What Do Daddies Do? A Father Involvement Measure for Married, Cohabiting and Nonresidential Men

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Abstract:

Most father involvement studies use simplistic measures or a conceptual model that translates poorly to unmarried fathers' experiences. This study develops a more inclusive father involvement measure, describes how different parenting aspects combine into distinct father types, and compares the ways that 2,694 nonresidential, cohabiting and married fathers parent. Aspects of parenting include paternity acknowledgement, formal, informal and in-kind financial support, play and child care activities. Findings suggest that most men participate heavily in their children's lives, and others have more limited roles. A small group of fathers are largely removed from their families. Conviction history and residential status are related to parenting style. In contrast, coresidential fathers parent the same regardless of marital status; married and cohabiting men had the same parenting styles. This study suggests there are few deadbeat dads.

Keywords: Marriage, nonmarital families, father involvement and parenting

Introduction

Children raised in nonmarital families fare, on average, worse than children who reside in two parent, married households (Amato & Keith, 1991; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994; Sandefur, McLanahan, & Wojtkiewicz 1992). Numerous researchers have attempted to uncover the mechanisms that lead to such diverse outcomes. One area of fruitful, but under-explored, research looks at how fathers affect their children's lives. Unfortunately, most studies suggest that unmarried men are unable to moderate the effects of an unmarried/single parent household (see Amato and Gilbreth, 1999 for a meta-analysis). Positive father effects are usually only found when involvement is operationalized as financial support (Argys, Peters, Brooks-Gunn, & Smith, 1998; Green & Moore, 2000; King, 1994). Other measures, such as frequency of visitation or contact by phone, appear to have a nonsignificant impact on child development or educational outcomes (Furstenberg, Morgan, & Allison, 1987; Hawkings & Eggebeen, 1991).

Findings that suggest fathers are largely ineffectual in their children's lives seem not only to contradict common sense, but most theories about child development and family functions. Even if the presence of a biological, male parent is not necessarily mandatory for healthy child development (as Popenoe, 1996 would argue), most researchers and theorists would agree that the involvement of another able adult is likely to benefit a child. Another adult, in this case the child's father, can provide extra supervision, give advice and homework help, earn extra family income, offer emotional support, show affection, and serve as a substitute for mother when needed. Thus, it is plausible that previous works missed father involvement effects.

In this study, I attempt to progress this line of research by making several important improvements. Prior investigations suffer from numerous methodological and conceptual problems that this study will address. First, many analyses use simplistic definitions of father

involvement, or operate with theoretical underpinnings that do not address the unique situation of nonresident fathers. Second, examinations of multiple facets of fathering often only test if each individual aspect is related to another. In contrast, I develop a typology of parenting that combines many dimensions of father involvement. Third, we now know that there are two types of nonmarital fathers: those that cohabit with their child and her mother, and those with separate residences. Investigations that fail to make this distinction or only look at nonresident fathers do not offer an accurate picture of nonmarital father involvement. Finally, most studies assume that married fathers have greater involvement than unmarried fathers. Truth is, we know very little about married fathers' involvement because few works directly compare married and unmarried fathers to uncover differences in parenting by marital/residential status.

This paper uses the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study to examine the involvement of married, cohabiting and nonresidential men. Drawing from both Doherty, Kouneski and Erickson (1998) and Levine and Pitt's (1995) concept of responsible fathering and Lamb, Pleck, Charnov and Levine's (1985, 1987) father involvement definition, I develop a more accurate measure of father involvement. Then, rather than testing each area of parenting separately or only correlating one or two dimensions, I use latent class analysis to develop a nominal father involvement variable. This variable indicates the different ideal types of parenting styles that fathers employ. Additionally, I conduct separate analyses for various marital/residential statuses (married, cohabiting and nonresidential) to see if marital/residential status is associated with differential parenting patterns. Finally, I test for relationships between father involvement styles and numerous demographic variables to better understand which men utilize certain styles of parenting. My results suggest that residential status better predicts parenting style than marital status. While I pinpoint a small group of fathers that are largely

absent from their children's lives, the majority of fathers score high on most measures of involvement.

Background and Theoretical Foundations

Father involvement studies are often based on a theoretical construction of involvement developed by Lamb et al. (1985, 1987). Their involvement construct is comprised of three different aspects: interaction, accessibility and responsibility. Interaction or engagement is characterized by direct contact with the child, be that play or child care. Accessibility refers to time that fathers are available for their children, but not actively interacting with them. For example, a father reading while his children are watching television is accessible. The final aspect, responsibility, consists of managerial duties. Responsible fathers schedule doctor appointments and know their children's teachers and friends.

Though Lamb et al.'s definition goes beyond a single parenting dimension, it is only entirely applicable to married fathers. Accessibility is appropriate only when a child and father share a residence. Nonresident men come to their children's home to visit, not to be in the next room. Additionally, some aspects of responsibility are unavailable to unmarried fathers. Men without legal parentage are technically unable to consent to their child's medical care or take her across state lines. Thus, comparisons between married and unmarried fathers based solely on Lamb et al.'s (1985, 1987) definition will always be positively biased towards married men.

I address this problem by blending Lamb et al's definition with another concept, responsible fathering (Doherty et al., 1988; Pitt & Levine, 1995). Pitt and Levine define responsible fathering as (a) waiting until ready to become a father, (b) acknowledging paternity, (c) financially supporting the child and (d) emotionally supporting the child. Obviously, the first aspect will not be addressed since my sample consists of actual, rather than potential, parents, but

I argue that a blend of responsible fathering and Lamb et al.'s father involvement creates a more accurate father involvement measure.

Although many studies cite Lamb et al. (1985, 1987) as a theoretical foundation for their parenting measures, few operationalize it. Some only address one area of involvement. For example, Argys, Peters, Brooks-Gunn and Smith (1998) define father involvement as payment of child support while Moore and Kotelchuck (2004) study father's attendance at well-baby doctor visits. Others use multiple measures of fathering, but analyze predictors or effects of such parenting separately (Green & Moore, 2001; Johnson, 2001; Teitler, 2001). A third vein of research attempts to expand on the multi-part conceptual work by Lamb, Pleck, Levine, Pitt, Doherty and others. It is to this faction that my work contributes.

These researchers examine how different aspects of fathering work together or act as substitutes for one another. For example, do men who pay child support also change diapers? Are loving fathers also good disciplinarians? Economic theory, developed for families largely by Becker (1991[1981]), suggests that men may substitute financial support for other forms of father involvement. In order to maximize utility, fathers should specialize in either breadwinning or homemaking/child care. Since most men participate in the labor force, they would choose to invest all of their energy and time into their careers. Following that, such men would define father involvement as providing economic support.

Other men, unable to secure acceptable employment, would then specialize in direct child care. For them, father involvement is defined as direct parenting without financial provisions. These men are more likely to be unmarried because married men are more connected to the labor force than unmarried men. Thus according to economic theory, we should not see "super dads", men that score high on all parenting aspects. Instead, there should be two or three general

parenting style patterns: men who give money and little else, men who are directly involved but do not provide financial support, and, possibly, men whose utility is unrelated to their children and thus avoid fathering completely.

Frank Furstenberg (1988) offers a different hypothesis concerning fathering styles. In a piece entitled, "Good Dads, Bad Dads", he suggests that cultural shifts have made the "father as breadwinner" model increasingly scarce. Separate spheres for men and women created a clear "breadwinner" definition of father involvement for 1950s men. Bring home your paycheck and spend time with the children when convenient. But this situation changed during the 60s and 70s. As women fought for entrance into the workplace, they also pushed for men to share equally in child and house work. While some men have embraced the "new father" ideal, many more have walked away from parenting completely, becoming "bad dads." This argument suggests we should see two ideal types of parenting styles: a small group of men that score high on all measures of parenting, and a much larger group of men that avoid fathering responsibilities. Since Furstenberg believes that married men are less likely to be bad dads, they should be overrepresented in the "good dad" group.

Although I am unaware of a study with as many parenting aspects as this one, there are several investigations of how two or three dimensions of parenting correlate. In general, few relationships are consistent throughout different studies. Some research indicates that informal child support is positively related to time spent with child or frequency of visits (Green & Moore, 2000; Rangarajan & Gleason, 1998) and formal child support (Rangarajan & Gleason, 1998). While informal support and visitation are usually positively related, the connection between time with child and formal support is less clear. Some studies find that formal support is positively related to visitation (Rangarajan & Gleason, 1998; Seltzer, Schaeffer, & Charng,

1989), while others argue that formal support does not have a connection to time spent with the child (Ardetti & Keith, 1993; Green & Moore, 2000; Manning & Smock, 1999). Paternity seems to be related to formal child support (Argys and Peters, 2001; Green and Moore, 2000), but is not related to frequency of child visits (Green and Moore, 2000). It seems that paternity drives child support and that informal support is more related to time with child than formal support. But we are missing information on many other father involvement measures and this study will help supply some knowledge.

The lack of consensus present in clustering studies is also found in the father involvement predictor research. As stated above, most studies use high/low measures of aspects of parenting, rather than cluster analyses that develop typologies of fathering (see Jain, Belsky, & Crnic, 1996 for an exception). As a result, the predictors presented are associated with a single dimension of parenting, not groupings of behaviors. Most works fail to find a significant relationship between their measure of father involvement and the parent's age (Coley & Chase-Lansdale, 1999; Cooksey & Craig, 1998; Flouri & Buchanan, 2003; Johnson, 2001; Landale & Oropesa, 2001; Manning & Smock, 1999), yet others have suggested that age leads to more involvement (Lerman & Sorensen, 2000; Volling & Belsky, 1991), and a third camp finds that younger fathers are more involved (Danziger & Radin, 1990; Hofferth, 2003; Rangarahan & Gleason, 1998).

Some studies suggest that race is unrelated to parenting (Cooksey & Craig, 1998; Rangarahan & Gleason, 1998; Sanderson & Thompson, 2002; Seltzer & Bianchi, 1998), but those that find effects are not consistent. In various analyses, sometimes African American fathers are more involved (Argys & Peters, 2001; Danziger & Radin, 1990; Lerman & Soresen, 2000), sometimes Latino men are (Averett, Gennetian, & Peters 2000; Hofferth, 2003), and for

others White fathers score highest (Miller & Garfinkel, 1999). In contrast to race and age, education is associated with more consistent results. Although some find schooling unrelated to fathering (Averett, Gennetian, & Peters, 2000; Hofferth, 2003; Johnson, 2001; Landale & Oropesa, 2001; Manning & Smock, 1999; Roggman, Boyce, & Cook, 2002), most establish a positive relationship to involvement (Coley & Chase-Lansdale, 1999; Flouri & Buchanan, 2003; Lerman & Soresen, 2000; Rangarahan & Gleason, 1998; Seltzer & Bianchi, 1988; Seltzer, Schaeffer, & Charng, 1989; Volling & Belsky 1991).

In this paper, I distinguish between current employment and a steady work history, defined as working 48 out of the last 52 weeks. Though most studies do not discriminate between these measures, they tend to find employment relates positively to father involvement (Coley & Chase-Lansdale, 1999; Danziger & Radin, 1990; Hofferth, 2003; Johnson, 2001; Landale & Oropesa, 2001; Rangarahan & Gleason, 1998). I also use conviction history as a predictor. Although I hypothesize that a clean record will be positively related to father involvement, I am unaware of any study that has tested this relationship. Though father involvement works often ignore criminal records, researchers have suggested that both incarcerated and convicted men need to be examined and encouraged as fathers (Coley, 2001).

The most novel examination in this paper looks at the relationship between marital status, residential status and father involvement. As stated in the introduction, few works have directly compared fathers from married, cohabiting and nonresidential families. Other analyses using the Fragile Families sample suggest that cohabitation is associated with higher involvement during pregnancy and birth (Johnson, 2001; Teitler, 2001). Landale and Oropesa (2001) found that Puerto Rican men were less likely to give money or direct care if they were not married, and

were either cohabiting or nonresidential. The relationship between father involvement and nonmarital status was weaker for men who resided with their children and their mothers.

Although this paper is largely exploratory, I venture a few hypotheses. Spending significant time with child, helping her mother out and participating in a variety of activities with child will all correlate together. Informal financial arrangements will also cluster with these measures, but formal support will not. Formal support will be related to paternity. Age and race will not predict fathering styles, but work characteristics and conviction history will. Men who do not live with their children will be less involved with their children, but the differences between cohabiting and married fathers will be much smaller.

Sample

My examination uses data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study (FFCW), conducted by the Social Indicator Survey Center at Columbia University and the Office of Population Research at Princeton University (see Reichman, Teitler, Garfinkel, & McLanahan, 2001 for more information). The FFCW is a hospital-based, multi-wave study designed to capture information from both unmarried mothers and fathers and their children. It uses a stratified random sample of all U.S. cities with a population of 200,000 or more. This study is representative of unmarried births in the late 1990s in urban areas. Married families are matched to the unmarried families on a number of demographic characteristics. FFCW has four waves: at birth, the second when the child is about a year old, the third when the child is about three and the final wave will be conducted when the focus child is about five. In order to get actual, rather than expected, measures of father involvement, this study uses parenting measures from the year one dataset and demographic information mostly from the baseline dataset. Additionally, I rely

mostly on father reports, and since 80% of fathers completed the study, my sample is smaller than the FFCW sample.

I further restrict the FFCW sample to exclude certain types of men. Not all hospitals allowed interviews with parents under 18, so I remove them to avoid representation issues. Men's children must not be wards of the state or living only with extended family members. I also did not include unmarried fathers who had sole custody of their children. Although this is a growing and under-researched population, they differ from other fathers so much that it is inappropriate to include them in this study. Additionally, many variables used in this analysis were only present on surveys given to 18 out of the 20 sampled cities, so men in the other 2 cities are removed. Finally, a small group of couples divorced between birth and the year one survey and are excluded from the following analyses.

Measures

Thus this study has a total sample of 2,694 fathers; 1,032 were married, 998 were currently cohabitating with their child's mother and 684 did not live with their children. Respondents with valid answers for all measures number 2,431 men (652 married, 916 cohabitating and 488 nonresident fathers). Table 1 presents descriptors used in this analysis.

Table 1. Demographics of Sample, by All, Married, Cohabiting and Nonresident Fathers

Variable	**All fathers (N)**	**Married**	**Cohabitating**	**Nonresident**
Current Age		C ***		C, M ***
23 and under	24.9% (672)	10.3% (106)	30.6% (299)	39.0% (267)
24 to 28	27.7% (747)	20.7% (214)	32.4% (317)	31.6% (216)
29 to 34	25.1% (676)	35.2% (363)	21.1% (206)	15.6% (107)
35 and older	22.2% (599)	33.8% (349)	16.0% (156)	13.7% (94)

Mean Age	29.2		32.1		27.7		26.9	
Race				C ***				C, M ***
Latinos	25.2%	(649)	24.7%	(240)	31.6%	(301)	16.7%	(108)
White	23.4%	(601)	40.8%	(397)	14.5%	(138)	10.2%	(66)
Black	47.1%	(1211)	28.7%	(279)	51.3%	(489)	68.7%	(443)
Other	4.3%	(110)	5.8%	(56)	2.7%	(26)	4.3%	(28)
Education				C ***				M ***
H.S. dropout	30.6%	(824)	17.1%	(176)	39.6%	(387)	38.2%	(261)
H.S. or GED	32.6%	(878)	25.0%	(258)	37.3%	(364)	37.4%	(256)
College	36.8%	(990)	57.9%	(597)	23.1%	(226)	24.4%	(167)
Convictions				C ***				C, M ***
None	80.2%	(2160)	90.0%	(929)	78.3%	(766)	68.0%	(465)
One	9.5%	(256)	5.2%	(54)	10.8%	(106)	14.0%	(96)
Two or more	10.3%	(278)	4.7%	(49)	10.8%	(106)	18.0%	(123)
Employed				C ***				C, M ***
	79.3%	(2124)	91.3%	(938)	76.3%	(743)	65.2%	(443)
Long-term job				C ***				C, M ***
	61.7%	(1663)	76.6%	(791)	57.0%	(557)	46.1%	(315)

***C, ***M = value differs from cohabiting or married at $p < .001$.

The sampled fathers are, on average, almost 30, but married men are older than unmarried men. Additionally, fathers that live with their children's mother tend to be slightly older than those who do not. About half of the overall sample is African American, while the

other half is evenly split between Whites and Latinos. Since African Americans are more likely to be unmarried parents, it is not surprising that married fathers are less likely to be Black than other fathers. African American dads are most likely to be nonresident. Whites are overrepresented in the married category, while Latino men are more likely to be cohabiting fathers.

Fathers in this sample are equally likely to be high school dropouts, high school diploma or GED holders or to have had college experience. Although a third of the sample has attended college, most received a trade certificate or fell short of a Bachelor's degree (analyses not shown). Only 30% of the college category holds a B.A. Married fathers are much more educated than unmarried fathers; cohabiting and nonresident fathers do not have different schooling experiences.

The majority of fathers has never been convicted of a non-traffic related offense. Married fathers are more law-abiding than cohabiting men, and nonresident men have the most convictions. Both current and long-term employment follow familiar patterns: married men are more connected to the labor force than cohabiting fathers, and nonresident fathers score lowest. It seems very difficult for this sample to hold a long-term job. While 80% were working the week of the survey, only 60% had been working consistently for the last year (approximately since the child was born- average age is 16 months). From this picture, it seems that married men are better off than cohabiting fathers who, in turn, are better off than nonresident dads.

Two father involvement measures come from a series of questions on the frequency to which fathers engaged in a variety of activities with their children. The fathers were asked, on a scale of 0 to 7, how many days a week they: put the child to bed, played toys with the child, played games like peekaboo, read stories, told stories, gave hugs or other physical affection and

sang nursery rhymes. These questions are augmented with two from the mother survey. The mothers were asked how often fathers feed and diaper the child (0 to 7 times a week). Rather than using each question separately, I conduct a factor analysis as a data reduction technique.

Generally this data parsed into two factors, but since my analyses divide fathers by marital/residential status, I have a separate factor analysis for each grouping of fathers (one for all fathers, one for nonresident fathers and one for coresident fathers). For all fathers and nonresident fathers, the same basic pattern emerged. The data fell into two factors, one called play and the other, care. Table 2 presents the measures that loaded highly on each factor and the scores for each father grouping. For each factor, the overall mean is 0 and the overall standard deviation is 1. These factors are designed to tap both quantity and quality of interaction, in that they measure both how often a father is with his child, and how he chooses to spend that time. For all fathers, playing games, playing with toys, singing nursery rhymes and reading and telling stories scored high (.6 or above) for the play factor. In contrast, only two activities, feeding and diapering the child, loaded highly on the care factor. Married and cohabiting fathers did not significantly differ. Both scored higher than the overall mean (0) for care and play factors. Nonresident fathers, on the other hand, score significantly lower that the other fathers on both measures. They have negative values for care and play. Notice also that the nonresident father's standard deviation is much larger than the other fathers, indicating increased variability in that population. For nonresidential fathers, the factor analysis pattern (not shown) is much the same. One difference is that giving hugs and other physical affection now also loads highly on the play factor. Since nonresident fathers are compared only to other nonresident dads, their overall mean is 0, standard deviation, 1.

Table 2. Factor Analyses for Activities, By Marital/Residential Status

For all fathers (SD)					
Factor	**Eigenvalue**	**Measures**	**Married** n = 993	**Cohabiting** n = 943	**Nonresident** n = 620
Play	4.490	games, toys, sing, read and tell stories	.21 (.88)	.21 (.88)	C, M *** -.66 (1.07)
Care	1.351	feedings, diapers	.31 (.76)	.30 (.80)	C, M *** -.94 (1.02)
For coresidential fathers (SD)					
Mental play	2.705	sing, read & tell stories	.03 (1.01)	-.03 (.99)	
Care	1.556	feedings, diapers	.02 (.98)	-.03 (1.02)	
Physical play	1.074	games, hugs, toys	-.05 (1.06)	** .05 (.93)	

**p < .05. ***C, ***M = value differs from cohabiting or married at p < .001.

I ran a third factor analysis for coresidential men, both married and cohabitating. When nonresident fathers are removed, three factors appear with eigenvalues above one. While the care factor remains intact, the singular play factor has split into two areas. The first loads highly with singing nursery rhymes, reading and telling stories, so I have labeled it mental play. These activities can help a child to build her vocabulary and develop pre-reading skills. The second play factor, physical play, is associated with playing with games, playing with toys and showing physical affection. For both care and mental play, cohabiting and married fathers are statistically the same. Interestingly enough, for physical play, cohabiting fathers have a higher, albeit small, average score than married men.

Three more father involvement measures come from mother surveys. One measure, how often a father spends an hour or more with his child, taps quantity of interaction. Does he see his child every day for 5 minutes, or do they spend a significant amount of time together? Responses are coded 1 to 3 for a couple times a month or less, a couple times a week, or almost every day. In Table 3, I present both the mean and the percents for each category. The modal response for all fathers is almost every day. Married fathers have significantly higher scores than cohabiting fathers, although the metric difference is small. The biggest difference between nonresident fathers and other dads is in the twice a month or less category. About half of nonresident fathers spend significant time with their children very infrequently.

To measure parental cooperation, mothers report how often the father watches the child for her when needed. Responses are coded 1 to 3 for never/rarely, sometimes, and often. Most men often care for their children when asked. Married men are slightly more likely to do so than cohabiting fathers. Nonresident dads are much less likely to help their children's mothers on a regular basis. Only about a third of nonresident dads often help when needed, while over half are never or rarely available when needed. Mothers were also asked how often the father takes the child places she needs to go, such as daycare or the doctor, indicating father responsibility. This measure, called kid errand, was scored 1-3 with levels of never/rarely, sometimes, or often. Research has suggested that although men may be more active in their children's daily lives, they still lag behind mothers in certain areas, like schedule management (Pleck, 1997). As you can see from Table 3, such a relationship is borne out in my data as well. As compared to other measures, fathers are less likely to be in the highest level. For all fathers, they are pretty evenly placed in each category. When we look at marital/residential status, however, a familiar pattern emerges. Cohabiting and married fathers, who do not differ from each other, are much more

likely to be responsible than nonresidential fathers; 60% of nonresidential fathers never or rarely take their children to the doctor or daycare, while about half of coresidential fathers run errands on a regular basis.

Table 3. Father Involvement Measures by All, Married, Cohabitating and Nonresident Fathers

Variable (Scale)	**All dads (N)**	**Married**	**Cohabitating**	**Nonresident**
Hour w/kid (1-3)		C ***		C, M ***
Mean	2.54 (2620)	2.82 (1008)	2.76 (957)	1.77 (655)
2x month or less	16.4% (429)	3.8% (38)	6.0% (57)	51.0% (334)
2x a week	13.4% (352)	10.7% (108)	11.5% (110)	20.5% (134)
Every day	70.2% (1839)	85.5% (862)	82.5% (790)	28.5% (187)
Watch child (1-3)		C ***		C, M ***
Mean	2.49 (2626)	2.74 (1016)	2.66 (953)	1.86 (657)
Never/rarely	17.8% (467)	5.4% (55)	8.5% (81)	50.4% (331)
Sometimes	15.5% (408)	15.5% (157)	17.0% (162)	13.5% (89)
Often	66.7% (1751)	79.1% (804)	74.5% (710)	36.1% (237)
Kid errand (1-3)				C, M ***
Mean	2.10 (2627)	2.22 (1016)	2.27 (953)	1.64 (658)
Never/rarely	33.3% (876)	25.8% (262)	23.0% (219)	60.0% (395)
Sometimes	23.6% (621)	26.2% (266)	26.5% (253)	15.5% (101)
Often	43.0% (1130)	48.0% (488)	50.5% (481)	24.5% (161)

Variable	Unmarried dads (N)	Cohabiting	Nonresident
			C ***
Paternity	82.2% (1342)	86.9% (833)	75.5% (508)
Child support			
Formal			29.5% (201)
Informal			44.3% (302)
No support			26.2% (178)
In-kind support			
Buys toys			3.12 (631)
Buys clothes			3.31 (599)
Buys medicine			2.70 (625)
Buys diapers			3.42 (629)
Buys food			3.14 (628)

***C, ***M = value differs from cohabiting or married at $p < .001$.

Unmarried fathers have one additional measure. While paternity is automatically assigned to a father if he is married to the birth mother, such is not the case for unmarried fathers. Only paperwork makes an unmarried father the child's legal parent. 80% of unmarried fathers have legal parenthood. Cohabiting dads, though, are more likely to have completed the paternity paperwork; only 15% are not their child's legal parent. In contrast, almost a quarter of nonresidential fathers have not acknowledged paternity.

Finally, nonresident fathers report their financial contributions. Although such information is also pertinent to cohabiting families, the survey only questioned nonresident fathers. Men were asked if they had a formal support order on file with the child support office.

Only if they did not, were they asked if they had worked out an informal agreement with their child's mother concerning cash contributions. Thus, we cannot tell if men with formal orders also gave informal support. As presented in Table 3, 44% of men have an informal agreement, and less than 30% of fathers have a legal support order in place (leaving a quarter of fathers with no set financial arrangement).

The final measure of financial support taps in-kind support. Men were asked how often they bought their children clothes, diapers or other child care items, toys, medicine, and food or formula. These questions were scored 1 through 4 for the responses of never, rarely, sometimes or often. Fathers bought, on average, most items on a regular basis (3 = sometimes). Like the activity variables, I ran a factor analysis as a data reduction strategy. All measures loaded onto one factor with an eigenvalue of 3.226. I scored all nonresident fathers on this factor. The resulting scale had a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1.

Method

This analysis uses Latent Class Cluster Analysis (LCA). LCA is used to find subtypes of classes from categorical data (see Lazarfeld & Henry, 1968; McCutcheon, 1987). This method can be expanded, as I do in this paper, for ordinal and numeric data as well. It takes the information present in each variable and uses them to construct a singular, categorical variable. In this case, LCA is used as a data reduction tool to create a father involvement measure. Through the various dimensions of parenting, I am able to create a parenting style variable that indicates different categories of parenting. LCA operates under the assumption of conditional independence. In other words, with the introduction of the new categorical variable of father involvement, the relationships between all of the individual dimensions disappear. In addition to the creation of a father involvement variable, LCA, using the Latent Gold 3.0 software, allows

me to input covariates. These covariates do not create the parenting style definition, but rather describe the individuals that make up the different categories. Using this feature, I am able to show how father demographics are related to parenting styles.

Results

A two class latent structure fit the complete father sample best. Table 4 presents the conditional probabilities for the parenting measure responses. I have labeled the two groups the "good" dads and the "bad" dads. These two types of fathers seem to be almost complete opposites. While over 80% of good dads report spending an hour with her every day, 80% of bad dads spend an hour with their child twice a month or less. The same pattern is seen in the watch child measure. An 80% majority is in the highest category for good dads and in the lowest category for bad fathers.

Table 4. Conditional Probabilities for All Fathers, 2-Cluster Model

Variable	**"Good dad"**	**"Bad dad"**	**Significant diff.**
Hour w/kid (1-3)			***
Mean	2.82	1.22	
2x month or less	2.5%	81.4%	
2x a week	13.1%	15.2%	
Every day	84.6%	3.4%	
Watch child (1-3)			***
Mean	2.75	1.25	
Never/rarely	4.2%	79.7%	

Sometimes	16.0%	16.0%	
Often	79.8%	4.3%	
Kid errand (1-3)			***
Mean	2.31	1.14	
Never/rarely	21.1%	79.7%	
Sometimes	26.7%	10.1%	
Often	52.2%	1.1%	
Play factor	0.11	-0.47	***
Care factor	0.32	-1.59	***
Percent of sample	83.8%	16.2%	N/A

N = 2431

***p < .001.

"Good" dads and "bad" dads differ less in the kid errand aspect. While the vast majority of bad dads still score in the lowest category, such a skew is missing for good dads. About half of them often take their children to needed appointments, and the other half is almost equally distributed in the two lower levels. Good and bad dads look, once again, like opposites when we examine the activity factors. Good dads score higher than the mean on both play and care factors, while bad dads score below zero. This difference is more pronounced in the care measure, with bad dads scoring almost two standard deviations below good dads (SD = 1). Finally, the sample percent shows the majority (83%) of fathers are in the "good dad" cluster.

What type of men are good dads and what characteristics are associated with the bad dad category? Table 5 presents strikingly few significant differences between the two clusters. They

are the same age and have the same racial and educational breakdowns. Additionally, both good dads and bad dads are equally as likely to be consistent workers. Good dads, though, are marginally more likely to be employed. Two characteristics help distinguish fathering styles. Good dads are much less likely to have been convicted of a crime. While almost 85% of good dads have no record, only 64% of bad dads have no convictions. Finally, the two clusters differ in their marital/residential status. Almost ninety percent of good dads live with their children; half of those are married and half are in a cohabiting relationship. In contrast, 80% of "bad" dads do not live with their children, 13% are cohabiting and only 7% are married.

Table 5. Demographic Covariates for All Fathers

Variable	**"Good dad"**	**"Bad dad"**	**Significant diff.**
Current age			NS
23 and under	23.5%	35.7%	
24 to 28	26.6%	31.8%	
29 to 34	26.7%	17.5%	
35 and older	23.3%	15.0%	
Race			NS
Latinos	26.9%	18.5%	
White	26.2%	13.0%	
Black	42.7%	65.0%	
Other	4.2%	3.4%	
Education			NS
H.S. dropout	28.8%	36.8%	
H.S. or GED	31.6%	37.9%	

College	39.6%	25.2%	
Convictions			***
None	84.0%	63.1%	
One	8.3%	15.2%	
Two or more	7.7%	21.7%	
Employed	83.0%	61.6%	†
Long-term job	66.3%	44.9%	NS
Marital/Residential			***
Married	44.9%	5.1%	
Cohabiting	42.5%	13.1%	
Nonresident	12.6%	81.9%	

N = 2431

†p < .10. ***p < .001.

This LCA suggests that a father's marital status is highly related to his fathering behaviors. As it stands, this first analysis suggests that only residential parents can be good fathers. On one level, this comparison is between apples and oranges. Nonresident fathers are constricted in their ability to interact with their children in ways that residential fathers are not because they do not share a home with their children. To see how nonresidential fathers construct parenting, this next analysis isolates that group.

A 3-cluster model best fits nonresidential dads. I have labeled the three clusters in this model the "out of house dads", "divorced dads" and, for lack of a better name, "deadbeat dads". The conditional probabilities for father involvement measures can be found in Table 6. Out of house dads seem to succeed in parenting as best a nonresidential parent can. Over half see their

child for an hour every day and almost all are with her at least twice a week. Out of house fathers are also good at cooperating with their children's mothers. 70% watch their child often and another 20% sometimes help when needed. The same drop-off for other fathers is seen in the responsibility measure, but almost half take their children places they need to be. These fathers score above the mean in both activity factors and actually score higher in care than in play activities. Additionally, the out of house fathers have high scores for in-kind support. Less than 20% of out of house dads have a formal support order, but almost 60% have an informal agreement. That involved fathers do not have formal support orders contradicts conventional wisdom. For nonresidential fathers, good parenting is not necessarily linked to formal child support, and is instead related to in-kind and informal channels.

Table 6. Conditional Probabilities for Nonresident Fathers, 3-Cluster Model

Variable	**"Out of house dad"**	**"Divorced dad"**	**"Deadbeat dad"**	**Sig. diff.**
Hour w/kid (1-3)				***
Mean	2.48	1.15	1.00	
2x month or less	9.3%	86.1%	99.8%	
2x a week	33.2%	12.9%	0.3%	
Every day	57.6%	0.9%	0.0%	
Watch child (1-3)				***
Mean	2.65	1.14	1.00	
Never/rarely	6.8%	87.4%	99.7%	

Sometimes	21.9%	11.1%	0.3%	
Often	71.4%	1.4%	0.0%	
Kid errand (1-3)				***
Mean	2.25	1.08	1.00	
Never/rarely	23.0%	92.6%	99.8%	
Sometimes	29.3%	6.7%	0.2%	
Often	47.8%	0.6%	0.0%	
Play factor	0.16	0.40	-1.08	***
Care factor	0.76	-0.75	-0.79	***
Paternity estblshd	76.9%	81.4%	64.8%	***
In-kind factor	0.29	0.22	-0.98	***
Child support				***
Formal order	16.2%	38.3%	23.6%	
Informal order	58.2%	45.4%	41.4%	
No child support	25.1%	16.1%	34.8%	
Percent of sample	49.3%	31.5%	19.2%	N/A

n = 488

*** $p < .001$.

"Out of house dads" are the largest group of nonresident fathers, while "divorced dads" make up about a third of the sample. Although these men are not technically divorced, since they were never married, they look very similar to divorced dads. We stereotypically imagine that middle class, divorced dads pay child support, and participate in the fun areas of parenting,

like playing games, but otherwise shirk the less enjoyable aspects of parenting. Indeed, this is the pattern presented by "divorced dads." These men infrequently spend long periods of time with their children; 90% fall into the twice a month or less category. Additionally, they cannot be trusted to watch the child or take her to appointments on a regular basis. Neither do they participate in care; they score three quarters of a standard deviation below the care average.

These men are not entirely bad, though, because they score well on several involvement aspects. Almost 80% have acknowledged paternity and they score well above the mean for play activities. They have a positive score for in-kind activities and are the group least likely to not have a child support agreement. Almost 40% have a formal order. Another 40% have an informal agreement, leaving only about 15% of their children without a steady, consistent financial arrangement. Although I have labeled the last group "deadbeat dads," because they participate very little in parenting, they do not fit the deadbeat parent stereotype perfectly. These men, who make up less than 20% of the sample, score very low on time, cooperative parenting and responsibility. Virtually all deadbeat dads fall into the lowest levels of these three measures. They have large, negative averages for both care and play activities. Additionally, deadbeat dads do not participate in in-kind child support and only 60% have acknowledged paternity. The reason I hesitate to outright condemn such men as deadbeats is that they participate in financial support at much higher levels than a "deadbeat" would. About a quarter have a formal support order and 2/5 have an informal agreement.

Table 7 shows that although age, race and consistent employment histories continue to be unrelated to father involvement, all other measures are significant. Education gains significance and its pattern is very interesting. "Divorced" fathers are more educated than other dads; 70% have graduated high school or more. Both out of house and deadbeat dads are more likely to be

high school dropouts. It would seem then, that the men closest in education levels to middle class divorced men also behave like them.

Table 7. Demographic Covariates for Nonresidential Fathers

Variable	**"Out of house dad"**	**"Divorced dad"**	**"Deadbeat dad"**	**Sig. diff.**
Current age				NS
23 and under	42.3%	39.6%	35.5%	
24 to 28	32.9%	32.5%	32.9%	
29 to 34	13.4%	17.1%	16.6%	
35 and older	11.3%	10.9%	15.0%	
Race				NS
Latinos	18.9%	17.6%	12.1%	
White	7.1%	9.7%	8.4%	
Black	70.4%	69.1%	75.2%	
Other	3.6%	3.5%	4.3%	
Education				***
H.S. dropout	45.3%	28.3%	44.5%	
H.S. or GED	35.8%	41.3%	31.3%	
College	18.9%	30.4%	24.2%	
Convictions				***
None	74.8%	69.8%	40.2%	
One	11.9%	12.9%	24.1%	
Two or more	13.3%	17.3%	35.7%	
Employed	70.7%	67.3%	40.0%	*

Long-term job	49.4%	54.0%	25.8%	NS

n = 488

*p < .05. ***p < .001.

Conviction history is associated with less involved parenting. 75% of out of house dads have never been convicted. While a similar amount of divorced fathers have no record, a slightly larger percent (13 vs. 17) have had multiple convictions. In contrast, over half of deadbeat fathers have records, and over a third are serial offenders. Finally, current employment is also associated with father involvement. Both out of house and divorced fathers have much higher rates of employment than the 40% of deadbeat dads with a job. This analysis confirms my concern about grouping residential and nonresidential fathers. Separating out nonresidential dads allows us to see their variability in parenting styles. Although they are, as a group, less involved than cohabiting and married fathers, a large segment, the out of house dads, are highly involved. The next analysis groups cohabiting and married men to see if, after controlling for coresidence, marital status matters for fathering.

The coresidential model, presented in Table 8, has two clusters, named "new dads" and "in a pinch dads." Over half of the sample is in a pinch dads, men that spend time with their children (almost ¾ do it every day) but are less likely to watch their children for mothers or run children errands. In a pinch dads score below the mean for physical and mental play, as well as for child care activities. Aside from being around their children, in a pinch dads seem to shy away from hands-on parenting.

Table 8. Conditional Probabilities for Coresidential Fathers, 2-Cluster Model

Variable	**"In a pinch dad"**	**"New dad"**	**Significant diff.**

Hour w/kid (1-3)			***
Mean	2.64	2.98	
2x month or less	8.5%	0.1%	
2x a week	18.7%	2.1%	
Every day	72.8%	97.9%	
Watch child (1-3)			***
Mean	2.54	2.91	
Never/rarely	10.9%	0.8%	
Sometimes	24.1%	7.7%	
Often	65.0%	91.5%	
Kid errand (1-3)			***
Mean	2.04	2.52	
Never/rarely	33.3%	12.3%	
Sometimes	29.1%	23.2%	
Often	37.6%	64.4%	
Physical play factor	-0.21	0.26	***
Mental play factor	-0.09	0.13	***
Care factor	-0.60	0.75	***
Percent of sample	54.8%	45.2%	N/A

n = 1851

*** p < .001.

"New dads" look like good dads in the all father analysis, but here their involvement scores are even higher. Almost all new dads are with their child every day and watch her whenever needed (91%). Although their responsibility levels drop, new dads score above the mean for care, mental and physical play. Note that both fathers, although statistically significant, have small metric differences in both the physical and mental play factors. Care values, on the other hand, are almost two standard deviations apart, with new dads scoring much higher. It is important to note, that when looking at cohabiting and married men, no category indicates poor or uninvolved parenting.

Table 9 contains information about the demographic differences between in a pinch and new dads. The previously seen relationships change for coresidential men. Age, education and employment history remain nonsignificant, and current employment and conviction history, previously important, fall to nonsignficance. Two other pattern changes are also important. For the first time, race is associated with parenting. Latino men are more likely to be "in a pinch dads", while African Americans are more likely to be new dads. Whites and those of other racial groups seem to be evenly split between the categories. Finally, marital status is not associated with a difference in parenting style. Married and cohabiting men are as likely to be "in a pinch dads" as they are to be "new" fathers. This finding suggests that, at least when children are young, men who live with their children are as "good" as men who are married to their children's mothers.

Table 9. Demographic Covariates for Coresidential Fathers

Variable	**"In a pinch dad"**	**"New dad"**	**Significant diff.**

Current age			NS
23 and under	21.0%	20.6%	
24 to 28	24.9%	27.6%	
29 to 34	29.1%	27.5%	
35 and older	25.1%	24.4%	
Race			***
Latinos	32.0%	23.4%	
White	27.5%	29.2%	
Black	36.6%	42.8%	
Other	3.8%	4.6%	
Education			NS
H.S. dropout	29.4%	25.1%	
H.S. or GED	30.6%	31.9%	
College	40.1%	43.0%	
Convictions			NS
None	85.9%	83.0%	
One	7.3%	8.9%	
Two or more	7.0%	8.1%	
Employed	85.6%	82.4%	NS
Long-term job	69.0%	66.6%	NS
Marital Status			NS
Married	49.4%	51.8%	
Cohabiting	50.6%	48.2%	

n = 1851

*** p < .001.

Discussion

This study indicates a substitute versus complement argument for parenting dimensions is a false dichotomy. Some fathers, the "deadbeat" and "he is dads", participate little in parenting. Unlike Furstenberg's "bad dad" image, though, they do fulfill several important dimensions of fathering- paternity acknowledgement and, to some degree, financial support. Other men construct their roles as fathers differently. "Divorced dads" are nonresidential men who provide economic support and fun, but avoid the more mundane, responsible aspects of parenting. "In a pinch dads", in contrast, will happily watch their child or, to a lesser degree, take her to appointments, but do not interact with their children on an individual basis. "Out of house dads", in my mind, score as high as can be expected since they do not reside with their children. It's important to note, however, that many do not participate in the formal child support system. For some men, being a good dad means having an informal agreement with your child's mother, rather than opting for a more traditional, legal system. Thus substitutions do occur, but only "divorced dads" follow Becker's financial support versus time model. The most common substitution is informal support instead of formal support, but these men still provide interaction.

The importance of informal support is often missed in other works because they operate from the assumption that good unmarried parenting is similar to appropriate divorced father parenting. The most focused upon aspect of divorced parenting is the presence and payment of a child support order. Such an emphasis for unmarried fathers is misplaced for several reasons. Researchers need to realize that unlike divorced parents, many unmarried parents are still in love or romantically involved. There would be few reasons to file a formal support order while a

couple is together. Couples that are no longer dating do not need any legal proceedings to end their relationship and, thus, are less likely to come into contact with child support officials. Coupled with the distrust of the legal system that many, especially those with prior arrests, individuals have, and the likelihood of a formal legal support is slim. As suggested by Edin and Lein (1997) and Waller (2002), those that have formal support orders may be the men least likely to be involved parents. Their findings suggest that many unmarried mothers rely on the formal system as a last resort, to force uninvolved fathers to financially support their children. Thus for unmarried families, research needs to expand to look at various financial arrangements, including informal agreements and in-kind support.

As echoed in previous research, even those most involved, the "good" and "new" dads, are deficient in the responsibility measure. Pleck (1997) suggests that although men have increased the amount of time with their children, the ultimate responsibility for children's schedules, health and schooling largely resides with their mothers. Programs designed to increase father involvement (i.e. Johnson, Levine and Doolittle, 1999) need to recognize that men often lag behind women in management aspects, and should teach those necessary skills.

Surprisingly, few demographic measures are consistently associated with parenting styles. For the all father sample and nonresident dads, employment is important. Men with jobs are more likely to adopt a more involved parenting style. Additionally, it seems that men who have been convicted of a crime are more likely to be "deadbeats." Education gains significance for nonresident fathers and follows a sideways U pattern. The most educated have medium levels of involvement, while less educated men are usually either highly involved "out of house dads" or "deadbeats." Additionally, conviction status depresses father involvement. Programs that are designed to encourage unmarried fathering might look towards the penal system. Both

children and their fathers may benefit if parenting skills were incorporated into the rehabilitation process.

Race is the only characteristic that distinguishes parenting styles for coresidential fathers. Latinos are more likely to be "in a pinch dads" and African American men are more likely to be "new fathers." That Latino men tend to be hands off is consonant with portrayals of "machismo" and more distant Hispanic paternal models. In contrast, Black men are often seen as distant fathers, and their over-representation as new fathers counteracts that image.

The most important finding in this paper is how marital/residential status is related to fathering styles. My results clearly indicate that, despite a small group of nonresidential fathers that participate heavily in their children's lives, residency apart from a father's child reduces his involvement. The difference in parenting styles between resident and nonresident fathers is stark and large. Marital status, on the other hand, is unrelated to parenting. Men who live with their children are equally likely to adopt any given parenting style, whether or not they are married to their child's mother. Although more research is needed to unpack and reaffirm this finding, my research suggests that in terms of father involvement, policy that focuses on encouraging marriage alone may be misguided. It may be more important to encourage couples to live together as a first step, or focus more on nonresidential fathers than cohabiting ones.

This study brings clarification to father involvement predictor research. Depending on the definition of father involvement used and the type of father being studied, distinct dimensions cluster together and different demographics are associated with parenting. For example, education follows a nonlinear pattern for nonresidential fathers. This association may help explain the divergent findings between education and involvement. Nonresidential parenting has more variation, and accordingly, more measures predict differences. To

complicate matters, although certain fathers cluster all behaviors together, others, like the "divorced dads" substitute financial support for daily interaction. Thus, few demographics can help us to understand how the different parenting styles relate to different types of men.

My last finding of note is that most men are good fathers. Only 20% of all fathers and nonresidential fathers are what we would consider uninvolved or bad dads. At a time when so much popular media and political discourse focuses on "the future of fathering" and the loss of men in American families, this finding can help to slow the escalating pseudo-hysteria. Many men are caring for their young children and even participating in areas that are stereotypically female, like diapering and feeding a toddler.

Of course, like any other work, this study suffers from several limitations. The most critical concern has to do with the representativeness of the sample. Since I used father data, only men who answered the survey were included. Clearly, men who responded to the FFCW study are more likely to be involved in their children's lives. The worst fathers have no contact with their children or their mothers, and thus, are not depicted in this paper. Additionally, since the focal children are so young, it will be important to follow this sample as their children reach new developmental stages with different concerns. Although the vast majority of men are involved in their children's lives now, will such a pattern continue as the child ages? Additionally, in the future, more relationships will break up and either the mothers or fathers may find new significant others. Will these men continue to parent when their child's mother marries another person?

Conclusion

This paper contributes to the literature in several ways. One, most men are good fathers. Two, distinct parenting styles exist and are more complicated than simple substitution or

complementary theories suggest. Three, for a matched sample of urban births in the late 1990s, married and cohabiting fathers of young children parent similarly. For these families, legal marriage is not associated with better fathers. Although these results are notable, several lines of further research should be explored. Will these relationships continue in the future? How will parenting styles change if couples marry, or more likely, they split up? Will these father involvement measures be predictive of fathering at a later time? And finally, will these different types of fathering have any effects on children? Hopefully, in time, we will learn more about fathering, how it is performed, which men participate in different parenting styles and ultimately which style best benefits children.

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