Complicated Families and Men's Involvement with Coresidential Children

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Abstract
Recent research has highlighted multipartnered fertility and coresidential children as negatively related to nonresidential father visitation, but there has been little consideration of the opposite scenario: whether nonresidential father visitation, stepchildren, and multipartnered fertility affect involvement with coresidential children. Using the National Survey of Family Growth and focusing on fathers with biological coresidential children under 5 (n=649) and ages 5-18 (n=658), this research examines whether the frequency of interaction with coresidential children is affected by multipartnered fertility, coresidential stepchildren, and interaction with nonresidential children.

Introduction

In recent years, interest in father involvement has increased dramatically, largely due to the growth in nonresidential fathers. With high rates of divorce and nonmarital childbearing, at least half of children will now spend some time living in a single-mother household (Bianchi 1990; Bumpass and Lu 2000). The growth in nonresidential fathers has been accompanied by the concern that father absence can have severe and long-lasting consequences for children's well-being (e.g., Amato 2000). As a result of this concern, increasing father involvement for nonresidential children has become a major societal and political focus, with the federal government spending $500 million dollars over 5 years to promote responsible fatherhood.

At the same time, other social changes related to single parenthood and nonresidential fatherhood have also occurred. In particular, it is likely that today's single parents repartner and have additional children in new relationships. This phenomenon, known as multipartnered fertility, has resulted in increasingly complex family situations for parents and children. As of 2002, just over a fourth of all fathers 15-44 with two or more children had children with two or more partners (Guzzo and Furstenberg 2007). These numbers are considerably higher when looking at unmarried and disadvantaged fathers (Carlson and Furstenberg 2006). Generally, multipartnered fertility among fathers translates into having coresidential children from a current relationship and nonresidential children from a prior relationship(s). Less commonly, some fathers with children by different partners live with all their children. And along with having additional children in new partnerships, many of the new partnerships involve stepchildren, as single parents often partner with people who themselves have children from prior relationships. The complicated nature of today's families presents a challenge to involved parenthood,

particularly for fathers, who are far more likely than mothers to have nonresidential children and coresidential stepchildren.

Most recent scholarly attention has focused on what happens to father involvement when men no longer live with their children. Maternal gatekeeping (Fagan & Barnett 2003) and the quality of the parental relationship (Carlson, McLanahan, & Brooks-Gunn 2008; Sobolewski & King 2005) have been shown to affect nonresidential father involvement, but the most popular hypothesis has focused on the notion of competing obligations. Furstenberg and colleagues argue that fathers "swap" their families when an early parental union ends and men form new relationships (Furstenberg and Nord 1985; Furstenberg and Cherlin, 1991; Seltzer 1991; Furstenberg and Harris 1992; Furstenberg 1995). This argument basically states that men's involvement with children is largely based on coresidence, so when parental relationships end and fathers no longer live with their children, involvement declines. Involvement with nonresidential children from a prior union is most strongly affected when men have new children in new coresidential relationships, as they focus on the current residential family at the expense of children from prior relationships. Evidence largely supports this argument, though it seems that only the presence of new biological children (as opposed to stepchildren) affect men's involvement and support of nonresidential children (Manning and Smock 1999, 2000; Guzzo 2009). Studies generally conclude, then, that having new biological coresidential children negatively impacts men's involvement with their nonresidential children. Given that involvement with nonresidential children generally declines over time (Mott 1990; Furstenberg and Harris 1992; Furstenberg 1995), the identification of potential causes of the decline is an important first step to increasing nonresidential father involvement.

Because of the understandable concern over nonresidential father involvement, attention to the factors that influence *coresidential* father involvement has waned, and an important but overlooked question is whether increasing nonresidential father involvement or the presence of stepchildren affects involvement with coresidential children. On the one hand, father involvement may be a zero-sum game, in which high levels of involvement and time spent with nonresidential children or stepchildren comes at the price of involvement and time spent with coresidential children. On the other hand, selection processes may be at play or fathers may combine time spent with nonresidential and coresidential children, such that we may see that the most involved nonresidential fathers and stepfathers are also the most involved coresidential fathers. Using the 2002 Cycle of the National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG), this paper examines the association between having coresidential stepchildren, having children with different partners, and the visitation of nonresidential children and the frequency of involvement with coresidential biological children.

Competing Obligations

Furstenberg and colleagues argue that men's parental obligations are largely based on coresidence and that men tend to concentrate their attention and resources to their current household and children, even if it decreases the resources expended on nonresidential children (Furstenberg and Nord 1985; Furstenberg and Cherlin 1991; Seltzer 1991; Furstenberg and Harris 1992; Furstenberg 1995). This argument presents men and their new partners (who may pressure men not to divert resources to an outside household) in an unflattering light, but part of the explanation lies in practical and logistical constraints. There is only so much time in a day, a week, a month, and so on. If coresidential fathers are at all involved in their coresidential children's lives (stepchildren or otherwise), it will take up time, time that could potentially be

spent with nonresidential children. Coresidential fathers certainly face pressure from their current partners to be involved with their shared biological coresidential children and perhaps with stepchildren as well, but they also have more direct opportunities for involvement stemming from coresidence – they see coresidential children more often, interact with them on a personal basis, and share in daily lives, all factors that likely strengthen the father-child bond and increase the rewards of being involved. Conversely, fathers are far less likely to have a direct relationship with their nonresidential children; their relationships with their nonresidential children are often mediated by coresidential mothers. They are far less likely to be involved in day-to-day interactions and have less time to form a strong parental bond. As such, they may feel they get fewer of the rewards of parenting, even if they feel burdened by the costs of parenting (i.e., child support). Thus, though unfortunate, it makes sense that many men focus on their coresidential children at the expense of their nonresidential children.

However, one can potentially make a similar argument for the opposite scenario. When fathers are highly involved with their nonresidential children, this can cut into their time with coresidential children. For instance, a nonresidential father who sees a nonresidential child a few times a week while coaching the child's sports team may end up missing dinner with his coresidential children. A father who wants to have one-on-one time with his nonresidential children (perhaps to show how important they are to him or to convey a message that this day is "all about you" rather than having to deal with the often complicated relationships between stepparents and step- and half-siblings) may take only those children out for a recreational activity. If the competing obligations hypothesis is true, I would expect that the more frequent the visitation with nonresidential children, the more negative an effect on interaction with coresidential children.

A potential caveat to this, though, is *what* men do with their nonresidential children when they visit them. Here, the term "visit" can be misleading, as many nonresidential children are actually visiting their fathers, rather than the other way around. Many fathers' visits with nonresidential children come in the form of taking the children to his home. As such, they most likely would be spending time with both nonresidential and coresidential children, combining fathering behaviors. If this is the case, then there may be little relationship between the frequency of visitation with nonresidential children and the frequency of interacting with coresidential children.

Competing obligations can also come from having both stepchildren and biological children in the same household. Although the evidence largely suggests that it is biological coresidential children, not stepchildren, that have a negative effect on men's involvement with nonresidential children (Manning and Smock 1999, 2000), it is less clear whether stepchildren affect involvement with coresidential biological children. Though stepfathers tend to be less involved with stepchildren than biological fathers are with biological children (Cherlin 1992), the presence of stepchildren can still impact the amount of time with biological children. If men spend some time with their stepchildren, perhaps in response to pressure from the children's mother or in an effort not to play favorites, the finite amount of time available may mean that involvement with stepchildren comes at the expense of time with biological children. Again, though, many activities (such as meals or playing together) involve all the children in a household, regardless of parentage, so the presence of stepchildren may not have a large effect.

"Dedicated" Fathers

While the competing obligations hypothesis would suggest that high levels of visitation with nonresidential children would negatively impact involvement with coresidential children,

another scenario is also possible. Instead of a negative association between nonresidential child visitation and interaction with coresidential children, a *positive* association may exist if selection and concerns about "fairness" come into play. Some men may be highly dedicated to the father role, even if their relationship with their children's mother is no longer intact. These are the type of men who enjoy being with their children and who want to actively participate in their children's upbringing. They want to be "good" fathers and try to be highly involved with both nonresidential and coresidential children. Thus, the type of father who visits his nonresidential children frequently, who makes a concerted effort to be part of their lives despite the logistical barriers and to incorporate them into his new family, may be the type of father who is also very active and involved with his coresidential children.

Some men may also be cognizant of the potential for unequal involvement among coresidential and nonresidential children and make efforts to be "fair" precisely because he does not want time spent with nonresidential children to take time away from coresidential children, and vice versa. Not wanting one group of children to feel slighted, such fathers would try to compensate by spending more time with coresidential children after to spending time with nonresidential children. Nonresidential children are often several years older than coresidential children, so the types of activities they can engage in may differ, and combining activities may be difficult. For a father concerned about fairness, a dinner out with older nonresidential children might be compensated by being home in time to bathe and put younger coresidential children to bed. If selection plays a role (where the most involved nonresidential fathers are also the most involved coresidential fathers and vice versa) or concerns about fairness are present (where fathers want to spend equal amounts of time with both nonresidential and coresidential children), then I would expect that more frequent visitation with nonresidential children would

be associated with more frequent interaction with coresidential children and infrequent visitation with nonresidential children would be associated with low levels of interaction with coresidential children as well.

Other influences

Besides visitation with nonresidential children, other factors may affect involvement with coresidential children. In particular, other aspects of the family situation are important. Multipartnered fertility can play a role – if men's coresidential children are with different partners, there may be differential treatment based on how well the half-siblings get along with each other or how well and how frequently they interact with their stepmother and nonresidential mother. Men's relationship status is also important; single coresidential fathers have more opportunities to interact with their coresidential children because they have no other partner with whom to share parenting. Although there is some evidence that cohabiting fathers tend to be less involved than married fathers (Hofferth and Anderson 2003), other work suggests differences are minimal (Berger, Carlson, Bzostek, and Osborne 2008).

Child-related characteristics can play a role as well. The number of coresidential children is important – the more children with whom a father coresides, the more opportunities for interaction, but it is likely that only biological children matter (Cherlin 1992). Children's age will also play a role – younger children require more interaction, and as children age, interaction and involvement tends to decline, especially during adolescence (Furstenberg, 2000). Many studies show that fathers spend more time with sons than daughters (Lundberg 2005; Yeung, Sandberg, Davis-Kean, and Hofferth 2001) and spend more time with children overall if they have sons (Barnett and Baruch 1987), so the presence of coresidential sons may encourage more involvement with coresidential children.

Finally, socioeconomic and demographic factors may play a role. Education is positively associated with paternal involvement (Marsiglio 1991), though income is negatively related to weekday interactions with children and has a very small positive effect on weekend interactions with children (Hofferth and Anderson 2003), an effect that may stem from increased hours of employment during the week. There may be race-ethnic and nativity differences in involvement with coresidential children, though the findings from studies on nonresidential father involvement have been inconsistent or varied across types of involvement (Cooksey and Craig 1998; King, Harris, and Heard 2004). Other influences on father involvement include religiosity (Wilcox 2002) and men's family structure during adolescence and whether their mother had a teenage birth (Furstenberg and Weiss 2000).

Data and methods

This paper uses Cycle 6 (2002) of the National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG). The NSFG is a nationally representative, household-based cross-sectional survey of Americans aged 15-44. Past cycles of the data have interviewed only women, but the most recent wave included 4,928 men, with a response rate for men of 78% (Groves, Benson, Mosher et al., 2005). In gathering information about men's current and prior partners (current spouse/partner, last three sexual partners, up to three former wives, and the first premarital cohabiting partner), men are asked whether they had any children with each partner. In addition, men are then asked if they had any children that have not yet been discussed and whether these children are with the same woman. A comparison of male childbearing data in the NSFG with data from vital statistics suggests that men are not underreporting children (Martinez, Chandra, Abma, Jones, and Mosher 2006), though this does not necessarily translate into accurate reporting of child-related characteristics such as visitation; the limitations of this data are further discussed at the end of

this paper. The analyses are limited to men whose children are all 18 or younger (n=1,544), who have biological coresidential children (excluding an additional 477 men), and who have no children who have been adopted, placed in foster care or are deceased (excluding 6 men). Although the main focus here is to analyze the role of both multipartnered fertility and visitation with nonresidential children, there were too few men to include those who had both coresidential and nonresidential children but by with only one mother (n=14). An additional 21 are missing information on one or more of the activities with coresidential children, leaving a final sample size of 1,026 fathers.

Activities with coresidential children asked separately for young children (n=649) and school-aged children (n=658); 281 fathers have both young children and school-aged children. For coresidential children aged 0-4, fathers were asked, on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 5 (every day), "in the last four weeks, how often did you…

- Feed (him/her/either of them/any of them) or eat meals with (him/her/either of them/any of them)?
- Bathe, diaper, or dress (him/her/either of them/any of them) or help (him/her/either of them/any of them) to bathe, dress, or use the toilet?
- Play with (him/her/either of them/any of them)?
- Read to (him/her/either of them/any of them)?

These measures did not scale well together (alpha = .6039) and are thus analyzed separately. Because virtually all fathers played with and fed their children several times a week or daily (98.6% and 97.4%, respectively), the categories of "never," "less than once a week," and "several times a week" were collapsed into one category in the analyses for the measures of

playing and feeding. For coresidential children aged 5-18, fathers were asked, on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 5 (every day), "in the last four weeks, how often did you…

- Help with homework or check that (he/she/they) did (his/her/their) homework?
- Talk with (him/her/either of them/any of them) about things that happened during the day?
- Take (him/her/either of them/any of them) to or from (his/her/their activities)?
- Eat meals with (him/her/either of them/any of them).

These measures did not scale well together either (alpha = .5342) and are also analyzed separately. Most fathers ate meals with their children several times a week or more (95.8%), so the categories of "never," "less than once a week," and "several times a week" were collapsed into one category for the indicator of meal frequency. Most fathers also talked with their children about their day at least once a week or more (96.5%), so the categories of "never" and "less than once a week" were collapsed into one category for the indicator of talking with their children about their day. An additional measure was asked for all coresidential children regardless of age, on a scale of 0 (not at all) to 6 (every day): "in the past 12 months, how often would you say you spent time with (this child/either of these children/any of these children) on an outing away from the home to places such as museums, zoos, movies, sports, etc.?" It should be noted that these questions to not reference a particular child but refer to any or all children, and the data does not distinguish between involvement with stepchildren and biological children.

The analytical plan is to analyze, using ordinal logistic regression, the frequency of interacting with coresidential children, controlling for competing obligations and family complexity, as reflected through the presence of nonbiological coresidential children (stepchildren), multipartnered fertility, and visitation with nonresidential children. Visitation with nonresidential children is based on the following question asked of all men who reported

having one or more nonresidential child under age 19 who was still alive and not adopted or placed in foster care: "During the last 12 months, about how often did you see or have a visit with [this child/ either of these children/ any of these children]?" Responses were measured on a scale of 0 (not at all) to 6 (every day), and as with activities with coresidential children, visitation with nonresidential children does not refer to a specific child. Multipartnered fertility is based on men's fertility histories, and measures were created indicating whether coresidential children were all with the same partner, and whether coresidential and nonresidential children with the same or different partners. To account for both the presence of nonresidential children and multipartnered fertility, I constructed a series of indicator variables: coresidential children only with only one mother (the reference category); coresidential children only but with different mothers; coresidential and nonresidential children with different mothers, with visitation of nonresidential children monthly or less; and coresidential and nonresidential children with different mothers, with visitation of nonresidential children weekly or more. I would have also liked to include stepchildren in these indicator variables, but doing so would have produced very small cell sizes, so the presence of stepchildren is a simple dichotomous indicator. In preliminary models, I explored other ways of controlling for visitation and multipartnered fertility, including a more straightforward measure of visitation (simple dichotomous measures of frequency) and a separate control for multipartnered fertility but interpretation of results was not straightforward and model fit was better when combining visitation with multipartnered fertility. I also explored having a visitation cutoff of weekly or more as well; the results were substantively similar but model fit was poorer.

The multivariate analyses include controls for men's age, race/ethnicity, and nativity. The men's socioeconomic variables, measured at the time of the survey, include level of

education, employment status (full-time or not), and total reported household income in the past twelve months. Frequency of religious service attendance is also included. Measures of men's family background include family structure at age 14 and whether the respondent's mother had a birth prior to age 18. Men's current relationship status is measures as married (omitted), cohabiting, or not in a coresidential relationship (referred to as "single" for brevity). To further account for the extent of men's obligations to children, the number of biological coresidential children, the age of the youngest child, and the gender composition of coresidential children (measured as sons only (omitted), sons and daughters, and daughters only) are covariates.

Results

Descriptive results

Table 1 presents the weighted descriptive results for men whose biological children are all aged 18 or less and who have at least one biological coresidential child, presented separately by children's age group (coresidential children aged 0-4 and coresidential children aged 5-18). The average age of fathers with young coresidential children was 32.2 years old, and the average age of fathers with school-aged children was about 36 years old. About two-thirds of fathers were non-Hispanic white, about 9% were non-Hispanic black, 19% were Hispanic, and about 6% were some other race-ethnicity. 18.2% of fathers of young children were foreign-born, as were 16.2% of fathers of older children. 82% of fathers with coresidential children were currently married; of those with young children, 15% were cohabiting and only 3% were single parents. Of those with older children, 9% were cohabiting and 8.5% were single parents. Just over three-fourths of fathers with coresidential children lived with both biological parents at age 14, and 12% of the fathers with young children and 15% of the fathers with older children reported their own mother had a birth prior to age 18. The majority of fathers (about 81%) are working full-

time. About 15% had less than a high school degree, with most having a high school degree or some college. 26% of fathers with young children had college degree or more, as did 21% of fathers of older children. Of those with young children, 22% never attended religious services, 25% attended less than once a month, 23% attended 1-3 times a month, and 31% attended weekly or more. Of those with older children, 23% never attended religious services, 23% attended less than once a month, 20% attended 1-3 times a month, and 34% attended weekly or more.

- Table 1 here -

Turning now to the presence of children, fathers with young children had about 1.8 biological coresidential children on average, and fathers of older children had about 2.1 biological coresidential children. The average age of the oldest coresidential child was 4.3 years old for those with children aged 0-4 and 9.7 years old with children 5-18. For both groups of fathers, having only daughters is less common than having sons only or sons and daughters. 39% of those with children aged 0-4 have coresidential sons only, 32% have coresidential sons and daughters, and 29% have coresidential daughters only. For those with older children, 32% have sons only, 43% have sons and daughters, and 25% have daughters only. In addition to having biological coresidential children, about 18% of those with young children and 23% of those with older children had nonbiological children as well. Finally, it is apparent that the vast majority of men with biological coresidential children and whose children are all aged 18 or less have only biological coresidential children with one partner – 86.6% of those with young children and 87.3% of those with older children. It is worth noting that about 14% and 18%, respectively, of fathers with coresidential children with only one partner also have coresidential nonbiological children (not shown), meaning that only about 75% (86.6%*14%) of fathers with

young children and 72% (87.3%*18%) of fathers with school-aged children have "traditional" families in which they live with only their coresidential biological children by only one partner.

For men with young children, just over 13% have children with multiple partners; 45% of whom 45% also have coresidential nonbiological children, meaning their partners have multipartnered fertility as well (not shown). Three percent of men with young children live with all their children by different partners, representing about 22% (3.0%/13.4%=22.4%) of all men with young children with different partners. 7.6% of those with young children have both coresidential and nonresidential children with different partners and visit their nonresidential children less than monthly, and 2.9% have both coresidential and nonresidential children with different partners and visit their nonresidential children monthly or more frequently. For men with children aged 5-18, just under 13% have multipartnered fertility (of whom 55% also have coresidential nonbiological children). Three and half percent live with all their children by different mothers, representing about 28% (3.5%/12.7%=27.6%) of those with multipartnered fertility. 6.2% have both nonresidential and coresidential children with different partners and visit nonresidential children less than monthly, and 3.1% have both nonresidential and coresidential children with different mothers and visit monthly or more frequently.

From the descriptives, a few things are apparent about the family complexity today's fathers with coresidential minor children face. One, though the majority (about three-fourths) of fathers with coresidential children have "traditional" families, a substantial minority have complex households with stepchildren or children with different partners. Two, while it is widely assumed that multipartnered fertility translates into having children in different households, this is not always the case, as about quarter of men who have children with different partners live with all their children, and many men with multipartnered fertility partner with

women with multipartnered fertility as well. Third, among those with both coresidential and nonresidential children by different partners, it is more common for men to see their nonresidential children rather infrequently than to see them on a frequent basis of monthly or more.

Bivariate Relationships

Tables 2-4 display the bivariate relationship between the presence of stepchildren, multipartnered fertility and visitation, and frequency of interaction with coresidential children. Looking first at Table 2, which details involvement with children aged 0-4, it is clear that most coresidential fathers engage in activities several times a week or more (next-to-last column). 31% of fathers report bathing their child(ren) several times a week, and 54% report doing so daily. Only 5.5% report that they had not participated in bathing their child at all in the past four weeks, with 9% reporting sporadic participation in bathing (less than once a week or once a week). Nearly all fathers report having fed or had meals (97.4%) or playing (98.6%) with their child(ren) several times a week or more. Fathers reported lower levels of reading to children, with about 25% reporting not at all or less than once a week, and only about 58% reporting several times a week or more, but the lower frequency here may be a product of the child's age.

- Table 2 here -

The presence of stepchildren does not significantly affect the frequency of interacting with younger coresidential children. There are some differences in the frequency of involvement by multipartnered fertility and visitation with nonresidential children. 42% of fathers with coresidential and nonresidential children by different partners and who visit their nonresidential children monthly or more reported reading to their coresidential children aged 0-4 every day, compared to only 26.6% of those with only coresidential children by only one partner, consistent

with the selection hypothesis that the most involved nonresidential fathers tend to be the most involved coresidential fathers, too. However, these fathers also report about twice as often as those with only coresidential children with one partner (30.1% vs. 14.5%) that they did not read to their young children at all in the past month, consistent with the hypothesis of competing obligations. Together, these contradictory patterns suggest that there may be different types of fathers. The frequency of playing with children also varies by multipartnered fertility and visitation. Here, the biggest difference occurs among those with coresidential children by one partner and coresidential children by multiple partners. Only 45.5% of those with coresidential children by multiple partners report playing with their child(ren) every day compared to 83.7% of those with children only by one partner. Differences in the frequency of bathing or feeding/having meals with young children are not significant across the categories of multipartnered fertility and visitation.

- Table 3 here -

For older children, there seems to be a bit more variability in involvement. The vast majority of fathers with coresidential school-aged children report talking about their child's day (91.4%) or eating meals with them (95.8%) several times a week or more, but taking children to activities or helping with homework occurs less frequently. About 15% of fathers report not helping with homework or taking children to activities at all in the month prior to the survey, while only about 60% report doing these activities several times a week or more often. There are no significant differences by the presence of stepchildren, but there are some differences by multipartnered fertility and visitation. Multipartnered fertility among those with only coresidential children is significantly and positively associated with taking children to activities; men with coresidential children with only one partner are much more likely to report not taking

to their child(ren) to activities at all in the past month than those with who have children with different partners but coreside with all their children (15.7% vs. 0.6%). They are also less likely to take their children to activities several times a week or more (74.4% among those with no multipartnered fertility vs. 81.9% among those with multipartnered fertility and coresidential children), though this obscures the fact that men with multipartnered fertility among their coresidential children are less likely to report having taken their children to activities every day. Fathers with coresidential and nonresidential children with different partners and who visit their nonresidential children monthly or more also differ significantly from those with coresidential children by only one partner for the frequency of eating meals with children. Men who visit their nonresidential children frequently report having meals only once a week or less roughly 5 times as often as those with only coresidential children by one partner, and only 67% of those who visit nonresidential children frequently report meals with their coresidential children every day compared to 78% of those with only coresidential children. These differences suggest that the competing obligations hypothesis is somewhat true – frequent visits with nonresidential children may cut into mealtime with coresidential children.

- Table 4 here –

Finally, the frequency of taking children on outings is displayed in Table 4. About 65% of fathers report taking their coresidential child(ren) on some sort of outing weekly or more or often. The presence of stepchildren is significantly associated with the frequency of such outings, with those who have stepchildren and biological children less likely to report no or 1-2 outings in the past year but much more likely to report only going on outings several times a year. Multipartnered fertility also matters – men with coresidential children with only one partner report higher proportions of not going on any outings or only several outings a year

(18.4%) compared to those with coresidential children only with different partners (6.2%). Those with coresidential children with different partners are far more likely to report doing activities several times a week (64.7%) than those without multipartnered fertility (29.5%), though none of them report doing activities daily, which occurs among 7.3% of those with coresidential children by only one partner.

Multivariate Results

The bivariate associations may be driven by socioeconomic, demographic, and children-related characteristics (particularly age and number of children), so I turn now to multivariate models. Because there are several dependent variables, I limit discussion of the models only to the variables of interest – stepchildren, multipartnered fertility, and visitation with nonresidential children. All models include the controls discussed in the Data and methods section, and the full results are available upon request.

Table 5 shows the multivariate results for activities with coresidential biological children aged 0-4. The presence of stepchildren does not significantly affect the frequency of involvement, but multipartnered fertility and visitation of nonresidential children are somewhat important. For bathing, frequent visitation (monthly or more) with nonresidential children is positively associated with the frequency of participating in bathing young coresidential children. For feeding and playing, having only coresidential children but with different partners is negatively associated with frequency.

- Table 5 here -

Table 6 shows the results for activities with older children and the outings with all children. Here, the presence of stepchildren is significant, reducing the frequency of taking coresidential biological children to activities, talking with them about their day, and eating meals

with them. This may reflect having more children overall to spend time with, or it may be that somehow having stepchildren weakens relationships with coresidential biological children. Multipartnered fertility and visitation are also somewhat important. Men with coresidential children by different partners report taking children to activities more frequently than those with children by only one partner. Fathers with nonresidential children who visit those children monthly or more frequently take their coresidential children on outings more frequently than those with only coresidential children by one partner, likely reflecting the fact that nonresidential fathers often participate in recreational activities with their nonresidential children (Stewart 1999) and are then simply bringing coresidential children along.

- Table 6 here -

Discussion

With the dramatic changes in family life over the past few decades, the early attention to coresidential father involvement has given way to concern about nonresidential father involvement. One line of research has focused on the role of men's new families (stepchildren and new biological children) and multipartnered fertility in low rates of nonresidential involvement, largely arguing that men have competing obligations for time and money. Under this framework, men tend to focus on those children with whom it is both easiest to be involved and for whom involvement brings the biggest rewards, i.e., biological children who currently live with the father. The major theorized pathway is from the presence and involvement with coresidential biological children to interactions with other children, and nearly all research assumes this pathway is unidirectional. Virtually no research has investigated whether these competing obligations – stepchildren, children with different partners, or children outside the home – can impact men's interaction with their biological coresidential children.

Using the 2002 NSFG, I analyzed men's involvement with their coresidential children, examining whether it was affected by the presence of stepchildren, children with different partners, and visitation of nonresidential children. The descriptive results here suggested that, of men with at least one coresidential biological child and whose children were all aged 18 or less, roughly 75% have what can be considered a "traditional" family with only coresidential children by only one partner. And although only a small proportion of men with coresidential children only have children with more than one partner, this represents about a fourth of all men with multipartnered fertility who have at least one coresidential child. Finally, the descriptive results demonstrated that it is much more common for men with both nonresidential and coresidential children by different partners to visit nonresidential children less than monthly than to visit them monthly or more.

Two hypotheses were considered regarding the interrelationship between coresidential children interaction and family complexity, along with the null hypothesis: 1) higher levels of visitation with nonresidential children would be associated with lower levels of involvement with coresidential children, as would having stepchildren and multipartnered fertility, 2) higher levels of visitation with nonresidential children would be associated with higher levels of interaction with coresidential children. The bivariate results suggested that aspects of both hypotheses were at play among young children for reading with children, while multipartnered fertility negatively affected playing with young children. For men with older children whose children are all coresidential, multipartnered fertility was somewhat related to the frequency of taking older children to activities, but again, the relationship was less than straightforward. Fathers without multipartnered fertility and only coresidential children are more likely to take children to activities daily but also more likely to not to take children to activities at all. Fathers who visit

nonresidential children frequently (monthly or more) eat meals with older coresidential children less frequently than fathers with only coresidential children by only one partner. Stepchildren are associated with more outings, as is multipartnered fertility among coresidential children. In multivariate models, the picture continues to be muddled. Frequent visitation of nonresidential children is associated with more frequent involvement in bathing young children and taking children on outings; the latter may simply reflect combining activities with nonresidential and coresidential children. Thus, I would conclude that the hypothesis that the most involved nonresidential fathers are also the most involved fathers is only weakly supported at best. There is no support that involvement with nonresidential children takes away from time with coresidential children, though it does not appear that men who do not see nonresidential children very frequently are particularly involved with coresidential children either..

Multipartnered fertility within the household increases the likelihood of taking older children to activities, but it is negatively related to the frequency of feeding and playing with young children. Here, I would generally conclude that multipartnered fertility within the household is negatively related to father involvement but only for young children. It seems likely that the positive association between activities and coresidential multipartnered fertility among older children may reflect the often broader age range of children when multipartnered fertility is present and thus a broader and more varied schedule of children's activities, such that this relationship might be driven primarily by logistical factors – there are simply more opportunities for activities. The broader age range might also explain the negative relationship with activities with younger children – fathers might have obligations to their older children (who are more likely to need chauffeuring to activities or help with homework) that negatively impact their ability to be involved frequently with young children. The presence of stepchildren

negatively impacts the frequency of taking older coresidential children to activities, taking to them about their day, and eating meals with them. Stepchildren seem to impact men with older biological children, but the mechanism behind this relationship is unclear – whether this simply represents another draw on men's time (i.e., competing obligations) or whether it is something more complicated, such as men with stepchildren being more likely to avoid interacting with children overall.

Limitations

A major limitation with the data is that specific information with activities with each child were not collected. It is not possible to distinguish between activities with coresidential biological and nonbiological children or between activities with coresidential children by different partners. Nor is it possible to determine whether fathers with both coresidential and nonresidential children were engaging in joint activities with those children. The cross-sectional format of the data also preclude drawing conclusions about causality – for instance, it not clear whether men who have stepchildren began to interact with coresidential children less frequently before or after the stepchildren entered his life or whether the type of men who have children with a woman who already has children are somehow different than other types of fathers.

The accuracy of interaction and visitation data may also be problematic; even men who place little salience on the father role are likely to be aware of the current social standards exhorting high levels of father involvement, so men may overstate interactions and visitation. The format and order of the questions may impact reporting as well. Men are first asked about coresidential children, then are asked about visitation and interactions with nonresidential children. Asking first about the children for whom they are most likely to have high levels of involvement may influence men to overstate interactions with nonresidential children.

It is also worth noting that the present analysis underestimates family complexity, as those with nonresidential biological children only (n=477) are excluded, as are those with both coresidential and nonresidential children but with only one partner (n=14). Further, the restriction to men whose children were all aged 18 or younger likely underestimated the extent of family complexity, as there is often a fairly large timing gap between men's earlier and later families such that men may have minor coresidential children and non-minor nonresidential children from a prior relationship. Finally, there is always concern in household-based surveys about the representation of disadvantaged populations (Hernandez and Brandon 2002). As family complexity tends to be higher in disadvantaged populations, the estimates of "traditional" and "complex" families here likely do not accurately represent the entire U.S. population.

Conclusion

Hopefully, this research will spur renewed interest in coresidential father involvement as well continued interest in nonresidential father involvement, even if the results here are not straightforward and do not lend themselves easily to policy recommendations. Though more and more children are increasingly living apart from their fathers, it is also the case that even children living with their biological father are living in households with complex family situations, often having coresidential stepsiblings or half-siblings as well as nonresidential half-siblings. The focus and concern over nonresidential father involvement should not replace research on coresidential father involvement – even if many children will spend some time in a single-parent household, most children will also live with both parents for some time as well, many of whom will also share their parents with half- and step-siblings. We need more longitudinal analysis to understand how father involvement changes over the life course of both fathers and children and how it changes during family transitions. Additional insight can also come from qualitative

work on fathers. Quantitative work does an excellent job of using theories and hypotheses to predict and detail *what* is happening, but without directly asking fathers *why* they are or are not involved, our explanations (and thus our "solutions") for potentially worrisome behavior are often lacking.

Finally, in addition to issues around paternal involvement, there is relatively little research on how maternal involvement might vary by the presence of stepchildren or multipartnered fertility or how children themselves relate to their step- and half-siblings. For instance, it is far more likely for mothers to have multipartnered fertility among their coresidential children than fathers, yet little research has investigated whether this impacts maternal behavior. Similar, child-centered research that examines how children relate to step- and half-siblings as well as how they relate to parents in the presence of step- and half-siblings (because children within the household may have different relationships with the adults and other children in and outside of the household) is lacking. As it seems unlikely that family complexity will decline in the future, the need to understand how parents and children make sense of, and function in, diverse and complicated family situations is increasingly important.

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Table 1. Weighted Descriptive Statistics for Fathers with Coresidential Children in the NSFG (sample sizes are unweighted; standard deviation in parentheses where appropriate)

	Fathers with Children 0-4	Fathers with Children 5-18
Age	32.2 years	35.9 years
	(5.71)	(5.05)
Race/ethnicity		
White	65.3%	65.4%
Black	9.3%	9.6%
Hispanic	18.8%	18.7%
Other	6.6%	6.3%
Foreign born	18.2%	16.6%
Current relationship status		
Married	82.0%	82.5%
Cohabiting	15.2%	9.0%
Single	2.9%	8.5%
Mother had a birth <18	12.1%	15.3%
Family structure at age 14		
Both biological parents	76.9%	77.5%
Stepfamily	7.7%	7.7%
Other	15.4%	14.8%
Working full-time	81.0%	80.6%
Total income		
Under $5,000	2.6%	1.6%
$5,000-$9,999	3.6%	2.2%
$10,000-14,999	5.8%	4.5%
$15,000-$19,999	5.4%	5.8%
$20,000-$29,999	17.5%	14.3%
$30,000-$39,999	15.2%	15.6%
$40,000-$49,999	9.3%	10.4%
$50,000-$59,999	7.5%	10.3%
$60,000-$74,999	9.5%	13.5%
$75,000 or more	23.6%	22.8%
Education		
Less than high school	15.3%	14.6%
High school/GED	34.0%	37.2%
Some college	24.7%	27.6%
College or more	25.9%	20.7%
Religious service attendance		
Never	21.6%	23.2%
Less than once a month	25.0%	23.1%
1-3 times per month	22.5%	20.0%
Weekly or more	30.9%	33.7%
Number of coresidential biological children	1.8 children	2.1 children
	(.943)	(.967)
Age of oldest biological child	4.3 years	9.7 years
	(4.203)	(4.321)
Gender of coresidential biological children		
Sons only	38.9%	32.1%
Sons and daughters	32.0%	43.0%
Daughters only	29.1%	24.9%
Has coresidential nonbiological children	17.9%	22.7%
Competing obligations & family complexity		
Cores children w/ 1 partner	86.6%	87.3%
Cores children w/ different partners	3.0%	3.5%
Cores & nonres children, different partners, visit nonres children less than monthly	7.6%	6.2%
Cores & nonres children, different partners, visit nonres children monthly or more	2.9%	3.1%
N	649	658

May not total 100% due to rounding.

Table 2. Weighted Bivariate Distribution of Engaging in Activities with Coresidential Biological Children Aged 0-4 by Competing Obligations and Family Complexity (sample size is unweighted)

	Stepchildren		Multipartnered fertility and visitation						
	Only bio cores children	Bio & nonbio cores children	Cores children w/ 1 partner	Cores children with different partners	Cores & nonres children, diff partners, visits < monthly	Cores & nonres children, diff partners, visits ≥ monthly		Overall distribution	N
Frequency of bathing									
Not at all	4.3%	10.9%	5.5%	1.0%	4.8%	10.7%		5.5%	35
Less than once a week	3.1%	2.3%	3.0%	1.9%	3.0%	2.0%		2.9%	23
About once a week	6.4%	3.8%	6.2%	0.8%	5.8%	4.3%		6.0%	44
Several times a week	31.9%	28.5%	32.0%	52.6%	14.9%	32.6%		31.3%	229
Every day	54.3%	54.5%	53.3%	43.7%	71.6%	50.4%		54.3%	318
Frequency of reading									
Not at all	13.4%	19.3%	14.5%	0.0%	13.2%	30.1%	†	14.4%	105
Less than once a week	10.4%	11.6%	11.0%	3.3%	12.9%	2.7%	†	10.7%	76
About once a week	17.4%	12.8%	16.3%	36.5%	16.2%	5.7%	†	16.6%	117
Several times a week	32.8%	31.3%	31.6%	51.5%	41.2%	19.5%	†	32.6%	199
Every day	26.0%	25.0%	26.6%	8.7%	16.4%	42.0%	†	25.8%	152
Frequency of feeding									
Not at all/less than once a week/about once a week	3.0%	1.1%	3.0%	1.9%	0.0%	0.0%		2.6%	22
Several times a week	22.4%	19.0%	21.9%	21.5%	20.2%	23.9%		21.8%	174
Every day	74.6%	79.9%	75.2%	76.5%	79.8%	76.1%		75.6%	453
Frequency of playing									
Not at all/less than once a week/about once a week	1.5%	0.8%	1.5%	0.0%	** 0.0%	2.6%		1.4%	14
Several times a week	16.4%	13.9%	14.8%	54.5%	** 16.3%	11.7%		16.0%	129
Every day	82.1%	85.3%	83.7%	45.5%	** 83.7%	85.7%		83.7%	506
Overall distribution	82.1%	17.9%	86.6%	3.0%	7.6%	2.9%		100.0%	
N	553	96	561	18	45	25		649	

†p>.1 *p>.05 ** p>.01 *** p>0.001 Chi-square differences between "standard family structure" (i.e, only bio cores children or cores children with only 1 partner) and other categories.
May not total 100% due to rounding.

Table 3. Weighted Bivariate Distribution of Engaging in Activities with Coresidential Biological Children Aged 5-18 by Competing Obligations and Family Complexity

	Stepchildren		Multipartnered fertility and visitation					
	Only bio cores children	Bio & nonbio cores children	Cores children w/ 1 partner	Cores children with different partners	Cores & nonres children, diff partners, visits < monthly	Cores & nonres children, diff partners, visits ≥ monthly	Overall distribution	N
Frequency of helping with homework								
Not at all	15.4%	14.8%	15.8%	30.2%	3.3%	6.5%	15.3%	89
Less than once a week	5.0%	7.9%	5.8%	0.6%	0.0%	19.4%	5.7%	39
About once a week	17.2%	16.8%	17.0%	15.0%	19.1%	21.4%	17.2%	91
Several times a week	31.8%	31.9%	31.4%	34.8%	40.4%	21.6%	31.8%	217
Every day	30.6%	28.6%	30.0%	19.5%	37.2%	31.1%	30.0%	222
Frequency of taking to activities								
Not at all	13.1%	22.3%	15.7%	0.6% *	20.6%	8.9%	15.2%	106
Less than once a week	8.4%	11.6%	8.6%	9.0% *	18.1%	6.7%	9.1%	55
About once a week	17.4%	16.0%	17.5%	8.6% *	7.8%	32.5%	17.1%	121
Several times a week	38.7%	32.6%	37.2%	69.9% *	31.0%	18.0%	37.3%	224
Every day	22.4%	17.5%	37.2%	12.0% *	22.6%	33.9%	21.3%	152
Frequency of talking about the day								
Not at all/less than once a week	3.0%	4.9%	3.3%	0.0%	7.9%	3.9%	3.5%	28
About once a week	4.4%	7.6%	5.0%	4.4%	4.6%	10.7%	5.1%	41
Several times a week	24.9%	24.2%	25.3%	28.9%	19.8%	12.2%	24.7%	170
Every day	67.7%	63.4%	66.4%	66.6%	67.7%	73.3%	66.7%	419
Frequency of eating meals with child(ren)								
Not at all/less than once a week/about once a week	3.4%	7.1%	3.6%	4.6%	6.6%	15.4% †	4.2%	39
Several times a week	19.0%	16.5%	18.4%	22.2%	17.0%	18.0% †	18.4%	140
Every day	77.7%	76.4%	78.0%	73.3%	76.4%	66.6% †	77.4%	479
Overall distribution children 5-18	77.3%	22.7%	87.3%	2.3%	7.6%	3.2%	100.0%	
N	525	133	568	20	42	28	658	

†p>.1 *p>.05 ** p>.01 *** p>0.001 Chi-square differences between "standard family structure" (i.e, only bio cores children or cores children with only 1 partner) and other categories.

May not total 100% due to rounding.

Table 4. Weighted Bivariate Distribution of Frequency of Taking Coresidential Children Aged 10-18 on Outings by Competing Obligations and Family Complexity

	Stepchildren		Multipartnered fertility and visitation					
	Only bio cores children	Bio & nonbio cores children	Cores children w/ 1 partner	Cores children with different partners	Cores & nonres children, diff partners, visits < monthly	Cores & nonres children, diff partners, visits ≥ monthly	Overall distribution	N
Frequency of taking children on outings								
Not at all/1-2 times a year	4.7%	0.5% †	4.4%	0.0% †	2.2%	0.0%	4.0%	45
Several times a year	12.5%	22.0% †	14.0%	6.2% †	21.3%	4.3%	14.0%	145
1-3 times a month	18.2%	13.7% †	17.2%	17.1% †	22.7%	14.1%	17.5%	182
Once a week	26.8%	25.5% †	27.6%	12.0% †	17.2%	28.5%	26.6%	260
Several times a week	31.0%	28.2% †	29.5%	64.7% †	29.9%	34.9%	30.6%	299
Every day	6.9%	10.1% †	7.3%	0.0% †	6.8%	18.3%	7.4%	95
Overall distribution all children	84.2%	15.8%	88.8%	2.4%	5.9%	2.9%	100.0%	
N	886	140	898	24	63	41	1026	

†p>.1 *p>.05 ** p>.01 *** p>0.001 Chi-square differences between "standard family structure" (i.e, only bio cores children or cores children with only 1 partner) and other categories.

May not total 100% due to rounding.

Table 5. Odds Ratios from Ordinal Logistic Regression of Frequency of Activities with Coresidential Children Aged 0-4

	Frequency of bathing	Frequency of reading	Frequency of feeding	Frequency of playing
Has nonbiological coresidential children	0.898	0.876	1.171	1.102
Multipartnered fertility & visitation				
Cores children w/ 1 partner	--	--	--	--
Cores children w/ different partners	0.957	1.461	0.369 †	0.268 *
Cores & nonres children, different partners, visit nonres children less than monthly	1.790	1.054	0.665	1.287
Cores & nonres children, different partners, visit nonres children monthly or more	2.210 †	1.894	0.696	1.791
N	649	649	649	649
-2log likelihood	1427.478	1900.534	873.815	710.875

†p>.1 *p>.05 ** p>.01 *** p>0.001

All analyses include controls for father's age, race/ethnicity, nativity, income, education, employment status, relationship status, family structure at age 14, whether father's mother had a birth prior to age 18, frequency of religious service attendance, number and gender composition of biological coresidential children, and age of oldest biological child.

Table 6. Odds Ratios from Ordinal Logistic Regression of Frequency of Activities with Coresidential Children Aged 5-18 and Frequency of Outings with Coresidential Children Aged 0-18

	Frequency of helping with homework	Frequency of taking to activities	Frequency of talking about the day	Frequency of eating meals with child(ren)	Frequency of outings
Has nonbiological coresidential children	1.016	0.666 †	0.651 †	0.646 †	1.025
Multipartnered fertility & visitation					
Cores children w/ 1 partner	--	--	--	--	--
Cores children w/ different partners	0.948	2.166 †	0.948	0.518	1.244
Cores & nonres children, different partners, visit nonres children less than monthly	1.531	0.955	1.344	1.204	0.808
Cores & nonres children, different partners, visit nonres children monthly or more	0.924	1.055	1.699	1.359	1.657 †
N	658	658	658	658	1026
-2log likelihood	1880.847	1951.860	1214.174	901.400	3382.366

†p>.1 *p>.05 ** p>.01 *** p>0.001

All analyses include controls for father's age, race/ethnicity, nativity, income, education, employment status, relationship status, family structure at age 14, whether father's mother had a birth prior to age 18, frequency of religious service attendance, number and gender composition of biological children, and age of oldest biological child.