

UNMARRIED FATHERS ACROSS THE TRANSITION TO SEPARATION:  
THE RELATIONAL CONTEXT OF INVOLVEMENT

Bryndl Hohmann-Marriott  
Pennsylvania State University

ABSTRACT

Unmarried parents have a pattern of more frequent and earlier dissolution, putting their children at risk for reduced father involvement after the end of the parents' union. However, when separated parents have a higher-quality relationship and are able to engage in cooperative coparenting, fathers tend to be more involved. This study examines influences on the trajectory of father involvement across unmarried parents' transition to separation. The effects of the couple's relationship quality as well as the father's individual characteristics and resources are considered. Differences by coresidence prior to separation are also taken into account to investigate the effects of changes in coresidence, as distinct from changes in the romantic relationship, on fathers' continued involvement.

*Paper prepared for the 2007 meeting of the Population Association of America*

UNMARRIED FATHERS ACROSS THE TRANSITION TO SEPARATION:  
THE RELATIONAL CONTEXT OF INVOLVEMENT

Births to unmarried parents have been increasing rapidly, and over one-third of births in 2005 were to unmarried women (Hamilton, Martin, & Ventura, 2006). At the child's birth, many unmarried parents are in a relationship with one another and wish for the father to be involved (Carlson & McLanahan, 2004). However, these couples are often unable to maintain either a stable union or the continued involvement of the father. Unmarried couples are more likely than are married couples to end their union, and when they do so, nonresident never-married fathers tend to have low levels of involvement (Smock, 2000; Seltzer, 1991). Ending the union while the child is very young is especially problematic, as these fathers may enter on a trajectory of less involvement over the child's life (Seltzer, 1991; Aldous, Mulligan, & Bjarnason, 1998). Their pattern of more frequent and earlier dissolution means that unmarried fathers are at especially high risk of noninvolvement as they transition out of their unions.

This paper uses the Fragile Families study to investigate changes in father involvement as unmarried parents separate, as well as the individual and relational factors impacting these changes. Results will be applicable to policy initiatives such as the Fatherhood Initiative and Building Strong Families, as well as to prevention and interventions which promote healthy relationships, father involvement, and child wellbeing.

*Father Involvement*

Most family scholars recognize that fathers can be important figures in their children's lives. Child wellbeing is enhanced when their fathers take an active and positive parenting role (Marsiglio et al., 2000). This is reflected in cultural changes placing greater emphasis on fathers being actively engaged with their children. Research, too, is moving from a focus on what fathers do not do (a 'deficit' perspective) to the contributions fathers are making (a 'generative' perspective) (Hawkins & Dollahite; Doherty, Kouneski, & Erickson, 1998). Contributions by fathers can take many forms, and Lamb and colleagues (1987) categorize direct contributions into three aspects: engagement, availability, and responsibility. Engagement represents fathers' interactions with the child in such activities as caregiving, play, and cognitive stimulation. Availability is the father's presence and accessibility for potential engagement. Finally, responsibility encompasses fathers' participation in planning and organization, being prepared to accommodate emergencies (e.g. a sick child) as well as scheduling and attending routine events (e.g. sports teams, music lessons).

Father involvement is more dependent on relational context than is mother involvement. Research consistently shows that when parents have a higher-quality marriage, fathers are more involved (Belsky, Gilstrap, & Rovine, 1984; Grych & Clark, 1999; Lundy, 2002). This link between couple relationship quality and father involvement also holds for unmarried cohabiting parents (Coley & Chase-Landale, 1999; Danziger & Radin, 1990; Carlson and McLanahan, 2004, 2005).

The father's identity is also important to his engagement with the father role (Lamb, 1986), although the effects of his beliefs may be complex. There is evidence that fathers in intact unions with more egalitarian role beliefs are more involved in childrearing (Bulanda (2004). However, for separated fathers, a different study found that those with less conservative beliefs

about relationships and parenting are less likely to maintain contact with their children, possibly because conservative beliefs indicate that family is more central to these men's identities, whereas less conservative men are more accepting of the changes in the family relationships (Cooksey & Craig, 1998). Examining these beliefs across the transition to separation will allow for a clearer assessment of their potential influence.

It is necessary to take into account the mother's beliefs as well, as her beliefs about the father can impact the father's involvement. Studies of maternal gatekeeping consistently find that when mothers have more negative assessments of the father and his role in childrearing, fathers are less involved, regardless of the fathers' own beliefs, and conversely, that when mothers have a more positive view of the father and his role, fathers are more involved (McBride et al., 2005; Fagan & Barnett, 2003; Allen & Hawkins, 1999; DeLuccie, 1995; Fagan, Newash, & Schloesser, 2000; Arditti, 1995; Buchanan, Maccoby, & Dornbusch, 1996).

### *Separation*

When couples separate, father involvement is reduced, on average (Amato, 1987; Furstenburg & Nord, 1985; Seltzer, 1991). Fathers are less likely to stay involved when they have lower levels of education and income (Seltzer et al., 1989; Maccoby & Mnookin, 1992; Stephens, 1996; Thompson & Laible, 1999), whereas they are more likely to stay involved when they feel satisfied with parenting and perceive influence in their children's lives (Braver & O'Connell, 1998; McKenry et al., 1992; Minton & Pasley, 1996). Heatherington & Kelly (2002) point out that, as couples transition to divorce, some fathers maintain their predivorce levels of involvement, whereas others are 'divorce deactivated,' decreasing their involvement after the divorce, and a small number are even 'divorce activated,' increasing their involvement after the divorce. It is likely that these trends may also apply to unmarried couples who separate. They may even be stronger, as never-married parents appear to have more difficulty maintaining father involvement than divorced parents (Seltzer, 1991).

Much of the reduction in involvement may stem from fathers' moving from a coresident to a nonresident relationship with their child. This transition to nonresidence produces logistical challenges which may make it more difficult for fathers to maintain their previous levels of involvement. Fathers who never resided with their child have faced these challenges from the beginning, and for them, the end of the romantic relationship is not coupled with the end of the coresidential relationship. Thus, these never-resident fathers, who have lower levels of involvement to begin with, may not experience the same drop in involvement as coresident fathers.

The other key to continued father involvement is the quality of the parental relationship. When parents separate, they must re-establish their roles as parents and coparents (Demo & Ganong, 1994; Madden-Derdich & Leonard, 2000). Parents with higher levels of post-separation supportiveness and lower levels of conflict have fathers who are more involved with their young children (Whiteside & Becker, 2000). Unmarried parents who separate when their child is very young are thus in the difficult position of simultaneously negotiating their new roles as parents and as separated coparents, without benefit of institutionalized expectations.

What remains unclear is to what extent a potential decrease in father involvement is driven by the end of the romantic relationship, as distinct from the end of coresidence. It is clear that nonresidence will place more barriers on involvement. The effect of the end of a romantic relationship is less obvious. In some cases the parents may experience a decrease in relationship quality when they separate, resulting in less involvement by fathers. In other cases, however,

particularly when the couple experienced a highly-conflicted relationship, the end of the romantic union could actually decrease the level of antagonism and encourage greater father participation.

Other events in the parents' lives after separation may also impact the fathers' involvement, and one of the most considerable is when parents move on to form new partnerships and families. When the mother has a new partner, the father's contact with his children is reduced (Manning & Smock, 1999). For fathers, a subsequent marriage increases his chances of visiting his children, whereas a subsequent cohabitation or no new partnership does not (Cooksey & Craig, 1998). When the father has a new child with another partner, his contact with the older child decreases, although acquiring a new stepchild does not have this effect (Manning & Smock, 1999; Cooksey & Craig, 1998).

Along with the relational context, individual characteristics of nonresident fathers may contribute to their involvement, and will be considered in this study as control variables. Fathers with greater resources may be more likely to maintain their involvement after a separation. Fathers who are older, with more education and earnings, may have more personal and financial resources to contribute to childrearing, and both mothers and fathers may wish for his greater involvement (Doherty, Kouneski, & Erickson, 1998; Harris & Marmer, 1996). King, Harris, & Heard (2004) found that minority nonresident fathers had less contact with their children than nonresident White fathers, but when they did have contact, they were more likely to participate in childrearing activities such as working on school projects with the children (as opposed to entertainment-related activities). Unmarried fathers who do not share a cultural background with their partner may have less contact with their children (Carlson, McLanahan, & Brooks-Gunn, 2005). After the parents separate, the father may be less able to be involved, and the mother may be less willing for him to be involved, if he is struggling with drug and alcohol abuse or poor health.

This research asks how some fathers are able to maintain involvement with their young children as they transition out of their union with the child's mother. This research will examine the influence of the parents' relationship quality and beliefs on the amount of fathers' participation in key developmental areas both before and after the transition. In addition, unmarried couples who were cohabiting before they ended their union will be compared with unmarried couples who were not coresident to investigate the effects of ending coresidence, as distinct from ending the romantic union, on fathers' continued involvement.

## METHOD

### *Sample*

Data are from the first three waves of the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study. The baseline interview surveys parents at the time of their baby's birth, with subsequent interviews when the child is 1 year old and 3 years old. Both fathers and mothers were interviewed, making this data ideal for an analysis of father involvement in couple context. All percentages are weighted to be representative of births in cities with populations greater than 100,000.

Couples who, at the 1 year interview, were married, in a romantic coresident relationship (cohabiting) and in a romantic nonresident relationship (also termed 'living apart together' or 'visiting') were eligible for this analysis. This excluded the 625 couples who were in a romantic

relationship at the time of the baby's birth but who subsequently separated, most of whom were unmarried. The baby needed to be residing with both parents (for coresident couples) or with the mother (for nonresident couples), and the father could not have been in jail at either the 1 year or 3 year interviews. In addition, both the mother and father needed to be interviewed at baseline, and the mother to participate in both subsequent interviews. This exclusion removed 426 couples (13%) where only the mother participated in the baseline interview, 281 couples (10%) where the mother did not participate in the Year 1 interview, and a further 169 couples (7%) where the mother did not participate in the year 3 interview. Fathers had much higher attrition than mothers, so to minimize attrition bias, fathers who did not participate in the Year 1 and Year 3 interviews were retained in the sample if their partners participated. The final sample was 2,137 couples.

Of these couples, 78% were married at Year 1 (8% of these had married since the baby's birth), 17% were cohabiting (21% had begun cohabitation since the baby's birth), and 5% were in a romantic nonresident union. By the third year of their child's life, 11% ( $n = 437$ ) of all couples had ended their union, including 7% ( $n = 97$ ) of the married couples, 21% ( $n = 247$ ) of the cohabiting couples, and 50% ( $n = 93$ ) of the nonresident couples.

### *Variables*

The outcome variable is father's involvement with his child. This variable is a composite of four items, measured almost identically at the 1 year and 3 year interviews. The 1-year variables have an alpha of 0.7, and the 3-year variables have an alpha of 0.8. The four variables ask the number of days per week the father: plays with toys indoors with the child, plays imaginary games with the child, reads to the child, and tells the child stories. These items are asked of the father (reporting about himself) as well as of the mother (reporting about the father). A comparison of mother and father reports of father involvement (not shown) finds, as expected, that mothers' reports tend to be lower than fathers' reports, although the general pattern remains comparable. In this study, father reports are used because some fathers are nonresident at Year 1, and all fathers are nonresident at Year 3. For nonresident fathers it is not expected that the mother will be a reliable reporter, as she may be unable to observe the father interacting with the child. To avoid the attrition bias incurred by dropping fathers who did not participate in follow-up interviews (who were disproportionately nonresident and separating), the responses of fathers who were missing reports were imputed using the fathers' self-reported characteristics from baseline and the mother's reports of his involvement. A variable flagging nonparticipating fathers was included in all multivariate analyses.

The focal predictor variables represent the couple's relationship quality. This has two components, the reported relationship quality and conflict, each asked of both mothers and fathers at both Year 1 and Year 3. Reported quality is a question asking respondents whether their relationship is poor, fair, good, very good, or excellent. Reported conflict is a question asking respondents the frequency with which the partners "argue about things that are important to you," with response options including never, rarely, sometimes, often, or always.

Additional variables assess the couple's relationship and children, their parent role beliefs, and their individual characteristics. These variables are measured at the baseline interview. The relationship variables include the length of time the couple has known one another, whether either partner has a child with a different partner, whether the focal child is the first child for the couple, and whether the focal child is a boy. Parent role beliefs are asked of both partners, and include questions asking about the importance of fathers' caregiving, whether

fathers should spend more time with their families rather than working more, and whether it is best if the father is the primary earner and the mother is the primary caregiver (reverse-coded). Individual characteristics are included as the father's characteristic with an additional variable indicating whether the mother differed. These characteristics include age, race/ethnicity, immigrant status, and education. Three further items are only included for fathers; his own father's involvement, his subjective health, and if he has a problem with drugs or alcohol which impact his family or work life. Finally, a variable measuring the couple's employment at Year 1 is included.

## RESULTS

### *Stable vs. Separating Couples*

Comparing couples who separated between 1 and 3 years with those who remained stable across this time period suggests the extent to which involvement and changes are normative in this population and the extent to which they are due to the separation process. This comparison, as seen in Table 1, shows that, when their children are one year old, resident fathers, both married and cohabiting, are involved on average 4 ½ days per week. Nonresident fathers, by contrast, are involved less than 4 days per week. Fathers who subsequently separate are no different from their counterparts who remain in stable unions if they are married or nonresident. However, cohabiting fathers who separate are significantly less involved than their cohabiting counterparts whose unions remained stable.

Coresident fathers who remained in stable unions decreased their involvement from Year 1 to Year 3 by about a third of a day, in contrast to nonresident fathers in stable unions, who actually increased their involvement. However, these decreases were much smaller in magnitude than the decreases observed for the fathers who separated. These fathers decreased by almost a whole day, on average, which was significantly different from the fathers in stable unions.

These comparisons suggest that, prior to separating, couples who later end their union are much the same as couples who remain in a stable union. With the exception of cohabiting couples, it is not possible to differentiate these couples by their average level of father involvement. Differences appear as the couples separate, with decreases in involvement for separating fathers which are markedly greater than the minor decreases for fathers who remain in stable unions.

### *Involvement Across Separation*

Father involvement in couples who separate is detailed in Table 2. Involvement prior to separation is higher for married and cohabiting couples, roughly four and one-half days per week, than for nonresident couples, where fathers report being involved an average of less than four days per week. After separation, fathers in all types of unions reported less involvement, and the involvement of formerly married fathers, over three and one-half days per week, was greater than that of formerly coupled nonresident fathers, at just over three days per week. Formerly cohabiting fathers, with almost three and one-half days of involvement per week, fell in the middle and were not significantly different from either of the other two types.

On average, couples experienced a decline in father involvement across the transition, but this average decline masks important variation. Fathers could either make no changes in their level of involvement, they could decrease, or they could increase their involvement. More cohabiting and dating fathers than married fathers, over a third of each, did not change their

involvement, compared with only 16% of married fathers. Of course, this means something different for cohabiters, who maintained their relatively high levels of involvement, than for nonresident fathers, who maintained a lower level of involvement. Married fathers who did not change had somewhat higher involvement than cohabiting couples prior to separation, but about the same amount after. The largest group was those who decreased their involvement, particularly for married couples. Decreases in involvement were experienced by almost two-thirds of married couples, compared with only two-fifths of cohabiting and nonresident couples. For all groups, fathers who decreased their involvement started out with levels of involvement much higher than those for fathers who maintained their involvement. After separation, married fathers who had decreased their involvement had higher levels of involvement than did cohabiting or nonresident fathers. Finally, about 20% of fathers in all three types of union increased their involvement. These fathers were involved the least prior to separation, with similar levels of involvement for all. After separation, their levels of involvement were far higher than those for either those with no change or those who decreased, and again were quite similar for fathers in all three union types.

A comparison of married and cohabiting couples indicates the effects of marital status, independent of residence. Married and cohabiting couples have very similar levels of involvement both before and after separation, but their patterns of change differ considerably. Whereas the large majority of married fathers decrease their involvement, a greater proportion of cohabiting fathers than married fathers maintained their involvement. This suggests that the dissolution of a marriage produces a greater level of disengagement than does the dissolution of a nonmarital cohabiting union. A comparison of cohabiting and nonresident couples addresses the effects of residence, independent of marital status. The differences here, as expected, are particularly noticeable. Nonresident fathers, even when in a romantic relationship with the child's mother, are much less involved than resident fathers. Even after the union ends, fathers who were not resident remain less involved, suggesting that the patterns of involvement and the bonds with the child established through residence extend into the post-dissolution involvement of the fathers.

### *Involvement in Couple Context*

The question which remains is how father involvement may be associated with characteristics of the fathers or their relationships with the child's mother. Post-separation involvement is addressed by multivariate OLS regression models, presented in Table 3. Model 1 includes only the effects of the couple's concurrent relationship and the changes in that relationship. To avoid shared-method variance, the father's report of involvement and the mother's report of the relationship are used. The mother's reports of both quality and conflict have a strong association with father involvement. When mothers report a higher quality relationship, fathers are more involved. Likewise, when mothers report more conflict in their relationship, fathers are also more involved. The latter finding is consistent with research on father involvement after separation, which points out that conflict can be an indication of the level of conflict between the two parents (i.e. Sobolewski & King, 2005). That is, parents who are not in contact with each other, and where the father is not involved, do not have a chance to engage in conflict and their reports of conflict will be correspondingly low. Conversely, those parents where fathers are involved will have more opportunity to engage in conflict. In Model 2, which includes the couple's relationship and children, their parent role beliefs, and their individual characteristics, relationship quality and conflict continue to be the strongest predictors

of father involvement after separation. Interactions between union status and mother's Year 3 quality were not significant, indicating that the effects of relationship quality on father involvement are consistent across union status. Additional analyses (not shown) using mother's report of father involvement revealed a similar pattern.

The patterns of change in fathers' involvement are addressed using multinomial logistic regressions, presented in Table 4. The set of columns on the left represent a comparison of fathers who increased their involvement with those whose involvement remained the same. The corresponding analyses comparing fathers who decreased their involvement and those whose involvement remained the same are presented in the columns on the right. Analysis of change in fathers' involvement across separation indicates that higher relationship quality prior to the separation is associated with a reduced likelihood of decreasing involvement, as compared with no change in involvement. In addition, a decrease in relationship quality across the separation is associated with a greater likelihood of decreasing involvement, compared with no change. This means that fathers are more likely to decrease their involvement across the transition to separation when they have lower quality relationships before the separation and when relationship quality declines across the separation. Relationship quality is marginally associated with increases in involvement, as couples whose relationship quality increases are somewhat less likely to experience an increase in father involvement, compared with no change. Taken together, these results indicate that couples with higher quality relationships prior to separation tend to maintain pre-separation levels of father involvement.

## DISCUSSION

This research provides a first look at the changes in father involvement as unmarried couples separate. Given the high risk of dissolution for unmarried couples, as well as the increasing prevalence of unmarried parenthood, it is imperative to better understand the process of dissolution in these couples, particularly its implications for the couples' children. This study suggests that, prior to dissolution, fathers who eventually separate are just as involved as fathers who remain in stable unions. Both before and after separation, nonresident fathers have the lowest level of involvement. After the union ends, fathers reduce their involvement, with this pattern most prevalent in married couples. About one-fifth of all fathers increase their involvement, moving from levels substantially lower than average to levels substantially higher than average, suggesting that their relationships may have been suppressing their involvement.

The strongest association with both post-dissolution involvement and change in involvement is the quality of the parents' relationship. The better the quality of the relationship, the more involved the father and the more likely he is to stay involved. The quality of the pre-separation relationship is associated with changes across the transition, whereas the level of post-separation involvement is more strongly associated with post-separation relationship quality. Overall, these results indicate that form and quality of the parents' relationship with one another are an important, perhaps the most important, context for father involvement as couples separate. This is supported by both research and theory indicating that father involvement is highly responsive to context, particularly the mother-father relationship (i.e. Doherty, Kouneski, & Erickson, 1998). Fathers' involvement is hindered when they do not reside with their children, and when they do not have a positive relationship with the child's mother. In the latter case, the mother may be gatekeeping, keeping a father who she does not view positively away from her children to protect them or punish him, and/or the father may be withdrawing to avoid the

distress which contact with the mother produces. In either case, the parents could benefit from learning how to engage with one another without conflict and negative behaviors.

Particularly when children are very young and reliant on their parents, the involvement of the nonresident parent is dependent on the resident parent. It is encouraging to realize that many, if not most, separated parents are maintaining or increasing the father's involvement in his child's life in the time just after separation. These results suggest that programs and policies aimed at keeping fathers involved in their children's lives may meet with parents who are willing to encourage father involvement.

## REFERENCES

- Aldous, J., Mulligan, G. M., & Bjarnason, T. (1998). Fathering over time: What makes the Difference? *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, *60*, 809-820.
- Allen, S. M., & Hawkins, A. J. (1999). Maternal gatekeeping: Mothers' beliefs and behaviors that inhibit greater father involvement in family work. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, *61*, 199-212.
- Arditti, J. A. (1995). Noncustodial parents: Emergent issues of diversity and process. *Marriage and Family Review*, *20*, 283-304.
- Arditti, J. A., & Keither, T. Z. (1993). Visitation frequency, child support payment, and the father-child relationship postdivorce. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, *55*, 699-712.
- Belsky, J., Youngblade, L., Rovine, M., & Volling, B. (1991). Patterns of marital change and parent-child interaction. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, *53*, 487-498.
- Buchanan, C. M., Maccoby, E. E., & Dornbusch, S. M. (1996). *Adolescents after divorce*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bulanda, R. E. (2004). Paternal involvement with children: The influence of gender ideologies. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, *66*, 40-45.
- Bumpass, L., & Sweet, J. A. (1989). Children's experience in single-parent families. *Family Planning Perspectives*, *21*, 256-260.
- Carlson, M., & McLanahan, S. (2005). *Strengthening unmarried families: Could enhancing couple relationships also improve parenting?* Center for Research on Child Wellbeing, Columbia University: Working paper # 2005-26-FF.
- Carlson, M. J., & McLanahan, S. S. (2004). Early father involvement in fragile families. In: R. D. Day & M. E. Lamb (Eds.). *Conceptualizing and measuring father involvement* (p. 241-272), Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Carlson, M., McLanahan, S., & Brooks-Gunn, J. (2005). *Unmarried but not absent: Fathers' involvement with children after a nonmarital birth*. Center for Research on Child Wellbeing Working Paper #05-07-FF.
- Carlson, M., McLanahan, S., & England, P. (2004). Union formation in fragile families. *Demography*, *41*, 237-261.
- Coley, R. L., Morris, J. E. (2002). Comparing father and mother reports of father involvement among low-income minority families. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, *64*, 982-997.
- Cooksey, E. C., & Craig, P. H. (1998). Parenting from a distance: The effects of paternal characteristics on contact between nonresidential fathers and their children. *Demography*, *35*, 187-200.
- DeLuccie, M. F. (1995). Mothers as gatekeepers: A model of maternal mediators of father involvement. *The Journal of Genetic Psychology*, *156*, 115-131.
- Demo, D. & Ganong, M. (1994). Divorce. In P. McKenry & S. Price (Eds.), *Families and change: Coping with stressful events* (pp. 197-218).

- Ehrenberg, M. F., Gearing-Small, M., Hunter, M. A., & Small, B. J. (2001). Childcare task division and shared parenting attitudes in dual-earner families with young children. *Family Relations, 50*, p. 143-153.
- Fagan, J. & Barnett, M. (2003). The relationship between maternal gatekeeping, paternal competence, mothers' attitudes about the father role, and father involvement. *Journal of Family Issues, 24*, 1020-1043.
- Fagan, J., Newash, N., & Schloesser, A. (2000). Female caregivers' perceptions of fathers' and significant adult males' involvement with their Head Start children. *Families in Society, 81*, 186-196.
- Fuligni, A. S., & Brooks-Gunn, J. (2004). Measuring mother and father shared caregiving: An analysis using the Panel Study of Income Dynamics – Child Development Supplement. In: R. D. Day & M. E. Lamb (Eds.). *Conceptualizing and measuring father involvement* (p. 341 – 358), Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Furstenberg, F. F., Jr. (1988). Good dads – bad dads: Two faces of fatherhood. In: A. J. Cherlin (Ed.), *The changing American family and public policies* (pp.42-61). Washington, D.C: Urban Institute Press.
- Hughes, F. M., Gordon, K. C., & Gaertner, L. (2004). Predicting spouses' perceptions of their parenting alliance. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 66*, 506-514.
- Insabella, G. M., Williams, T., & Pruett, M. K. (2003). Individual and coparenting differences between divorcing and unmarried fathers: Implications for family court services. *Family Court Review, 41*, 290-306.
- King, V., Harris, K. M., & Heard, H. E. (2004). Racial and ethnic diversity in nonresident father involvement. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 66*, 1-21.
- Lamb, M. E. (1986). The changing roles of fathers. In M.E. Lamb (Ed.), *The father's role: An applied perspective* (pp. 3-27). New York: Wiley.
- Lamb, M., Pleck, J., Charnov, E., & Levine, J. (1987). A biosocial perspective on paternal behavior and involvement. Pp. 111-142 in *Parenting across the Life Span: Biosocial Dimensions*, J. Lancaster, J. Altmann, A. Rossi, & L. Sherrod (Eds.). New York, NY: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Maccoby, E. E., Depner, C. E., & Mnookin, R. H. (1990). Coparenting in the second year after divorce. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 52*, 141-155.
- Madden-Derdich, D. A. & Leonard, S. A.. (2000). Parental role identity and fathers' involvement in coparental interaction after divorce: Fathers' perspectives. *Family Relations, 49*, 311-318.
- Manning, W. D., & Smock, P. J. (1999). New families and nonresident father-child visitation. *Social Forces, 78*, 87-116.
- Marsiglio, W., Amato, P., Day, R., & Lamb, M. (2000). Scholarship of fatherhood in the 1990s and beyond. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 62*, 1173-1191.
- McBride, B. A., & Rane, T. R. (1998). Parenting alliance as a predictor of father involvement: An exploratory study. *Family Relations, 47*, 229-236.

- McBride, B. A., Brown, G. L., Bost, K. K., Shin, N., Vaughn, B., & Korth, Byran. (2005). Paternal identity, maternal gatekeeping, and father involvement. *Family Relations, 54*, 360-372.
- McBride, B. A., Brown, G. L., Bost, K. K., Shin, N., Vaughn, B., & Korth, B. (2005). Paternal identity, maternal gatekeeping, and father involvement. *Family Relations, 54*, 360-372.
- Seltzer, J. A. (1991). Relationships between fathers and children who live apart: The father's role after separation. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 53*, 79-101.
- Smock, P. J. (2000). Cohabitation in the United States: An appraisal of research themes, findings, and implications. *Annual Review of Sociology, 26*, 1-20.
- Sobolewski, J. M., & King, V. (2005). The importance of the coparental relationship for nonresident fathers' ties to children. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 67*, 1196-1212.
- Teachman, J. D., Tedrow, L. M., & Crowder, K. (2000). The changing demography of America's families. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 62*, 1234-1246.
- Whiteside, M. F., & Becker, B. J. (2000). Parental factors and the young child's postdivorce adjustment: A meta-analysis with implications for parenting arrangements. *Journal of Family Psychology, 14*, 5-26.
- Woodworth, S., Belsky, J., & Crnic, K. (1996). The determinants of fathering during the child's second and third year of life: A developmental analysis. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 58*, 679-692.

Table 1: Father involvement at Year 1 and change in involvement for stable and separating couples

	Married		Cohabiting		Nonresident	
	Stable	Separating	Stable	Separating	Stable	Separating
Involvement at Year 1	4.63	4.52	4.55	4.32 *	3.87	3.85
(SD)	1.61	1.78	1.6	1.83	1.76	1.89
Change from Year 1 to Year 3	-0.31	-0.89 *	-0.29	-0.86 *	0.11	-0.79 *
(SD)	1.78	1.91	1.83	2.28	2.04	2.11
<i>N</i>	1,006	97	562	247	132	93
%	93	7	79	21	50	50

Note: 2,137 respondents in Fragile Families study; union status is at Year 1, union stability is between Year 1 and Year 3. Involvement is reported by fathers.

\* *t*-test finds difference between stable and separated at  $p < 0.05$  or less.

Table 2: Father involvement at Years 1 and 3 and change in involvement for separating couples

	Married	Cohabiting	Nonresident	
Involvement at Year 1	4.52	4.32	3.85	* M, C > N
(SD)	1.78	1.83	1.89	
Involvement at Year 3	3.64	3.45	3.05	* M > N
(SD)	2.02	2.10	2.07	
Change in involvement				
Mean change	-0.89	-0.86	-0.79	
(SD)	1.91	2.28	2.11	
Mean decrease	-2.24	-2.89	-2.46	
(SD)	1.15	1.34	1.33	
Mean increase	2.08	2.10	2.20	
(SD)	0.82	1.20	1.35	
% no change	16	35	39	
% decreasing	64	43	40	
% increasing	20	21	21	
Year 1 involvement by change				
No change	4.48	4.25	3.16	
(SD)	1.93	1.56	1.87	
Decreasing	4.93	4.91	4.55	
(SD)	1.45	1.27	1.68	
Increasing	3.41	3.18	3.31	
(SD)	1.43	1.55	1.89	
Year 3 involvement by change				
No change	4.23	4.21	3.06	
(SD)	1.96	1.58	1.81	
Decreasing	2.69	2.02	2.09	
(SD)	1.65	1.44	1.64	
Increasing	5.49	5.28	5.52	
(SD)	1.45	1.43	1.42	
<i>N</i>	97	247	93	
%	47	32	21	

Note: Note: Fragile Families study, 437 couples who ended their relationship between the 1-year and 3-year interviews. Involvement is reported by fathers.

\* *t*-test finds difference at  $p < 0.05$  or less (tests for Year 1, Year 3, and mean change).

Table 3: OLS regression models of fathers' Year 3 involvement

	Model 1	Model 2
Union Status at Year 1 (vs. Married)		
Cohabiting	-0.26	-0.11
Nonresident	-0.55 *	-0.45
Relationship Quality		
Year 3	0.43 ***	0.42 ***
Increase (vs. consistent)	-0.53	-0.44
Decrease (vs. consistent)	0.06	0.00
Relationship Conflict		
Year 3	0.30 *	0.27 *
Increase (vs. consistent)	-0.42	-0.32
Decrease (vs. consistent)	0.46	0.34
Relationship Change		
Length		0.04
Change between birth & Year 1		0.07
Relationship beliefs		
Division of labor		0.14
Father caregiving		0.06
Children		
Child is boy		0.07
First child together		0.12
Mother has other children		0.19
Father has other children		-0.36
Ethnicity of father (vs. White)		
Black		0.03
Hispanic		0.07
Other		-0.62
Different from mother		0.32
Immigrant status of father		
Father immigrant		-0.65
Different from mother		0.11
Age		
Father age		0.01
Different from mother		-0.18
Education		
Father education		0.06
Different from mother		-0.12
Father background		
Own father's involvement		0.10
Health		-0.06
Drug/alcohol problem		-0.12
Employment (vs. both full-time)		
Father full, mother part		-0.16
Father full, mother not		0.14
Father not, mother employed		0.20
Neither employed		-0.05
Intercept	1.69 *	0.04
R <sup>2</sup>	0.07	0.11

Note: Fragile Families study, 437 couples who ended their relationship between the 1-year and 3-year interviews; analyses control for father's participation in Year 3 interview. \*  $p < 0.05$  \*\*  $p < 0.01$  \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

Table 4: Multinomial logistic regression models for change in involvement from Year 1 to Year 3

	Increase in involvement vs. no change				Decrease in involvement vs. no change			
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 1		Model 2	
	Parameter	Estimate SE	Parameter	Estimate SE	Parameter	Estimate SE	Parameter	Estimate SE
Union Status at Year 1								
Cohabiting	-0.04	0.36	0.00	0.40	-0.32	0.28	-0.42	0.32
Nonresident	-0.17	0.43	-0.32	0.54	-0.31	0.34	-0.58	0.43
Relationship Quality								
Year 1	-0.11	0.17	-0.07	0.18	-0.27	0.14*	-0.32	0.15*
Increase (vs. consistent)	-0.77	0.50	-0.94	0.53 <sup>^</sup>	-0.12	0.39	-0.26	0.41
Decrease (vs. consistent)	-0.05	0.31	-0.16	0.34	0.60	0.27*	0.59	0.29*
Relationship Conflict								
Year 1	0.08	0.19	0.08	0.21	0.08	0.16	0.07	0.17
Increase (vs. consistent)	-0.10	0.34	0.01	0.36	0.17	0.26	0.20	0.28
Decrease (vs. consistent)	0.37	0.38	0.43	0.41	-0.14	0.34	-0.20	0.36
Relationship Change								
Length			0.01	0.04			0.04	0.04
Change between birth & Year 1			-0.09	0.36			-0.26	0.29
Relationship beliefs								
Division of labor			-0.28	0.21			-0.24	0.17
Father caregiving			0.83	0.46 <sup>^</sup>			0.29	0.41
Children								
Child is boy			0.45	0.30			-0.12	0.24
First child together			0.18	0.34			0.49	0.28 <sup>^</sup>
Mother has other children			-0.46	0.35			-0.65	0.29*
Father has other children			-0.15	0.37			-0.05	0.29
Ethnicity of father (vs. White)								
Black			0.85	0.50 <sup>^</sup>			0.05	0.39
Hispanic			0.22	0.57			0.03	0.42
Other			0.48	1.11			1.55	0.79*
Different from mother			-0.12	0.44			-0.44	0.36
Immigrant status of father								
Father immigrant			-0.28	0.58			-0.28	0.43
Different from mother			-0.07	0.72			0.50	0.51
Age								
Father age			0.05	0.03			-0.01	0.02
Different from mother			-0.42	0.41			0.39	0.31
Education								
Father education			0.05	0.09			-0.06	0.07
Different from mother			-0.05	0.48			0.31	0.37
Father background								
Own father's involvement			0.07	0.16			0.10	0.13
Health			-0.22	0.22			-0.06	0.19
Drug/alcohol problem			0.09	0.59			-0.54	0.51
Employment (vs. both full-time)								
Father full, mother part			-0.25	0.56			-0.23	0.43
Father full, mother not			-0.22	0.44			-0.35	0.34
Father not, mother employed			0.10	0.45			-0.20	0.37
Neither employed			0.29	0.48			0.19	0.40
Intercept	-0.04	0.90	-2.17	1.92	0.94	0.75	2.35	1.56
Likelihood ratio chi-square	436		826		436		826	

Note: Fragile Families study, 437 couples who ended their relationship between the 1-year and 3-year interviews; analyses control for father's participation in Year 3 interview. \*  $p < 0.05$  \*\*  $p < 0.01$  \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$