would do something else that wouldn't be what she is suppose to be doing."

#### *Parental Expectations of Student Behaviors*

1. "I expect her to do her schoolwork. Be nice and polite to people. That's pretty much it. Just stuff like that."
2. "Pretty much the same."
3. "We express it. I tell her. Her mother tells her. And she knows that if she doesn't do well then we will be unhappy with her."

#### *Plans for Future and Educational Attainment Goals*

1. "I want her to achieve and strive to be the best all the way up to the top until she graduates. Once she gets out of school, I want her to achieve in college."

#### *Perceptions of Parent Contributed Resources*

1. "Crayons, coloring book, a pencil if she needs, and use the tablet."
2. "She gives her a computer. She helps out with some supplies if she needs paper. She bought her a book bag."

#### *Parental Involvement Activities at Home*

1. "I'll talk to her. I'll sit down with her and help her with her handwriting, handwriting, and pronouncing each of the words."

#### *Parental Involvement Activities at School*

1. "I attend the PTA meetings. Like if they are having a party, or if a child is having a party, I'll go in the kitchen or give something to bring with my daughter."

#### *Parent-Teacher Interactions*

1. "From the PT meetings and the school orientation."

*Perceptions of Cohabitation and Influence on Academic Success*

1. "I believe since she sees us together, at her age, she doesn't really know full detail. She's too young. But she sees us together so she thinks everything is fine."

**Textural Themes for Research Participant Six (Rp6)**

*School Engagement Activities*

1. "Doesn't participate in any extracurricular activities at this moment at least not until the end of this month, and she'll be starting gymnastics."
2. "Recreational program from the school."
3. "She's a ball of energy; she loves to sprint, jump, toss around; anything that maybe is physical."
4. "She's very active and I feel that it'll be something very intriguing for her to do."

*Academic Performance and Student Expectations*

1. "She has a proficient in all of them actually, except for gym; it's odd but she has a satisfactory in gym for some reason."
2. "She has great, excellent grades actually; I haven't gotten a bad grade yet."
3. "We are very strict on schoolwork when it comes down on schoolwork and getting schoolwork done."
4. "Probably if she got a satisfactory she would probably be alright with it but she more so likes to have proficient."
5. "She has missed school two times; one for a dentist appointment and one for a doctor's appointment."

*Homework Environment and Practices*

1. "She gets homework Monday through Friday."
2. "As soon as she gets home from school" from "about three thirty, sometimes four, if we, if she has a school project."
3. "At the kitchen table or sometimes at the dining room table"
4. "For the dining room table, it is set up in the middle of the floor. It has four chairs in it. We do have a television in the dining room, but we barely have that on. In the kitchen, there is just a table and a few chairs. It's more so an island, if you want to say, that is up against the wall. The kitchen table, if she sits there, she will be facing towards the wall so that she doesn't have any distractions. And the dining room table, depending on the way she sits, she'll either face the kitchen or the living room or one of the walls."

*Reward Systems*

1. "She won the award for best behaved in her school."
2. "We took her out to dinner."
3. "I took her to the store and let her pick two things that she wanted. Whether it was toys, or something for school, whatever she wanted because she earned that."

4. "He's ready to scream it to her. He'll go out and get her things. He'll take her to the movies. Whatever it is that she wants...."
5. "One of the incentives for her was they had the Disney on Ice that just came. This past weekend we took her to that and we had a great time there."

#### *Student Behaviors*

1. "This was when the school year first had begun. By her being so young, she, she didn't really want to be in the class that she was in because all of her friends, pre-kindergarten, were in another class and she felt alone in her class and she really wasn't motivated because she was worried about friends."
2. "More than likely, sometimes, she likes to be a bit of a class clown, and she'll like to goof off with other children, she likes to talk and all that, so, sometimes she will not get the work done in class."

#### *Parental Expectations of Student Behaviors*

1. "Well for me, that, she strives for the best. Never give up. There's always hope. If you did it wrong the first time, there is five more. If you feel as though you can't go do it, then ask for help. There is no wrong answer. There is no stupid question. You just got to be motivated. You have to be self-motivated."
2. "For him everything is just try. Just try. He's happy with whatever the outcome is as long as she tries. So, good or bad, as long as she puts some effort in it, that's all he wants is the effort."
3. "You can tell the difference especially during homework time. Because whenever her and I do homework, she is on it, she knows what she's doing. If there is an extra something, she got it. But, if I sit back and let her dad help her with her homework, she goes that she barely knows anything; or, she doesn't remember; or she can't find the answer, or stuff like that."

#### *Plans for Future and Educational Attainment Goals*

1. "My goals for her would be to graduate college with masters, bachelors. I feel like education is endless to me. I feel like I can't put a bracket on it because before you go, you should never put a limit on yourself."

#### *Perceptions of Parent Contributed Resources*

1. "She has her own tablet. I have, I actually have her signed up for ABCmouse.com I really think that's an awesome, awesome, awesome tool for early learning education. There's endless things for them to learn. We have flash cards and wordbooks. I have study posters hanging. I have a couple of books that tell me how to write up a couple of assignments for her to do in her spare time when she is not playing or something like that, and we take that hour out of the day to just sit and read. Just read a book. No electronics. No outside. You always want to be ahead of the game. And, me, I have to make sure that I put forth the effort in anything that she needs."

#### *Parental Involvement Activities at Home*

1. “Well during homework time I don’t like it to be, I guess, not fun especially since she is so young. So, I will make it fun, or make up games, we’ll do memory test. We will, I will make flash cards for her.”

#### *Parent-Teacher Interactions*

1. “Met her teacher during the pre-kindergarten screening before school even started. Where they were showing them the school, and their classroom. But, her teacher was one of the ones doing the screening. And then both of us took us up there, and I guess she remembered us from that day from how excited and pumped we were for her. And, from there, I am at the school. And not to mention when you pick the child up you have to physically go to the classroom and sign out. So, you get the additional contact. So, like I said, I like to get daily reports. But, they know us.”

#### *Perceptions of Cohabitation and Influence on Academic Success*

1. “Marriage, to me, that’s for me. Were both very much involved in her academic career and that has nothing to do with us not being married. Because like I said, we’re still together and if anyone was on the outside looking in, you would never know that were weren’t.”

#### *Perceptions of Cohabitation and Influence on Parental Involvement at School*

1. “To me, marriage is just a piece of paper and a last name change.”

#### *Perceptions of Cohabitation and Influence on Parental Involvement at Home*

1. “Because education is still going to be there, with or without a marriage.”

### **Textural Themes for Research Participant Seven (Rp7)**

#### *School Engagement Activities*

1. “Likes to do the music and performance.”
2. “Something she loves to do; she walks around our home singing; always doing the pretend like playing programs at home, putting on shows.”
3. “They sing and they put on performances during the holiday or special events.”

#### *Academic Performance and Student Expectations*

1. “Seems to be absolutely satisfied with B’s.”
2. “So as long as she reaches those good high 80’s and event 90’s she seems satisfied.”
3. “I would say A’s and really high B’s.”

#### *Homework Environment and Practices*

1. “.... three nights out of five.”

2. "Usually the same nights of the week; Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday".
3. "Just a dining room away from the kitchen, away from the living room. No TV distractions. There's four chairs that belong to the table and we have the high chair that sits at the table with us."

#### *Reward Systems*

1. "She's been nominated for things such as exemplary student, or student citizen where she helps throughout and she's a really good helper."

#### *Student Behaviors*

1. "When she first started school this year, math was a little bit more challenging for her because it was a step up from first grade. So she seemed a little nervous maybe, a little scared that she didn't know how to do it. It was harder to get her to sit still and focus on it."

#### *Parental Expectations of Student Behaviors*

1. "I do believe that they have a color code thing were they maybe move a clothespin from, you know, green, to yellow, to red. Whatever the color is. And I do expect her to stay in the green. And the other one is at the end of each day when we get home. I check her book bag. And they carry school agendas, and what I do know they do is, depending upon the day she's had, they'll be a smiley face inside the agenda, on a certain day, or it'll say good day, or bad day, talking too much, or something along those lines. I don't ever want to see anything in there that says bad day. I do expect all those to be smiley faces, or a good day, no trouble. I don't want anything in their saying she was in trouble."
2. "For her to mainly go to school, pay attention, and behave."
3. "I feel like him and I are really on the same times. That we both kind of have the same expectations out of her."

#### *Plans for Future and Educational Attainment Goals*

1. "I want to see her just go to the top. I want her to graduate. I want her to love the school and I want her to enjoy it. I want her to be able to get a great job and not have to depend on anyone. I want her to understand that it is okay to be an independent person."

#### *Perceptions of Parent Contributed Resources*

1. "I come from where we had to do it all on pen and paper, so I feel like using the old method is still helpful and like using flash cards and things. Her father bought a tablet. There's learning games on there, there's little note pad things were she can practice cursive writing or do math."

#### *Parental Involvement Activities at Home*

1. "If it helps her, I'll even let her teach to me what her teacher taught to her"

2. "I'll let her tell me what she was taught."

*Parental Involvement Activities at School*

1. "Every thing that they have that is parent welcome. Like if they have the PACT time, if one of us cant go, I go; or if he wants to go to PACT time I'll let him go; I try, sometimes we go together, but then sometimes we go separate. That way she has the one on one time with both of us at a different time. But, everything that they make public for parents, any party, or special lunch, I'm there."

*Parent-Teacher Interactions*

1. "This is a crazy story and I get looked at weird when I tell it. I had a teacher in high school that became like my best friend. We hung out together outside of school and so I met my child's second grade teacher through my friend and it just so happened that my child ended up in her second grade class."

*Perceptions of Cohabitation and Influence on Academic Success*

1. "No. I don't believe so."
2. "Some people think marriage is important when you have kids. I feel like as long as you are in it for not only for your kids, but yourself, are you happy. Is your household happy? Do you have problems? I mean, are you angry all the time. And if not, that's fine. And for instance, with us, were always positive. We don't let not being married affect how we treat and raise our children."