

**THE ROLE OF FATHER'S MASCULINITY ON
RELATIONSHIP TRANSITIONS**

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Previous research has examined the influence of numerous demographic characteristics on relationship transitions among couples who have a child. Briefly addressing past research, black couples have been found to be less likely to transition to marriage after the birth of a child, but may be more inclined to transition into a cohabiting union (Carlson, McLanahan, & England 2004; Western & McLanahan 2000). Research also points to the role of economic security in relationship transitions. Osborne (2005) finds that higher levels of economic status increase the likelihood that cohabiting couples will marry rather than remain cohabiting after the birth of a child. Higher levels of economic status also reduce the likelihood of separating (Osborne, Manning, & Smock 2007). Additionally, participation in various social institutions is also associated with relationship transitions. Incarceration is negatively associated with moving into a more committed relationship (Western & McLanahan 2000 and Waller and Swisher 2006), whereas military service has been associated with an increased likelihood of being married (Lundquist 2004; Teachman 2007). The association between fathers' religious participation and marriage is not as clear. Carlson and colleagues (2004) find no significant relationship among fathers' church attendance, but Wilcox and Wolfinger (2006) find that churchgoing fathers are more likely to marry.

I contribute to this line of research by exploring how father's masculinity affects relationship transitions. My main research question addresses whether fathers' masculinity influences transitions into more or less committed relationships with their child's mother? I extend past research on relationship transitions by providing a fuller picture of fathers. While previous studies have examined a few key demographic characteristics of men such as race, incarceration, and military service, no previous research, to the best of my knowledge, has examined as an extensive range of father's characteristics as I will in this study. The proposed research will attempt to find a crucial predictor of family structure. Future research will benefit from this study because to truly understand family formation we need to understand how men experience their masculinity and how they comprehend their manhood.

Men's Masculinity

Men's forms of masculinity have been developed by both social institutions and men's socialization to cultural norms, with social institutions and cultural ideologies reciprocally influencing each other and masculinities. To a degree, traditional frameworks of masculinity were created because of the emphasis that social institutions placed on breadwinning and marriage (Connell 2005). Masculinity can also be thought of as an outward display of one's gender identity, with culture dictating how we display gender and the repercussions for deviating from normative gender displays (Goffman 1979). Men are socialized to display their masculinity in a culturally idealized manner, which often stresses economic success, rationality, physical toughness, and power over women – in that men should be protectors of their wives and children. In fact, past research indicates that masculinity is demanded of all men and that men “must be sufficiently masculine to receive full rights as a member of our society (Nock 1998: 43-44).” Although masculinity is demanded of all men, the majority of men are unable and some are unwilling to achieve the idealized societal version of masculinity (Connell 2005). The question then becomes how do men construct masculinity when they are unable to meet the ideal type version?

Current Research

I will use the Fragile Families data to examine masculinities among a diverse group of fathers. Theoretically, I identify three ideal categorizations of masculinity which I call the “traditional,” “new father,” and “hyper-masculine” models. In creating these categories, I use factors that have been previously associated with masculinity, such as emotional control, primacy of work, and violence (Brannon et al. 1987; Mihalik et al. 2003; Thompson & Pleck 1986). First, I

will use cluster analysis as a means of confirming if these categories differentiate forms of masculinity among fathers. Then using multinomial regression models, I address if forms of masculinity differentially predict whether fathers transition into a more or less committed relationship with their child's mother between the birth of the child and the child's fifth birthday. I will also examine if the relationship between masculinity and relationship transitions is moderated by race. The ideal hegemonic form of masculinity argues that men should be married and fully committed to their families (Nock 1998; Townsend 2002), but prior research indicates that blacks may feel less social pressure to marry after a non-marital birth than whites (Pagnini & Morgan 1996). Therefore, masculinity's influence on relationship transitions may differ among black and white fathers.

Hypothesis 1: I predict that men who fit into the traditional model of masculinity will be more likely to form stable, committed relationships with their baby's mothers compared to fathers in the new father model of masculinity. Fathers who exhibit the hyper-masculine model will be the least likely to form stable, committed relationships with their baby's mothers.

Hypothesis 2: I hypothesize that black fathers will be less likely than white fathers in the same masculinity category to formalize a committed relationship with the baby's mother.

Dependent Variables

Relationship transitions. Relationship transitions will be measured by the type of relationship the father had with the baby's mother at the time of the child's birth. I will analyze whether a transition in relationship status occurred from the time of the child's birth to when the child was five years old. Data for this variable will come from the baseline and year five follow up surveys. Using data from the five year follow-up will maximize the number of transitions both into and out of marriage. Using the extended time period creates a more in-depth understanding of how masculinity operates not only for unmarried fathers, but also for fathers who were married at the time of birth. I will first measure if a transition occurred and then determine if that transition was one that can be classified as having stronger commitment (e.g. from just friends to romantically involved or romantically involved to married) or having lesser commitment (e.g. from romantically involved to just friends or from married to separated/divorced). Therefore, relationship transitions will be a three category measure of no transition, transition into a more committed relationship, and transition into a lesser committed relationship.

Focal Independent Variables – Masculinity Measures

Masculinity. Traditional masculinity measures: Traditional accounts of masculinity stress the importance of marriage, children, and financial providing. Because I will be controlling for the relationship status at baseline and because these men already have children, I will use attitudes towards marriage and fathering to provide additional insights into the social psychological aspects of masculinity, in addition to the demographic characteristics of marital status and parenthood. I will also include a measure that taps the father's level of rationality.

Supportive attitudes towards marriage: I will measure supportive attitudes towards marriage using a seven item index. Fathers are asked to what extent they agree with the following statements: the main advantage of marriage is that it gives financial security, all in all, there are more advantages to being single than to being married (reverse coded), a mother living alone can bring up her child as well as a married couple (reverse coded), it is better for a couple to get married than to just live together, it is better for children if their parents are married, when there are children

in the family parents should stay together even if they do not get along, and living together is just the same as being married (reverse coded).

Supportive attitudes toward fathering. Supportive attitudes towards fathering will be measured using three items. Higher values will indicate that fathering is an important aspect of their lives. Questions in this category are baseline measures of how strongly the father agrees with the following statements: being a father and raising children is one of the most fulfilling experiences a man can have, I want people to know that I have a new child, and not being a part of my child's life would be one of the worst things that could happen to me.

Importance of financial providing. Importance of financial providing is a dummy variable indicating that the father feels that providing regular financial support is the most important activity a father can do for their child.

Emotional control. A five-item index will be used to measure father's emotional control. In the one-year follow up survey, fathers were asked how strongly they agree with the following statements with four responses ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree: I will often say whatever comes into my head without thinking first, often, I do not spend enough time thinking over a situation before I act, I often say and do things without considering the consequences, many times, the plans I make do not work out because I have not gone over them carefully enough in advance, and I often make up my mind without taking the time to consider the situation from all angles. Higher scores will reflect higher levels of emotional control.

New father masculinity measures: Three factors associated with the new father category will be assessed: how emotionally available a father is to the mother, egalitarian gender role attitudes, and the importance of caregiving.

Emotional availability to baby's mother: I measure father's emotional availability with four items from the mother's baseline survey. Mothers were asked how the baby's father behaves towards you regarding if he is fair and willing to compromise when you have a disagreement, if he expresses affection or love for you, if he insults or criticizes you or your ideas (reverse coded), and if he encourages you to do things that are important to you.

Egalitarian gender role attitudes: I measure egalitarian gender role attitudes using a four item index. Fathers were asked how strongly they agree with the following statements: the important decisions in the family should be made by the man of the house (reverse coded), it is much better for everyone if the man earns the main living and the woman takes care of the home and family (reverse coded), it is more important for a man to spend time with his family than to work as many hours as he can, and fathers play a more important role in raising boys than in raising girls (reverse coded).

Mother's relative earnings: The mother's relative earnings measure represents the mother's proportion of the father's income. The formula used for this measure is mother's earned income/father's earned income.

Importance of caregiving. The importance of caregiving measure is a dummy variable indicating that providing direct care or showing love and affection to the child is the most important activity a father can do for their child.

Hyper-masculinity measures: Three factors associated with hyper masculinity will be assessed: gender mistrust, violence towards women, and control of women.

Gender mistrust. Gender mistrust is measured by two items with four responses ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The first item is in a dating relationship, a woman is largely out to take advantage of a man. The second item is women cannot be trusted to be faithful.

Violence towards women. Violence towards women is measured using the baby’s mother’s response at the year-one follow up to three questions: how often does the baby’s father slap or kick you, hit you with his fist or an object that could hurt you, and try to make you have sex or do sexual things that you do not want to do.

Control of women. Using the baby’s mother’s year-one follow up survey, I measure control of women with three items. The baby’s mother was asked how often the baby’s father tries to keep you from seeing or talking with your friends and family, tries to prevent you from going to work or school, and withholds money, makes you ask for money or takes your money.

Table 1 provides a graphical representation of the factors used to create the masculinity typologies and how I see each factor being associated with each conceptual category of masculinity.

Preliminary Results

Preliminary cluster analysis results do indicate that urban fathers cluster into three typologies of fathers that coincide with the traditional,” “new father,” and “hyper-masculine” models. The typologies appear to correspond with the break-down presented in Table 1 with only minor deviations.

My preliminary multinomial regression results find a significant relationship between father’s masculinity and relationship transitions when the child is five years old. Compared to traditional fathers, both hyper-masculine fathers and new fathers are more likely to transition into a less committed relationship versus making no transition. Whereas in comparison to traditional fathers, fathers who fit into the new father typology are significantly more likely to transition into a more committed relationship with their baby’s mother compared to making no transition.

Table 1. Factors Associated with each Conceptual Category of Masculinity

	Conceptual Categories of Masculinity		
	New Father	Traditional	Hyper-Masculine
Supportive attitudes towards marriage	+/-	+	-
Supportive attitudes towards fathering	+*	+	+
Importance of financial providing	-	+	+
Emotional control	-	+	-
Emotional availability to baby's mother	+	-	-
Egalitarian gender role attitudes	+*	+/-	+/-
Mother's relative earnings	+	-	-
Importance of caregiving	+	-	-
Gender mistrust	-	-	+
Violence towards women	-	-	+/-
Control of women	-	+/-	+

*Although these factors could apply to each category of masculinity, categories listed with an asterisk are the most likely to have this factor.