Phasing Out Fathers: Does Nonresidential Father Involvement Decline More When Mothers Have a New Partner?

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Abstract

This paper uses the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study to examine paternal involvement around the child's third birthday and changes in paternal involvement over time. Although prior studies have considered the role of new paternal relationships in explaining low levels of paternal involvement, this study examines the effect of new maternal relationships and how the presence of a new potential father-figure may contribute to nonresidential fathers' withdrawal from children's lives by leading to role confusion. I find that fathers are less likely to have seen their child in the last month and, if they have seen them, to have seen them less frequently when mothers have a new romantic partner at the third follow-up. Moreover, a mother who was unpartnered at the first follow-up but partnered at the second follow-up marginally increases the odds that fathers who had seen their children initially stopped doing so, while mothers who were stably partnered at both follow-ups are particularly likely to report the father had not seen the child at either follow-up. These effects are independent of the father's relationship status, suggesting that paternal involvement is indeed sensitive to changes in maternal relationships.

Introduction

The decline in paternal involvement over time among nonresidential fathers has been well documented. Yet far less attention has been paid to the *causes* of declining paternal involvement. Although there are some fathers who maintain frequent contact with their children when the relationship with the child's mother is no longer intact, the more common trend among nonresident fathers seems to be a rather quick withdrawal from children's lives (Furstenberg, Nord, Peterson, and Zill 1983; Mott 1990; Cherlin and Furstenberg 1991; Furstenberg 1995). A potential explanation – and one that has been largely unexplored – is that mothers form new relationships, which may fundamentally change the role of nonresidential fathers. When mothers form new relationships, their new partners may interact with their children far more than biological but nonresidential fathers, and when this occurs, nonresidential fathers may feel threatened or unsure of their status. Moreover, new relationships can be rather time-intensive, which may make mothers less willing to accommodate nonresidential fathers' time requests for visitation, especially when such requests may interfere with the mothers' own plans. The current study builds on prior work on nonresidential father involvement, examining not only involvement among nonresidential fathers at a point in time but examining the change over time in father involvement, and how it relates to changes in mother's relationship over time.

It is worth noting that theories exist regarding the effects of *father's* new relationships and new children when attempting to explain the causes of declining paternal involvement over time. Furstenberg, Nord, Petersen, and Zill (1983) suggested that men's involvement with their nonresident children declines when they form new relationships and especially when they have new children. In this argument, men's parental obligations are largely based on residence, so

that men tend to concentrate resources in their current household (Furstenberg and Cherlin 1991; Seltzer 1991; Furstenberg 1995). There is some evidence to support this contention, though it appears the presence of children in a man's household only diverts time and resources away from nonresident biological children if the residential children are biological rather than stepchildren (Manning and Smock 2000; Guzzo 2006). However, although research had addressed the role of men's new relationships in declining levels of paternal involvement, attention to mother's new relationships and how they may alter the nonresident father-child relationship is lacking. Although mothers appear to face more disadvantages in forming new relationships than fathers (Lichter, Graefe, & Brown 2003; Stewart, Manning, and Smock 2003), largely due to the presence of coresidential children, many mothers are nonetheless still looking for a new romantic partner. In forming a new relationship, mothers may be influencing nonresidential fathers' views of their parenting role, in part because of the lack of clear definitions of *who* are fathers and what fathers' duties are.

Father's Role Ambiguity

What do fathers do? The role of mother is fairly well defined, but for fathers, there exists far greater uncertainty about what exactly fathers are to do with their children and how they should and do contribute to their children's upbringing. For instance, there are discrepancies between ideals of fatherhood and the ways that fatherhood is enacted (LaRossa 1988; Lamb 2000). Moreover, the increasing diversity of family life and the recognition of biological versus social fathers means there is no singular definition of fatherhood (Palkovitz 2002). As such, men must construct their own definition of fatherhood in light of their personal and relationship characteristics. One factor that likely influences fathering behavior is the nature and strength of

the parental relationship. In many ways, it seems that men take their cues about parenting from the children's mother, since mothers tend to be the primary caretakers, especially when children are young. When parents live together, paternal involvement is continuously negotiated, as mothers might ask or direct fathers to do certain childrearing tasks or engage in certain activities (which is not to say that fathers do not independently interact with their children as well). But when parents are no longer together, men must learn to define their relationship with their children in different ways because they usually lack direct access to their children (since they generally do not have custody) and lack the mediating or directive influence of mothers. When mothers have custody of children, they are even more openly and obviously taking on primary parenting roles than when parents live together, definitively relegating fathers to a secondary position and forcing them to find other ways to participate in fathering. The lack of clear guidelines for what fathers should do for their children in general – but particularly for noncustodial fathers – contributes, I believe, to the decline in paternal involvement over time. When fathers are unsure of how to participate in their children's lives, of whether their efforts are appreciated, and of whether they are actually contributing to children's wellbeing, they may withdraw from their children's lives.

I argue that this may especially be the case when mothers form new relationships. Mothers play a gatekeeper role, facilitating or preventing access to children. And because mothers are far more likely to live with their children, any relationship they form likely exposures their children to a new male figure, one who may or may not engage in father-like activities. The existence of a potential father-figure, particularly one who may see the children

frequently and may even engage in parenting activities, such as playing games or reading books, may create role confusion for nonresident biological fathers.

In response to a mother's new partner, a father's paternal involvement may change. Some fathers may feel threatened by the existence of a new potential father-figure, feeling that their position as father is being usurped and that they are being replaced. As a result, they may withdraw from the child's life, feeling that they are becoming unnecessary or that their contributions are somehow redundant. This may especially be the case when a mother's new partner is coresidential. Even though research has fairly conclusively demonstrated that stepfathers do not participate in their stepchildren's lives to the same extent as biological fathers (Cherlin 1992), coresidential partners inevitably have more contact and day-to-day involvement than nonresidential biological fathers. Given that many nonresidential fathers engage in limited and fairly recreational activities with their children (Stewart 1999), any involvement with a stepparent (even one that is cohabiting but not married to the child's mother) may cause a father to question what he can contribute beyond what the stepparent does. More specifically, engagement with the child by mothers' new partners may affect paternal involvement – when a new partner not only spends time with a child but actually gets involved with the child (reading stories, playing games, watching a child while a mother is not present), fathers may reduce their involvement even more. This reduction might be strongest among those who have the weakest commitment to their child, such as those who never lived with the child or who were ambivalent about becoming fathers.

The preponderance of evidence on paternal involvement is drawn from studies of separated and divorced fathers (Coley 2001), and it is less clear if the decline in paternal

involvement is the same among unmarried fathers. Although about 40% of nonmarital births are to cohabiting couples, where both parents live with the child after the birth, when parental relationships are not coresidential, paternal involvement at birth may vary widely. In instances where there is little paternal involvement at birth, which may be the case for births that occur to parents who are not romantically involved, paternal involvement may change little over time; when paternal involvement is high, which may be more likely to occur when the parents are still romantically involved, there is more room for decline. Certainly, exposure to a new maternal relationship is higher among those who were unmarried at birth, since unmarried parents have much higher instability than married parents (Carlson, McLanahan, and England 2004; Osborne 2005). This may also translate into an earlier paternal withdrawal, as the parental relationship may break up sooner than if parents had been married.

Thus, the stronger the initial parental relationship, the more likely it is that the excitement and planning for the child was shared by both parents. If the parents were married at birth and their relationship ends, there might be a formal child support and visitation agreement. Moreover, a coresidential relationship means that fathers at some point lived with their children. Coresidence with a child, for any duration, might facilitate the formation of strong bonds which may encourage continued involvement even after the relationship ends. Research supports the association between relationship status at birth and subsequent father involvement. Fathers who were cohabiting at birth are more involved later relative to those who were not living with the mother at the time of birth (Landale and Oropesa 2001; Carlson; McLanahan, and Brooks-Gunn 2005). Relationship quality can affect paternal involvement as well – when parents have a high-conflict relationship, even after the demise of the union, it can impede and hamper high

levels of paternal involvement. And conversely, even when parents are no longer romantically involved, parents who got along well prior to union dissolution may be better able to agree upon visitation and involvement. The relationship quality effect is appears to be independent of relationship status for unmarried parents; high-conflict parental relationships discourage father involvement (Seltzer 1991; Furstenberg 1995), while more harmonious relationships encourage father involvement (Sobolewski and King 2005; Carlson, McLanahan, & Brooks-Gunn 2005; Carlson and McLanahan 2006).

A related possibility concerns the relationship between mothers and fathers. Even when a relationship ends, the existence of a prior romantic relationship often creates conflicting and complex feelings between former partners. When a mother forms a new romantic relationship, fathers may feel uncomfortable with the situation and avoid contact with the mother and, by default, the child. Again, this may be especially the case when a new partner is coresidential, since this may mean a father might come in direct contact with his ex-partner's new partner in picking up or dropping off (or even calling) the child. If fathers try to interfere (or are perceived as interfering, at least) in a mother's new relationship (even if solely out of concern for their children), mothers (acting as gatekeepers for accessing children) may restrict a father's ability to see his child in retaliation.

Mother's new relationships may impact paternal involvement in another way as well. New relationships tend to be rather time-intensive, and the time needs of the new relationship may interfere with the time demands made by nonresidential fathers. When fathers request that mothers keep certain dates or times open and these days conflict with activities mothers may have planned with their new partners (and the mother's children, as mothers try to incorporate

their new partners more fully into their own and their children's lives), mothers may give scheduling preference to their new relationships rather than their child's biological father, particularly if the mothers and fathers have a contentious relationship. It is also possible, though, that mothers with new partners may welcome opportunities for the child to spend time with the father if it gives mothers "alone time" with their new partner.

Alternatively, fathers may increase their paternal involvement when mothers have a new partner. Some men may feel threatened as fathers and decide to more fully participate in their children's life so as not to be replaced by the mother's new partner. These may be men who are particularly committed to being active and involved fathers. However, given that father involvement generally declines for all fathers, it seems fairly unlikely that most men who face complicating factors and/or barriers to active fathering will increase their involvement with their nonresidential children.

The effect of maternal relationship status on paternal involvement may depend on the stability of a new relationship and when it began. When mothers form new relationships very early in a child's life, new fathers may feel particularly disenfranchised and unsure of their role. If an early maternal relationship ends, it may provide fathers with an opportunity to re-enter a child's life and play a paternal role. If an early maternal relationship remains intact over time, it seems probable that the mother's partner plays a sizeable role in the child's life, and fathers may have little involvement throughout the child's life.

Father's socioeconomic characteristics can have an effect on paternal involvement; fathers who have low levels of education or have a history of incarceration may feel they have less to contribute to their children. Despite increased recognition of the nonmonetary value of

fathers, the notion of fathers as breadwinners remains strong (Gerson 1993). Studies generally show that fathers with higher socioeconomic status are more likely to be involved with their children, even when they do not live together (Furstenberg et al 1983; Seltzer, Schaeffer, and Charng 1989; Seltzer 1991; King, Harris, and Heard 2004). Mothers, acting as gatekeepers, may also control access to children based on their perception of father's suitability as a parent and role model. For instance, mothers may limit contact with fathers who might be a bad influence on the child, as may be the case when fathers are engaged in illegal activities or have a history of incarceration.

Obligations to other children might also affect paternal involvement. Men who have children with other partners might be spreading themselves thinly by parenting across multiple households, and their obstacles in being highly involved with any of their children might discourage active involvement. Conversely, it may that men who have children by multiple women are precisely those men who make little or no investment in their children; perhaps what makes it possible to have children with multiple partners is the lack of involvement with children. Women who have children with multiple partners might also be inadvertently discouraging involvement from the father of one/some of their children if men feel that *their* children might be benefiting from other fathers' participation, as a sort of "free-rider" problem. Evidence suggests that both maternal and paternal multipartnered fertility, but especially paternal multipartnered fertility, discourages paternal involvement (Mincy and Huang 2002).

Finally, characteristics of the birth and the child may also play a role. There is some suggestion that fathers bond more strongly with male children, since they might feel that have more in common or will have more shared activities as children age with sons than daughters.

Studies have documented that fathers of boys tend to be more involved with their children than fathers of girls (Morgan, Lye, and Condran 1988; Yeung, Sandberg, Davis-Kean, and Hofferth 2001). As such, paternal involvement might be higher for sons than daughters and might decline less over time. Another factor that might be important is the wantedness of the child. If the pregnancy was unplanned, men may not have wanted to be fathers or felt they were unready to take on the responsibilities of fatherhood, which may discourage paternal involvement.

Data and Methods

The analyses use data from the first three waves of the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study (Fragile Families). Fragile Families follows a birth cohort of nearly 5,000 children (and their parents) from birth (in 1998-2000) through age 5 in 20 major U.S. cities. Parents were interviewed at birth and again when the child is approximately one, three, and five years old. The study includes an over-sample of unmarried parents, and when the data is weighted, it is representative of births with U.S. cities with populations of 200,000 or more. At each interview stage, efforts were made to interview both mothers and fathers. At birth, 75% of fathers were interviewed overall, but this hides variation by relationship status at birth: 90% of cohabiting fathers were interviewed but only 38% of fathers who were not romantically involved were interviewed. The analyses here focus on father involvement among couples who were not romantically involved at both the first and second follow-up waves. This restriction is made so as to ensure that any changes in paternal involvement are not related to the demise of the parental relationship; by looking at fathers who were continuously not involved with the mother between the child's 1st and 3rd birthdays, changes in paternal involvement cannot be linked to a falling out with the mother that is taken out on the child. The sample is also restricted to men

who were not in jail at either follow-up and who did not have custody but were aware of the child. Unfortunately, less than half of these fathers were interviewed at the second follow-up. As such, the data analyzed here comes from the mother's reports of father involvement.

The analyses use three measures of paternal involvement. The first measure is a dichotomous indicator of whether the father has seen the child in the thirty days prior to interview. The second measure indicates the number of days in the past month (ranging from 0-30). For these measures, sample size is 843. The third measure is the mean number of days in the past week that the father engaged in four activities with the child: singing, playing with toys, telling stories, and reading. The last measure was not asked of two of the twenty cities and thus has a smaller sample size (n=642). Sample characteristics are detailed in Appendix A.

Since most prior research has examined absolute levels of paternal involvement (rather than the factors that contribute to change over time), the analytical approach is to first examine absolute levels of paternal involvement at the third wave of data collection (when the children are three), using logistic regression for whether the father has seen the child at all and OLS regression for the number of days of visitation and the mean number of days of engaging in activities, controlling for a number of independent variables (discussed below). The second half of the analysis focuses on change in paternal involvement between the first and second follow-ups using first-difference regression models, focusing on the change in the mother's relationship status between follow-ups. The analyses use multinomial logistic regression to examine change over time in visitation, where the dependent variable is defined as did not see the child in the month prior to interview at either follow-up, saw the child at the first follow-up but not the second, did not see the child at the first follow-up but saw the child at the second, and saw the

child in the month preceding both follow-ups (omitted). Two additional analyses use OLS regression to examine the change in frequency of visitation and the change in the number of days the father engaged in activities. Sample sizes are slightly smaller for the change models (n=822 for frequency of visitation models and 587 for the engagement model), as there is a need for information on the measures of paternal involvement at both waves.

The key independent variable for the models of involvement at the second follow-up is whether the mother has a new partner, measured dichotomously. A similar dichotomous variable is also included indicating whether fathers had a new partner at the second follow-up. For the change models, the key independent variable has five categories to measure how relationship status has changed between follow-ups: mother has no new partner at either follow-up (omitted), mother had a new partner at the first follow-up but not at the second follow-up, mother did not have a new partner at the first follow-up but has a new partner at the second follow-up, mother has the same new partner at both follow-ups, and mother has new, different partners at both follow-up. Since there is no direct question on whether a new partner is the same at both follow-ups, this is derived from the length of the relationship; if at the second follow-up, the relationship length predates the first follow-up, it is assumed to be the same partner. Father's relationship status change is defined as mother is not aware of any new relationship (omitted), father had a new partner at the first follow-up but not at the second follow-up, father did not have a new partner at the first follow-up but has a new partner at the second follow-up, and father has a new partner at both follow-ups but unknown if this is the same partner. It should be noted that it is possible for both mothers and fathers to have a new partner between follow-ups that would not be captured in the data, which only collects partnership information at the time of the survey.

The other independent variables for the level of involvement analysis at the second follow-up two relationship measures at baseline: relationship status (married, cohabiting, visiting, friends, and not involved) and relationship quality (a scaled measure, alpha=0.674, of partner supportiveness). It is expected that the stronger the parental relationship, the higher paternal involvement will be and the smaller the decline between follow-ups. There are several measures of both mother's and father's socioeconomic characteristics (all reported by the mother): education, age, and race, all measured at baseline.[1] Additionally, there is a dichotomous indicator of whether the father had ever suggested that the mother should have an abortion (asked of mothers at baseline), which acts as a proxy for wantedness; men who did not want the child might be less inclined to be involved fathers. Several more independent variables from the mother's reports at the second and third follow-ups are included: whether the father had ever been in incarcerated, whether the father had ever had drug or alcohol problems, whether the father had ever had health issues, and whether the father had children by other women. There is also an indicator of whether the mother had children by other men and the child's gender.

Bivariate Association

Table 1 shows the distribution of maternal and paternal relationship status and the bivariate association between the measures of father involvement and maternal and paternal relationship status. About 40% of mothers were unpartnered at both waves. 10% had a new partner at the first follow-up but were no longer partnered by the second follow-up, while over a fifth of mothers (22.4%) had no partner at the first follow-up but were partnered at the second follow-up. And additional fifth of mothers had partners at both waves, split equally between

[1] Mother's and father's characteristics are only weakly correlated; age was correlated at (0.71), race/ethnicity (0.53),

those whose partners were the same at both waves and those who had new partners at each wave. Based on mothers' reports, fathers were less likely to have formed new relationships, though it is possible that mothers simply did not know about new partners. Nearly 60% of mothers reported that they were not aware of any new paternal romantic relationships at either wave. About 18% of fathers were reported to have had a partner at the first follow-up but not at the second, while just 8% were unpartnered at the first follow-up and partnered at the second. 16% of mothers reported that the fathers had partners at both follow-ups, though it is unknown whether those partners were the same.

Of couples who were not romantically involved at both follow-ups, over one-fourth of fathers were reported by mothers as not seeing their child at either wave, with an additional 17% having visited the child when the child was about one year old but not longer visiting around the time of the child's third birthday. About 9% of mothers reported that fathers saw their child around their third birthday but had not seen the child at the first birthday. 45% of fathers were reported as having seen the focal child at both follow-ups. As hypothesized, maternal relationship status does matter – when mothers were unpartnered at the child's first birthday but had a new partner by the time the child was three, a disproportionately high number of fathers (22.3%) ceased seeing their child between follow-ups, though these fathers were also over-represented among those who saw their children at both waves. Fathers were least likely to see their children at both waves when the mother was in a stable relationship over time, suggesting that these fathers might have become disengaged very early on in the child's life. Conversely, more fathers began seeing their child between waves when the mother's early relationship had

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and education (0.40).

ended (12.2%). Father's relationships also appear to matter, though – fathers were least likely to have not seen their child at either wave if they had a new partner at first follow-up, regardless of whether they were still partnered at the second follow-up (34.9%) or not (35.8%). Conversely, men who did not have partners at the first follow-up (or least the mothers were not aware of a new partner) were most likely to have seen their child at both waves. This suggests that men who form new romantic relationship early in their child's life disengage from parenting very early on. However, there is also evidence that the formation of a new relationship between waves also negatively impacts father involvement: the group of fathers most likely to have seen their child at age 1 but not at age 3 were those who were unpartnered at the first follow-up but had a new partner at the second follow-up.

-- Table 1 here --

The mean number of days of visitation reported by mothers in the month prior to the second follow-up for all fathers was 5.5 days. Paternal visitation was lowest when either mothers (3.1 days) or fathers (2.5 days) had a stable relationship. Between the child's first and third birthdays, the frequency of visitation declined 1.9 days. As hypothesized, the decline was largest when the mothers who were unpartnered at the first follow-up had a new partner at the second follow-up (3.3 days); the decline was also largest among fathers who were unpartnered at the child's first birthday had a new partner by the child's third birthday (2.3 days), though the decline for fathers for whom mothers were not aware of a new relationship was also quite high (2.2 days). The mean number of days that the father engaged in activities with the child in the week prior to the second follow-up was 0.89 days; as with the frequency of visitation, it was lowest among when the mother had a stable partner (0.63 days) or formed a new relationship

(0.85 days); similarly, engagement was lowest when fathers were in a relationship at both follow-ups (0.32 days) or formed a new relationship by the child's third birthday (0.72 days). The mean decline between F1 and F2 was 0.08 days, and again, the decline is biggest when the mother formed a new relationship at 0.27 days; the formation of a new union among fathers has a much smaller effect (a decline of 0.09). It is also worth noting that father engagement actually increased when either the mother's (-0.11) or father's (-0.28) early relationship ended or when the mother was in a stable relationship (-0.23); despite the increase for the latter group, engagement and visitation remains very low and suggests that for this group, it is very easy to increase over time without creating a large absolute increase. Overall, it appears that the formation of both maternal and paternal romantic relationships negatively affects father involvement.

Multivariate Results

Table 2 shows the results of multivariate models of paternal involvement at the third follow-up. The first model uses logistic regression and presents the odds ratios of whether the mother reports the father had seen the child at all during the month prior to the interview, and the second model and third models use OLS regression to examine frequency of visitation in the past month and frequency of engaging in activities in the week prior to the interview, respectively. Looking at the dichotomous indicator of any visitation first, it is clear that the structure of the initial parental relationship at birth is important. Compared to those who were not romantically involved at birth, fathers in a romantic relationship are much more likely to have visited their child in the month prior to the interview. In analyses not shown here, there are no differences in the likelihood of visitation for married or cohabiting fathers, but fathers who

were cohabiting at birth were more likely to have had some visitation in the past month compared to those who were not in coresidential relationship at birth.

-- Table 2 here --

Few socioeconomic or demographic factors play a role, though African American mothers were twice as likely as white mothers to report the father visited the child in the month prior to the interview, while mothers who reported that the father was Hispanic reported that the father was about half as likely to have visited the child, though this is only marginally significant. Fathers with a drug or alcohol problem are about half as likely to have seen their child in the month prior to the interview, which may reflect either inability or lack of desire to see the child on the father's part or, alternatively, may reflect gatekeeping on the part of the mother. Wantedness (proxied by whether the father suggested an abortion) and child gender are unrelated to whether fathers saw their children at all.

Maternal and paternal family measures, however, are important. Fathers who had at least one child with another partner are 0.65 times as likely to have seen their child in the past month. Whether the father had a new partner by the child's third birthday is insignificant. But as hypothesized, mother's partnership status does matter. When mothers have a new relationship, fathers are 0.62 times as likely to have seen their child in the month prior to the second follow-up compared to mothers who were unpartnered.

Turning now to the frequency of visitation and engagement in activities, similar results emerge. The frequency of visitation and participation in activities in highest among fathers who were romantically involved at birth, especially those who were living with the mother. Black mothers also reported that fathers visited and engaged with children more frequently. Somewhat

surprisingly, highly educated mothers reported lower frequency of visitation among the fathers of their children. Father's behavior characteristics are important. Consistent with the lower likelihood of visitation overall, fathers with drug or alcohol problems have lower frequencies of visitation and engagement. However, we also see that fathers with health problems are *more* involved with their children. This may arise because health problems limit the ability of fathers to maintain full-time jobs, providing them with more time to care for children. They may take on childcare duties when the mother is working or otherwise busy. Depending on the nature of the health problems, it may also increase the importance of family, as those with serious illnesses often reflect upon what it truly important to them. Although child gender was unimportant in the overall visitation model, it does appear to impact the frequency with which fathers interact with their children. Fathers with daughters are less frequently involved with their children than fathers with sons. Since the type of activities that children engage in at this age are generally not yet gender-stratified (i.e., children are not yet playing organized sports), this may mean that fathers are simply less sure of what to do with daughters than they are with sons, so while they continue to be involved in their daughter's lives, they do so less frequently.

Finally, some aspects of maternal and paternal relationships are important. Father's multipartnered fertility does not significantly impact the frequency of visitation, but it does reduce the frequency of engaging in activities, perhaps reflecting a simple lack of time to actively participate as men parent across multiple households. The presence of a new maternal relationship continue to have a negative impact on visitation, although it does not significantly reduce engagement in activities. Paternal relationship status is also important. While men who had a new partner by the child's third birthday were no less likely to have seen their child at all

in the past month, they do see their child and engage in activities less frequently. This suggests that men in new relationships might have obligations to their new relationships that negatively impact the amount of time they have to spend with their children from prior relationships.

Tables 3 and 4 examine change between the first and second follow-ups in paternal involvement. In looking at overall involvement, the analyses use multinomial regression, where the dependent variable is defined as stably involved (saw child at both follow-ups – the omitted category), stably not involved (saw child at neither follow-up), declining involvement (saw the child at the first follow-up but not the second), or increasing involvement (did not see the child at the first follow-up but did at the second). As with absolute levels of involvement, relationship status at baseline is important, with those in romantic relationships significantly less likely to have not seen their child at either wave compared to seeing their child at both waves. However, those in nonmarital romantic relationships are also more likely to have experienced a decline in involvement between waves compared to those who were not involved. This is simply because they were more likely have seen their child at the first follow-up (not shown) and so had more of an opportunity to withdraw, so to speak.

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Turning now to socioeconomic and demographic characteristics, black mothers are nearly 70% less likely than white mothers to report that fathers did not see their child at either follow-up, while Hispanic and "other" fathers are more likely than white fathers to not see their child at either follow-up, and mothers report that Hispanic fathers are also marginally more likely than white fathers to have seen their child around the time of the child's first birthday but not at the child's third birthday. Fathers who had ever been incarcerated by the child's third birthday fall

into the category of declining paternal involvement, as they are 1.6 times as likely to have seen their child at the first follow-up but not by the second follow-up. And fathers with a drug or alcohol problem are significantly more likely to have any pattern of visitation other than stable visitation at both waves. Fathers of daughters are also more likely to have seen their child at the first follow-up but not at the second, again suggesting that fathers withdraw more from their daughters' lives than their sons' lives.

Mother's multipartnered fertility has an unexpected result, in that women with multipartnered fertility are more likely to report that fathers became *more* involved over time. Since the indicator does not discern between births to other men before or after the focal child's birth, it is possible that this could be capturing new births, where the mother relies upon the focal child's father more to take care of the focal child as she cares for the child's new sibling. Father's multipartnered fertility is also important but works largely in the expected direction, with having children with other mothers increasing the odds of not seeing the child at either wave by 80% and of seeing the child at the first follow-up but not seeing him or her at the second follow-up by 50% relative to seeing the child at both waves.

Maternal relationship status is also important. Mothers who were stably partnered at both waves are nearly 4 times as likely to report that the father was stably not involved, indicating that an early, strong maternal relationship might indeed discourage participation from biological fathers. We also see that a stable maternal relationship marginally increases the odds of both withdrawing from the child's life and (re-)entering the child's life, and although these effects are somewhat contradictory, they also suggest substantial confusion and ambiguity about paternal responsibilities and the paternal role when mothers have a new partner who may be acting as a

social father. When mothers who did not have a new partner at the first follow-up have one at the second follow-up, fathers are also about 1.6 times as likely to have withdrawn from the child's life, as expected (though this is only marginally significant). It is also worth noting that no indicators of paternal relationship status are significantly linked to change in whether the father visited the child at all.

Table 4 shows the results from change models of the frequency of visitation and engagement in activities between the first and second follow-ups, using OLS regression, and there are relatively few significant covariates. For the change in frequency of visitation, the only variable significant at $p \leq 0.05$ is one of the indicators of maternal relationship – when mothers had a new partner at the first follow-up but not at the second follow-up, the change in visitation between follow-ups is actually positive. That is, when mothers' relationships dissolve, fathers increase their visitation, supporting the argument here that nonresidential fathers' roles and responsibilities are so vague that they are responsive to changes in the presence of other potential father figures. Maternal relationship status is unimportant for change in the frequency of engaging in activities. And as with the change in overall visitation between follow-ups, paternal relationship status is unrelated to changes in frequency over time.

Discussion

With high and consistently rising rates of nonmarital fertility, combined with a fairly high divorce rates, many parental relationships will not remain intact. As such, many parents will be forming new relationships and doing so inevitably affects their children and their parenting. What is less clear, however, is whether and how one parents' new relationship affects the other

parents' parental involvement. This research is the first that addresses this issue, doing so in light of the much more ambiguous definitions of fatherhood.

I argue that fathers, especially nonresidential fathers, have unclear guidelines about what it is they should do and how they contribute to children's wellbeing, and as such, their involvement with children is much more variable than mothers and much more likely to be affected by exogenous factors. One potential factor is the presence of a new potential father figure for their child, in the form of a mother's new romantic partner. When mothers have a new partner, nonresidential fathers may feel that someone else may be filling the father role (even if the new partner has little interaction with the child) and reduce their involvement accordingly. The evidence here supports this contention. Around the child's third birthday, fathers are less likely to have seen their child at all in the last month and, if they have seen the child, to see them less frequently when the mother is involved in a romantic relationship with someone other than the father. This effect is independent of whether the father has a new partner as well, which does not decrease the likelihood of seeing the child at all but does decrease frequency of visitation and engaging in activities such as reading or telling stories.

Moreover, when mothers are involved in a stable long-term relationship, fathers are especially likely to have not seen the child at all at either the first or third birthday, suggesting that a new maternal relationship formed early in the child's life may discourage many biological fathers from being involved. There is also some evidence that when mothers formed a new relationship between the child's first and third birthday (or were stably involved at both waves), fathers who had seen their child at age one were less likely to see the child at age 3. Conversely,

the frequency of father's visitation increased over time when an early maternal relationship dissolved, suggesting that this provides an opportunity for fathers to increase their involvement.

The results here cannot determine whether mothers with new partners allow access to children less frequently or whether fathers disengage because they are unsure of their new role in light of a new maternal relationship, and it is possible that elements of both are occurring. Nor can the results here rule out the possibility that men reduce their involvement because they feel uncomfortable interacting with an ex-partner's new partner or seeing an ex-partner who has "moved on." Still, this work does provide evidence that men's involvement with nonresidential children is affected by the presence (or absence) of a new male partner in the mother's, and thus the child's, life. If men are indeed unsure of their father role, a new potential father-figure may be a contributing factor to the frequent withdrawal of fathers from nonresidential children's lives. More generally, the results are suggestive that paternal involvement with their children is affected by maternal behaviors, even when mothers and fathers are no longer romantically involved.

Limitations

A major limitation of this study is the reliance upon mother's reports for father information. There is often a discrepancy between mothers' and fathers' reports of parental involvement (Seltzer and Brandreth 1994; Coley and Morris 2002), and as such, it is possible that father's own reports might differ. Moreover, mothers may not accurately know much about father's history or current characteristics; for instance, mothers may not know whether fathers have ever been in jail or if they have a new partner. This research is also limited by the lack of measures indicating the extent to which new partners are involved. Though there is information

on mother's relationship status in terms of coresidence and some information on mother's new partner's involvement with children in the Fragile Families data, using this information in the current analysis would have created very complicated categories of maternal relationships with relatively small cell sizes in each category, which would have impacted the magnitude and significance of the coefficients. Moreover, since only 12% had the same partner at both follow-ups, any such analysis of relationship/partner involvement would have meant using information from more than one partner in some cases, which would have further complicated interpretation. Overall, though future research should focus on the potential contributions of mother's partners as "social fathers" as affecting nonresidential biological father's involvement, I believe doing so here probably would have meant missing out on the bigger picture. Finally, there are also no measures of relationships between waves. Indicators of mother's and father's relationships are restricted to relationships that were intact at the time of the surveys, and it is quite possible that both mothers and fathers had relationships in the time between waves.

Appendix A. Descriptive Characteristics

	Visitation	Engagement in Activities
Relationship Status at Birth		
Married	13.5%	3.7%
Cohabiting	20.8%	21.3%
Visiting	32.6%	39.7%
Friends	18.0%	18.7%
Not involved	15.1%	16.5%
Relationship quality (ranges from 1-3)	2.54	2.53
	(0.384)	(0.382)
Mother's Socioeconomic Characteristics		
Race/Ethnicity		
White	13.0%	22.8%
Hispanic	21.9%	12.3%
Black	62.4%	62.0%
Other	2.7%	2.9%
Mother's Age at Birth	23.8 years	24.1 year
	(5.57)	(5.75)
Education at Birth		
Less than HS/GED	39.1%	38.7%
HS/GED	34.2%	36.7%
Some college	23.3%	21.1%
College or higher	3.4%	3.6%
Father's Socioeconomic Characteristics		
Race/Ethnicity		
White	9.9%	9.1%
Hispanic	22.9%	23.9%
Black	64.0%	63.5%
Other	3.2	3.6%
Father's Age at Birth	26.5 years	26.9 years
	(7.36)	(7.63)
Education at Birth		
Missing	115.%	13.1%
Less than HS/GED	27.9%	29.05
HS/GED	38.4%	38.4%
Some college	18.9%	16.5%
College or higher	3.3%	3.0%
Father ever incarcerated	52.4%	50.8%
Father ever had health problems	12.3%	14.3%
Father ever had drug/alcohol problems	23.3%	23.1%
Pregnancy/Birth Characteristics		
Focal child is female	48.3%	48.6%
Dad suggested at an abortion prior to birth	17.6%	17.1%
Parental Fertility & Family Formation		
Mother had children with other men	56.8%	57.6%
Father had children with other women	61.3%	61.4%
N	843	642

May not total 100% due to rounding.

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Table 1. Bivariate Association of Visitation, Mother's Partnership Status, and Father's Partnership Status

		Mother's Reports of Father Seeing the Child in the Month Prior to F1 & F2 Interviews				Mean # of visits at F2 in past 30 days	Mean decline in # of visits between F1 & F2	Mean # of days in the past week father engaged at in activities at F2	Mean decline b/w F1 & F2 in # of days father engaged in activities
	Total	Not at either wave	Saw child at F1, not at F2	Did not see child at F1, saw at F2	Saw child at F1 & F2				
All those not involved at both follow-ups		28.5%	17.3 %	9.3%	45.0%	5.5 days	1.9 days	0.89 days	0.08 days
By mother's partnership status									
No partner at either wave	42.6%	24.2%	15.6%	9.1%	51.1%	6.2 days	2.3 days	0.94 days	0.12 days
New partner at F1, no partner at F2	10.1%	29.3%	14.6%	12.2%	43.9%	6.2 days	-0.9 days	1.02 days	-0.11 days
No partner at F1, new partner at F2	22.4%	25.5%	22.3%	7.6%	44.6%	5.0 days	3.3 days	0.85 days	0.27 days
New partner at F1 & F2, same partner	12.3%	45.5%	16.8%	10.9%	26.7%	3.1 days	0.8 days	0.63 days	-0.23 days
New partner at F1 & F2, different partners	12.6%	31.1%	16.5%	8.7%	43.7%	5.7 days	1.1 days	0.93 days	0.06 days
By father's partnership status									
Mother not aware of partner at either wave	58.2%	26.1%	16.8%	8.4%	48.6%	6.7 days	2.2 days	1.05 days	0.12 days
New partner at F1, not partner at F2	17.8%	41.8%	13.4%	9.0%	35.8%	5.1 days	-0.6 days	1.05 days	-0.28 days
No partner at F1, new partner at F2	8.1%	19.6%	20.3%	13.5%	46.6%	4.1 days	2.3 days	0.72 days	0.09 days
New partner at F1 & F2, don't know if same	15.9%	40.2%	17.4%	7.6%	34.9%	2.5 days	1.5 days	0.32 days	0.07 days
	843	234	142	76	370	843	822	6420	587

Table 2. Father Involvement Three Years after a Birth among Couples Not Romantically Involved at F1 & F2

	Logistic Model of Having Seen Child in Last Month (Odds Ratio)	*OLS Models of Paternal Involvement*			
		Frequency of Visitation in Last Month		Frequency of Engaging in Activities in Past Week	
		ß	Std. Err.	ß	Std. Err.
Relationship Status at Birth					
Married	3.526**	4.145*	1.726	0.772*	0.346
Cohabiting	5.746***	4.718***	1.023	0.716***	0.210
Visiting	2.989***	2.683**	0.903	0.343†	0.184
Friends	2.835***	1.119	1.006	0.221	0.203
Not involved (omitted)	--	--	--	--	--
Relationship quality	0.956	0.087	0.823	0.240	0.169
Mother's Socioeconomic Characteristics					
Race/Ethnicity					
White (omitted)	--	--	--	--	--
Hispanic	1.209	0.827	1.285	0.190	0.273
Black	2.009*	2.497*	1.252	0.479†	0.265
Other	2.036	5.049*	2.321	0.697	0.449
Mother's Age at Birth	1.013	0.003	0.003	-0.002	0.016
Education at Birth					
Less than HS/GED	0.891	0.646	0.694	0.217	0.140
HS/GED (omitted)	--	--	--	--	--
Some college	0.897	-0.037	0.812	0.143	0.167
College or higher	1.201	-2.934†	1.750	-0.493	0.341
Father's Socioeconomic Characteristics					
Race/Ethnicity					
White (omitted)	--	--	--	--	--
Hispanic	0.482†	-1.659	1.427	-0.119	0.304
Black	1.192	-1.047	1.747	0.201	0.349
Other	0.519	-0.882	1.979	-0.418	0.401
Father's Age at Birth	0.991	0.024	0.057	-0.006	0.012
Education at Birth					
Missing	0.667	-0.637	0.986	-0.208	0.191
Less than HS/GED	1.087	0.975	0.745	0.003	0.151
HS/GED (omitted)	--	--	--	--	--
Some college	1.052	0.722	0.834	0.283	0.176
College or higher	0.446†	-0.987	1.783	-0.356	0.368
Father ever incarcerated	0.793	-0.842	0.612	-0.154	0.124
Father ever had health problems	1.398	2.690**	0.881	0.354*	0.169
Father ever had drug/alcohol problems	0.522***	-3.217***	0.735	-0.542***	0.150
Pregnancy/Birth Characteristics					
Focal child is female	0.796	-1.213*	0.580	-0.251*	0.120
Dad suggested at an abortion prior to birth	0.971	0.137	0.788	-0.157	0.162
Parental Fertility & Family Formation					
Mother had children with other men	0.794	-0.633	0.621	0.030	0.126
Father had children with other women	0.648*	-1.056	0.648	-0.341*	0.133
Mother has new partner	0.618**	-1.361*	0.592	-0.114	0.122
Father has new partner	0.965	-2.824***	0.626	-0.414**	0.132
Constant		5.432†	2.810	0.536	0.564
N	843	843		642	
Adj. R^2	--	0.106		0.113	
-2 log likelihood	1039.3614	--		--	

† p≤0.1 * p≤0.05 ** p≤0.01 *** p≤0.001

Table 3. Relative Risk Ratios from Multinomial Logistic Regression of Change in Visitation between F1 & F2 (Omitted is Saw Child at both F1 & F2)

	Not at either wave	Saw child at F1, not at F2	Did not see child at F1, saw at F2
Relationship Status at Birth			
Married	0.253*	0.374	1.198
Cohabiting	0.156***	0.247***	1.045
Visiting	0.291***	0.535†	1.328
Friends	0.275***	0.383*	0.666
Not involved (omitted)	--	--	--
Relationship quality	0.811	1.480	0.821
Mother's Socioeconomic Characteristics			
Race/Ethnicity			
White (omitted)	--	--	--
Hispanic	1.096	0.681	1.434
Black	0.323**	1.101	1.491
Other	0.408	0.691	0.920
Mother's Age at Birth	1.000	0.970	0.970
Education at Birth			
Less than HS/GED	1.204	1.291	1.243
HS/GED (omitted)	--	--	--
Some college	1.139	1.435	1.499
College or higher	0.873	1.247	1.010
Father's Socioeconomic Characteristics			
Race/Ethnicity			
White (omitted)	--	--	--
Hispanic	2.179†	2.676†	2.288
Black	0.688	1.217	0.808
Other	3.293*	0.942	1.815
Father's Age at Birth	1.002	1.019	1.016
Education at Birth			
Missing	1.645	1.696	1.256
Less than HS/GED	0.913	0.996	1.052
HS/GED (omitted)	--	--	--
Some college	0.996	0.721	0.506
College or higher	2.270	1.261	7.63^{e-18}
Father ever incarcerated	1.130	1.653*	1.362
Father ever had health problems	0.667	0.711	0.784
Father ever had drug/alcohol problems	2.068**	2.314**	1.947*
Pregnancy/Birth Characteristics			
Focal child is female	0.923	1.758**	1.066
Dad suggested at an abortion prior to birth	1.039	1.286	0.900
Parental Fertility & Family Formation			
Mother had children with other men	1.257	1.319	1.832*
Father had children with other women	1.819**	1.499†	1.273
Mother partnership			
No relationship at either follow-up	--	--	--
Had partner at F1, not at F2	1.365	1.016	1.407
No partner at F1, partner at F2	1.260	1.599†	0.919
Same partner at both follow-ups	3.936***	1.944†	2.097†
New partners at both follow-ups	1.564	1.158	1.047
Father partnership			
Mother not aware of new relationship	--	--	--
No partner at F1, partner at F2	0.669	1.311	1.693
Had partner at F1, not at F2	1.263	0.951	1.265
Partners at both follow-ups, unknown if same	1.445	1.205	1.087
N		822	
-2 log likelihood		1802.425	

† p#0.1 * p#0.05 ** p#0.01 *** p#0.001

Table 4. OLS Regression of Change in Frequency of Visitation and Engagement in Activities between F1 & F2

	Change in Visitation Frequency		Change in Engagement in Activities Frequency	
	ß	Std. Err.	ß	Std. Err.
Relationship Status at Birth				
Married	-1.484	1.942	0.120	0.360
Cohabiting	0.747	1.171	0.156	0.226
Visiting	0.323	1.31	0.034	0.197
Friends	0.505	1.151	0.097	0.216
Not involved (omitted)	--	--	--	--
Relationship quality	1.258	0.942	0.203	0.203
Mother's Socioeconomic Characteristics				
Race/Ethnicity				
White (omitted)	--	--	--	--
Hispanic	-0.274	1.457	-0.168	0.292
Black	1.371	1.412	-0.291	0.279
Other	-3.461	2.605	-0.445	0.470
Mother's Age at Birth	-0.071	0.089	0.001	0.017
Education at Birth				
Less than HS/GED	0.102	0.790	0.200	0.150
HS/GED (omitted)	--	--	--	--
Some college	0.336	0.918	0.039	0.176
College or higher	3.433†	1.988	0.515	0.366
Father's Socioeconomic Characteristics				
Race/Ethnicity				
White (omitted)	--	--	--	--
Hispanic	1.110	1.610	0.006	0.328
Black	-1.159	2.000	-0.589†	0.356
Other	1.930	2.250	0.827*	0.416
Father's Age at Birth	0.006	0.064	0.021†	0.012
Education at Birth				
Missing	-0.395	1.108	0.109	0.201
Less than HS/GED	-0.261	0.850	0.237	0.160
HS/GED (omitted)	--	--	--	--
Some college	0.113	0.942	-0.009	0.188
College or higher	-0.723	2.061	0.402	0.381
Father ever incarcerated	0.049	0.695	0.019	0.133
Father ever had health problems	-1.434	0.995	-0.269	0.177
Father ever had drug/alcohol problems	1.498†	0.834	0.255	0.158
Pregnancy/Birth Characteristics				
Focal child is female	0.760	0.665	-0.077	0.127
Dad suggested at an abortion prior to birth	0.283	0.893	0.287†	0.172
Parental Fertility & Family Formation				
Mother had children with other men	0.393	0.708	-0.149	0.134
Father had children with other women	-0.443	0.743	0.114	0.142
Mother partnership				
No relationship at either follow-up	--	--	--	--
Had partner at F1, not at F2	-3.185**	1.168	-0.107	0.221
No partner at F1, partner at F2	0.590	0.863	0.173	0.165
Same partner at both follow-ups	-1.621	1.086	-0.257	0.208
New partners at both follow-ups	-1.534	1.073	-0.039	0.208
Father partnership				
Mother not aware of new relationship	--	--	--	--
No partner at F1, partner at F2	0.373	0.893	-0.082	0.185
Had partner at F1, not at F2	-1.521	1.258	-0.372	0.233
Partners at both follow-ups, unknown if same	-0.239	0.957	-0.161	0.182
Constant	-1.357	3.224	-1.198*	0.597
N	822		587	
Adj. R^2	0.009		0.012	

† p#0.1 * p#0.05 ** p#0.01 *** p#0.001