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Phone: (419) 372-7279

cfdr@bgnet.bgsu.edu

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Susan Stewart

Susan Stewart,
Department of Sociology,
University of Richmond, Richmond, Virginia

Nonresident Parenting and Adolescent Adjustment:
The Quality of Nonresident Father-Child Interaction

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Aside from providing financial support, exactly how nonresident fathers benefit children remains unclear. This paper assesses whether the quality of the interaction between nonresident fathers and their children is related to adolescent adjustment, net of visitation frequency. Results suggest that participating in leisure activities with nonresident fathers does not influence children's well-being. Results provide mixed evidence as to whether children benefit from nonresident fathers' involvement in authoritative parenting. Whereas talking to nonresident fathers about "other things going on at school" is consistently positively related to adjustment, other measures of authoritative parenting are not. Closeness to nonresident fathers, although negatively related to emotional distress, does not mediate the effect of father involvement. Results suggest that we continue to examine nonresident fathers' involvement in specific aspects of authoritative parenting, as opposed to leisure and recreational activities more typical of nonresident father-child contact.

Dramatic increases in divorce and nonmarital childbearing have caused major shifts in the nature of parent-child interactions, in that many parents no longer live with their children. Roughly half of children in the United States will live apart from their biological fathers during some part of their childhood (Bumpass & Sweet, 1989). Previous research has examined how patterns of nonresident father involvement affect the social and psychological well-being of children. This work has dealt primarily with child support payments and visitation frequency, and does not support straightforward positive effects of father involvement on children. Studies based on large national samples consistently find that whereas fathers' payment of child support is associated with positive child outcomes, frequency of visitation is not (Seltzer, 1994). Moreover, although children who feel closer to their nonresident fathers exhibit more positive outcomes, frequency of visitation has a very modest effect on father-child closeness (Buchanan, Maccoby, & Dornbusch, 1996; Furstenberg, Morgan, & Allison, 1987). Amato and Gilbreth's (1999) recent meta-analysis affirms these results.

Less attention has been paid to the context and quality of the nonresident parent-child relationship (Arditti, 1995). Frequent contact does not imply high quality parenting (Ihinger-Tallman, Pasley, & Buehler, 1993). Evidence suggests that it is the *quality* of the interaction, rather than the quantity of contact, that underlies positive outcomes for children (Healy, Malley, & Stewart, 1990; Hess & Camara, 1979; Lund, 1987; Peterson & Zill, 1986; Simons et al., 1994, 1999). These studies include measures of father involvement beyond visitation frequency, such as the extent to which fathers engage in social, recreational, and educational activities with their children, monitor their children's activities, and participate in their children's discipline. Additionally, because visiting children does not appear to ensure close relationships, it is these

contextual features of the relationship that may determine how close children feel toward their nonresident fathers, which in turn may lead to positive outcomes.

Using a nationally representative sample of youth who report living apart from their biological fathers, I examine the quality of nonresident fathers' involvement with children, children's level of closeness to nonresident fathers, and several aspects of children's adjustment—academic achievement, emotional distress, and delinquent behaviors. The analysis has two central goals. First, I identify specific parenting behaviors that are positively related to children's adjustment, net of frequency of visitation. Second, I determine whether these effects are mediated by children's closeness to nonresident fathers, or whether these factors have a direct impact on children's well-being.

BACKGROUND

Policy and child-custody decision makers are currently working under the logical assumption that it is beneficial for nonresident parents to maintain relationships with their children (Depner & Bray, 1993). This assumption primarily rests on studies examining the effects of child support and visitation frequency, which have produced inconsistent results. Moreover, much of the literature on nonresident parenting has been atheoretical (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999), and the mechanisms underlying father involvement and children's well-being are not well understood.

Previous theoretical work relating to children's well-being in intact families may be useful in this regard. James Coleman's (1988) concept of social capital has been employed to explain the positive relationship between parental involvement and child outcomes for children and parents who live in the same household (Astone & McLanahan, 1991; Harris, Furstenberg, & Marmer, 1998; Parcel & Menaghan, 1994). Whereas human capital refers to the skills and knowledge acquired by an individual, social capital exists in the relations among persons (Coleman

1988:S100-101). In families, social capital exists in the relations between children and their parents, and social capital is necessary for children to benefit from the human capital their parents possess.

Social capital in the family is approximated by the availability of adults in the family as well as their attention to the children in the family (Coleman, 1988). For example, children from single-parent homes are more likely to drop out of school than children from two-parent homes (Coleman, 1988). However, even if adults are physically present, there can be a lack of social capital in the family if children do not receive adequate attention from their parents—children whose mothers do not expect them to go to college also have higher drop-out rates. Thus, family social capital has been measured in terms of both the *quantity* and *quality* of parent-child relationships (Furstenberg & Hughes, 1995). Parental behaviors gauging the quality of the relationship reflect interest and investment in the child’s welfare (e.g., helping with homework, attending school meetings). Considering these aspects of nonresident parent-child relationships should therefore provide some additional insight into child well-being.

Prior studies suggest that the quality of the *resident* father-child relationship is related to the child’s social-psychological adjustment, controlling for the mother’s involvement. Children whose fathers are more involved in parenting (e.g., help with schoolwork, share meals and leisure activities, talk and read to their children) experience enhanced academic achievement and life satisfaction, less emotional distress, fewer behavior problems, and less delinquency and drug use (Amato & Rivera, 1999; Astone & McLanahan, 1991; Bogenschneider, 1997; Coombs & Landsverk, 1988; Harris et al., 1998; Mosley & Thomson, 1995; Rankin & Kern, 1994; Thomson, Hanson, & McLanahan, 1994; Young et al., 1995).

Studies suggest a positive relationship between the quality of the *nonresident* father-child relationship and child outcomes as well, net of visitation frequency and mothers' involvement (Astone & McLanahan, 1991; Bogenschneider, 1997; Buchanan et al., 1996; Healy et al., 1990; Hess & Camara, 1979; Lund, 1987; Peterson & Zill, 1986; Simons et al., 1994, 1996). However, several issues limit our understanding of the effect of nonresident fathering on children. First, these findings are based on nonrepresentative samples of children. Research based on nationally representative data suggests that nonresident fathers are not critical to child well-being (Hawkins & Eggebeen, 1991). Another limitation is that parenting behaviors are often collapsed into overall measures of father involvement, making it difficult to disentangle the effects of various aspects of fathering (e.g., Lund, 1987; Peterson & Zill, 1986; Simons et al., 1994). Studies that assess the effects of parenting activities separately show that particular parenting behaviors can have different effects on child outcomes (Cooksey & Fondell, 1996; Furstenberg & Hughes, 1995). For instance, Buchanan et al. (1996) found that remembering "special days" (e.g., birthdays and holidays) was the only qualitative measure of nonresident father involvement that was consistently related to adolescent adjustment.

A third issue is that researchers assume that father involvement will operate similarly for children with coresident and nonresident fathers. Based on a study of children with *resident* fathers (Young et al., 1995), Amato and Gilbreth (1999) suggest that whereas nonresident fathers' participation in authoritative parenting contributes to children's well-being, engaging in recreational activities would provide few benefits. Introduced by Baumrind (1968), "authoritative" parenting practices are those that combine warmth, demandingness, and psychological autonomy. Authoritative parenting is typically measured by items gauging the extent to which parents are open to their child's views, are interested and involved in their child's

education and activities, allow the child a role in family decisions, praise their child's accomplishments, and provide consistent discipline (Dornbusch et al., 1987). This style of parenting is associated with more positive outcomes for children than other styles of parenting, i.e., authoritarian and permissive (Dornbusch, 1989). Moreover, the relationship between authoritative parenting and child well-being is complex. Gray and Steinberg (1999) show that the three main dimensions of authoritative parenting (acceptance-involvement, strictness-supervision, and psychological autonomy granting) may operate independently of one another as well as interact to affect child outcomes.

Simons and his colleagues (1994, 1999) show a positive relationship between nonresident fathers' participation in authoritative-type parenting behaviors and child well-being. Their scale, referred to as "quality of father's parenting," consists of 14 parenting behaviors that are not contingent on coresidence with the child, including talking with the child about school, friends, rules, and problems, consistency in punishments, and supporting the parenting decisions of the mother. Yet the effect of children's participation in leisure activities with nonresident fathers has not been empirically evaluated. This is surprising given that so-called "Disneyland" activities are nonresident fathers' primary mode of contact with their children (author citation). The focus of previous work on authoritative parenting may not be appropriate for nonresident fathers because the constraints of the nonresident parent role make it difficult to maintain a conventional father-child relationship (Arditti, 1995). Nonresident fathers feel less competent as parents than resident fathers, and they rarely participate in their children's decisions, supervision, or discipline (Arendell, 1986; Furstenberg & Nord, 1985; Greif, 1997; Minton & Pasley, 1996). To the extent that society expects nonresident fathers to play a rather limited role with respect to their children (Horna & Lupri, 1987; Kissman, 1997), their participation in leisure activities may have a positive

effect on children's adjustment. At the very least, the effect of engaging in these activities on child outcomes should be assessed.

The level of connectedness between children and their parents is another aspect of social capital in the family (Coleman, 1988). Evidence suggests that children's closeness to their *resident* fathers is positively associated with child outcomes (Amato & Rivera, 1999; Harris et al., 1998; Pleck, 1997; Young et al., 1995). Less evidence suggests that children's closeness to their *nonresident* fathers is associated with adjustment, net of closeness to resident mothers (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999; Buchanan et al., 1996). Furstenberg et al. (1987) found no consistent relationship between closeness and child well-being.

Qualitative aspects of nonresident father involvement may influence how close children feel toward their fathers. For example, *resident* fathers report that they engage in activities with their children to become closer to them (Lamb, Pleck, & Levine, 1987). Veneziano and Rohner (1998) findings indicate that the effect of resident father involvement on children's psychological adjustment is mediated by children's perceptions of fathers' warmth and affection. Studies of *nonresident* fathering have not examined whether closeness has a mediating effect on children's well-being, although it is likely that sharing activities and talking would bring fathers and children closer together. There may also be a reciprocal effect in that closer relationships between fathers and children may encourage more frequent conversations and sharing of activities.

It is also possible that closeness between fathers and children has a moderating effect. Amato and Rezac (1994) show that the effect of father involvement on child outcomes depends on the level of interparental conflict. They found that contact with nonresident fathers decreases children's behavior problems when conflict between parents is low and increases behavior problems when conflict is high. Similarly, activities with nonresident fathers may not benefit

children when the father-child relationship is not close. Scheduled visits can become the setting for superficial conversation, miscommunications, and confrontation that may adversely affect the child (Greif, 1997). On the other hand, among fathers and children who are close, visitation may provide opportunities for relationship development that may amplify the positive effect of father involvement on child well-being.

CURRENT INVESTIGATION

Drawing on the 1994-1996 National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, the present study contributes to the literature on nonresident father involvement in several key ways. First, I use a nationally representative sample of youth to conduct these analyses. Most previous studies use small, nonrepresentative samples that limit the generalizability of their findings. Second, rather than collapsing various parenting behaviors into a general measure of father involvement, I assess the independent effect of each type of involvement separately. Results that link specific parenting activities to particular outcomes have implications for nonresident fathers who have relatively few opportunities to parent their children, and would be informative as to the parenting activities associated with the greatest benefits. Third, in contrast to previous work focusing solely on authoritative parenting (Simons et al., 1994, 1999), I examine the impact of activities that more accurately reflect the constraints of the nonresident parent role. I test a general hypothesis that engaging in recreational and leisure activities with nonresident fathers has a positive effect on child well-being. Finally, I explore the mediating effect of closeness to nonresident fathers, testing the hypothesis that nonresident fathers' involvement in parenting produces positive child outcomes by enhancing father-child closeness. In addition, similar to Amato and Rezac's (1994) work on interparental conflict, I determine whether closeness has a moderating effect. I test

whether nonresident fathers' involvement with children produces more positive outcomes when they have closer, as opposed to more distant, relationships.

DATA AND METHODS

DATA

The analyses are based on the 1994-1996 National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health) a study of youth in grades 7 through 12. The primary advantage of Add Health over other nationally representative surveys is that it provides quantitative measures of qualitative features of nonresident parent-child relationships, in addition to conventional measures of visitation frequency and child support. For instance, in contrast to the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH), Add Health provides information on the content of nonresident parent-child communication.

The analysis is based on the public use core sample of 6,072 youth who completed the Wave I In-home interview, which represents one-half of the In-home sample of adolescents surveyed. The In-home data set consists of responses to a highly detailed interview of a subset of adolescents who were selected from the rosters of sampled schools. One parent or parent-figure was interviewed for each In-home sampled student (Udry, 1997). Wave I of Add Health has an overall response rate of 78.9%.

The analytical sample is restricted to 2,034 children living with their biological mothers but not their biological fathers. Cases in which the father is known to be dead or where the child does not report him as living were removed from the sample (N=190). Children reporting not knowing anything about their nonresident fathers were left in the sample and were coded as having no physical contact or verbal communication with them (N=256).

Children missing on all delinquency or emotional distress items were removed from the sample (N=12). Seven more cases were removed due to invalid data on frequency of overnight visits, frequency of in-person or telephone or letter contact, and level of closeness. To increase reliability and consistency of parents' reports, cases in which the person filling out the parent interview was not the child's resident mother were dropped (N=229). Children not recording their race (N=4) and cases missing information on whether the child ever lived with his or her father or the date that the father last lived with his child (N=57) were also removed. The final sample contains 1,535 children living apart from their biological fathers.

The sample is further restricted for the analysis of academic achievement. Children who were not currently in school were removed from the sample, as these children were not asked about recent grades (N=38). Children missing information on grades in all of their subjects were also dropped (N=28). These cases include children who reported that they didn't take the subject, took the subject but "grades were not recorded that way" (in terms of letters), or who didn't know their course grades. The analytical sample for academic achievement is based on 1,469 children.

DEPENDENT VARIABLES

Adolescent adjustment. Three sets of variables were used as indicators of adolescent adjustment. The first adjustment measure is the adolescent's level of emotional distress. A 4-point scale was derived from a set of 19 items in which the child reported her frequency of having had each of the following feelings during the past week, from 0 (never or rarely) to 3 (most of the time or all of the time): (1) Was bothered by things that usually don't bother you; (2) Didn't feel like eating, your appetite was poor; (3) Felt that you could not shake off the blues, even with help from your family and your friends; (4) Felt that you were just as good as other people; (5) Had trouble keeping your mind on what you were doing; (6) Felt depressed; (7) Felt that you were too tired to

do things; (8) Felt hopeful about the future; (9) Thought your life had been a failure; (10) Felt fearful; (11) Were happy; (12) Talked less than usual; (13) Felt lonely; (14) People were unfriendly to you; (15) Enjoyed life; (16) Felt sad; (17) Felt that people disliked you; (18) It was hard to get started doing things; and, (19) Felt like life was not worth living. Items 4, 8, 11, and 15 were reverse coded such that negative feelings received higher scores. The mean score of all nonmissing items was calculated for each child. This scale has an overall mean of .607 and a reliability coefficient of .86 (Cronbach's alpha).

The second adjustment measure is an indicator of the child's self-reported level of participation in delinquent behaviors. Self-reports are preferable to parental reports and official court records, which both seriously underrepresent children's involvement in delinquent activity. Responses range on a 4-point scale from 0 (never) to 3 (5 or more times). The children were asked how often they engaged in the following 15 acts of delinquent or undesirable behaviors in the past 12 months: (1) Paint graffiti or signs on someone else's property or in a public place; (2) Deliberately damage property that didn't belong to you; (3) Lie to your parents or guardians about where you had been or who you were with; (4) Take something from a store without paying for it; (5) Get into a serious physical fight; (6) Hurt someone bad enough to need bandages or care from a doctor or nurse; (7) Run away from home; (8) Drive a car without its owner's permission; (9) Steal something worth more than \$50; (10) Go into a house or building to steal something; (11) Use or threaten to use a weapon to get something from someone; (12) Sell marijuana or other drugs; (13) Steal something worth less than \$50; (14) Take part in a fight where a group of your friends was against another group; (15) Were loud, rowdy, or unruly in a public place. The mean score of nonmissing items was calculated for each child. The scale has an overall mean of .309 and a reliability coefficient of .82.

The final measure of adjustment is academic achievement, as indicated by the child's overall grade point average (GPA) in the most recent marking period, computed from the child's report of their grades in four areas: English/Language Arts, Mathematics, History/Social Studies, and Science (Cronbach's alpha = .74). Responses range from 'A' (4.0), 'B' (3.0), 'C' (2.0) and 'D or F' (1.0). In cases where children are missing information on a particular grade or grades, the remaining grades are averaged. The average GPA of the children in this sample is 2.66.

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

Relationship quality. The key independent variables are concerned with the quality of the nonresident parent-child relationship, and include the type of involvement with fathers and closeness to fathers. Nonresident fathers' participation in leisure and recreational activities is assessed with three separate items. Children were asked whether they had participated in the following activities with their biological father in the past four weeks: (1) Gone shopping; (2) Played a sport; (3) Gone to a movie, play, museum, or concert, or sports event. These items are treated as dummy variables, with participation coded as 1 and nonparticipation coded as 0.

Add Health includes five measures of parental involvement that may represent aspects of authoritative parenting. Along with participation in leisure activities in the past four weeks, children were asked whether biological fathers had worked with them on a project for school. The children were then asked whether they had talked with their nonresident biological father, in the last four weeks, about (1) Someone they are dating, or a party they went to; (2) A personal problem they are having; (3) School work or grades; and, (4) Other things they are doing at school. These variables are coded as dummy variables. Children who had no contact with their father in the past 12 months (in addition to children knowing nothing about their father) are coded as not having participated in any of these activities (N = 179). The items available in Add

Health do not come close to covering the broad range of behaviors associated with authoritative parenting. However, Amato and Gilbreth (1999) group very similar items in a category they refer to as authoritative parenting (e.g., “listening to children’s problems,” “monitoring child’s school performance,” “helping with homework,” and “engaging in projects with the children”).

Closeness to the nonresident biological father is measured with responses to one question pertaining to the child's overall feelings of closeness, "How close do you feel to your biological father?" Responses ranged from 1 (not close at all) to 5 (extremely close). This variable is treated as a continuous measure. Children having no contact with fathers in the last 12 months were still asked about feelings of closeness. However, children knowing nothing about their biological father were not. These children were coded as having a relationship that is less than "not close at all," i.e., they were coded as 0 on this variable.

CONTROL VARIABLES

Variables that could influence the relationship between nonresident father-child relationship quality and adolescent adjustment were included as controls in the multivariate analysis. Although frequency of contact alone is not a significant predictor child well-being (Furstenberg et al., 1987; King, 1994; McLanahan et al., 1994), it may influence the kinds of activities nonresident fathers and children engage in. Leisure activities appear to be more common among fathers who see their children sporadically (Furstenberg & Nord, 1985). Frequency of visits is assessed with two separate measures. Overnight visitation is measured by the question, “In the last 12 months, about how often have you stayed overnight with him (father)?” Responses range from 0 (not at all) to 5 (more than once a week). Other phone or physical visitation is assessed with the question, “In the past 12 months, about how often have you talked to him (father) in person or on the telephone, or received a letter from him?” Responses range from 0 (not at all) to 5 (more

than once a week). These variables are treated as continuous measures. Children reporting not knowing anything about their biological fathers were coded as having no contact.

The analysis controls for closeness to mothers. Among adolescents living apart from their fathers, closeness to mothers and closeness to fathers are positively correlated and adolescents who are closer to their resident mothers score higher on measures of adjustment (Buchanan et al., 1996). The child's level of closeness to the biological mother is measured with the question, "How close do you feel to your biological mother?" Responses ranged from 1 (not close at all) to 5 (extremely close). This measure is treated as a continuous variable.

The sex, age, and race of the child may influence adolescent adjustment and father involvement. For instance, whereas depression is higher among adolescent girls (Nolen-Hoeksema and Girgus, 1994), adolescent boys are more likely to engage in anti-social behaviors (Eagly and Steffen, 1986). Older children are more likely to use alcohol and drugs than younger children (Coombs & Landsverk, 1988) and minority children exhibit poorer school performance and overall adjustment than white children (Mayer, 1997). Nonresident father involvement may vary by the sex, age, and race of the child (Seltzer, 1991). The sex of the child is coded as 1 for female, race is categorized as White and non-White (with non-White coded as 1), and the child's age is left as a continuous variable.

Characteristics of the child's resident mother (age, education, union status, and family income) are also included as controls. Mothers' education is positively associated with father involvement (King, 1994), and adolescents with younger and less educated mothers may score lower on measures of adjustment. The age of the child's mother is coded as a continuous variable in years. Mothers' level of education is coded as less than high school, high school, some college, and college degree or greater. Evidence concerning how living with a stepparent affects

the well-being of children is quite mixed (Amato, 1993), although most research shows that children in stepfamilies and children in single-parent families score similarly on most outcomes (Coleman, Ganong, & Fine, in press). Nonresident fathers visit less when a second adult lives in the child's household (Seltzer and Bianchi, 1988). Adolescents whose mothers are in a married or cohabiting union are coded as 1. Children from low-income families exhibit lower levels of well-being (Brooks-Gunn, Britto, & Brady, 1999). Total family income is coded as continuous variable in thousands of dollars, with missing cases coded to the mean (11%).

Finally, I include mothers' reports of the characteristics of nonresident fathers (ever lived with child, duration of separation, and child support). Children born outside of marriage have less involved nonresident fathers than children born within marriage (Seltzer, 1991) and are more likely to drop out of school (McLanahan, 1999). Add Health does not include information on the mother's marital status at the birth of her child, so whether the nonresident father has ever lived with his child serves as a proxy of legitimacy status (Seltzer, 1991). Nonresident fathers who have lived with their children are more likely to engage in school-related activities with them (author citation). Additionally, I include the amount of time the father has been separated from his child, coded in years. This value is equal to the child's age for children who have never lived with their fathers. Nonresident fathers tend to visit their children less frequently the longer they have been living apart from them (Furstenberg & Nord, 1985; Seltzer & Bianchi, 1988). The payment of child support is consistently positively related to child well-being (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999). Fathers who pay support exhibit higher levels of contact (Seltzer, 1991) and are more likely to engage in school-related activities (author citation). The monthly child support paid for that child alone is treated as a continuous variable, with missing cases coded to the mean (less

than 2%). No other data about the child's nonresident father were collected from mothers, and nonresident fathers were not interviewed.

ANALYSIS

The main goal of the study is to identify aspects of nonresident fathering that are positively associated with the developmental outcomes of adolescents. A related goal is to determine whether aspects of father involvement affect outcomes directly, or whether they affect child outcomes indirectly through father-child closeness. I estimate separate models predicting children's emotional distress, delinquency, and academic performance. OLS regression is used for the analysis of emotional distress and academic performance. Delinquency is analyzed using a tobit regression model, as the distribution of this variable is left-censored and is therefore highly skewed (i.e., about 20 percent of adolescents reported not engaging in any delinquent activities). Under such conditions, OLS would produce biased and inconsistent estimates (Long, 1997). The interpretation of the tobit regression coefficients is similar to that of OLS regression.

I estimate four separate models for each measure of adjustment. First, I examine the bivariate relationship between each type of father involvement, father-child closeness, and each measure of adjustment. In the second model, I estimate the independent effects of each type of involvement with fathers, net of frequency of visitation and other socioeconomic controls. Correlation coefficients (most less than .40) and variance inflation factors (VIFs < 10) indicate that multicollinearity among the father involvement and visitation variables does not preclude them from being included in the same model. Results will determine which types of parenting behaviors are beneficial to children, accounting for frequency of contact. In the third model, I estimate the effect of closeness to nonresident fathers, net of closeness to resident mothers and socioeconomic variables. This model will determine whether closeness to nonresident fathers

makes a unique contribution to children's adjustment, beyond children's closeness to their mothers.

In the fourth model, I include the involvement measures and closeness to fathers in the same model, controlling for frequency of visitation, closeness to resident mothers, and socioeconomic variables. Whether father-child closeness mediates the effect of father involvement is determined by comparing the effects of the father involvement variables in the model that does not include closeness to the model that includes closeness. A substantial reduction in these effects would indicate a mediating effect. Additionally, in separate models, I include an interaction term for each measure of father involvement and closeness to determine whether closeness has a moderating effect. I use a partial F-test to test whether including the interaction term significantly improves model fit (Agresti and Finlay, 1986).

RESULTS

Table 1 presents a distribution of the independent variables used in the analysis. About 30% of the children in this sample have not seen their fathers in the last year, with 31% reporting having seen their father once or several times and 39% having seen their father monthly or more. Less than half of the children said they stayed overnight with their fathers in the last year, with 24% reporting staying overnight once or several times and 18% reporting staying overnight at least monthly. These reports of visitation frequency from children are comparable to the reports of resident mothers in other national surveys (Seltzer & Brandreth, 1994).

The children report a high degree of closeness to their resident mothers. Over 90% say their relationship with their mother is either quite or extremely close, similar to prior work (Buchanan, et al. 1996). This sample of adolescents is comprised of roughly half boys and girls, is two-thirds White, and the children's mean age is 15. Resident mothers' average age is 42 and the majority

have had at least some college. About 40% of mothers are married or cohabiting and they report average family income of \$32,000. Over two-thirds of the children have lived with their nonresident father, and the average length of time children have been separated from their father is 11 years. Over half of the children in this sample received no child support in the last year.

Table 1 about here

Descriptive results concerning nonresident fathers' level of involvement in various activities indicates a low level of contact, somewhat lower than has been suggested by previous studies (author citation). Between 15 and 20 percent of children report engaging in leisure or recreational activities with their fathers. These results probably underrepresent fathers' participation in leisure activities because they pertain to activities occurring *in the last 4 weeks*, in contrast to other national surveys that assess contact in the preceding year. In particular, these measures probably do not capture the full extent of father involvement among the third of children reporting less than monthly contact. Yet even among children who report monthly contact, only half report engaging in any of these activities (data not shown). This suggests fathers and children are engaging in activities not represented by these areas.

There is a higher level of involvement in authoritative parenting behaviors than leisure activities. Although only 7% of children report that their father worked with them on a project for school, 25% of children talked to fathers about someone they are dating or a party they went to. Eighteen percent report talking about a personal problem they are having. Children appear to spend the most time talking with fathers about schoolwork or grades (41%) and other things at school (33%). These results are consistent with previous work suggesting that fathers are more comfortable discussing grades and school-related activities with their children than personal issues (Nollar & Bagi, 1985; Starrels, 1994; Youniss & Smollar, 1985). Over 80% of children who

report monthly contact with fathers report talking to their fathers about at least one of the topics listed, suggesting that these items represent the kinds of things fathers and children discuss together (data not shown).

Children's level of closeness to their nonresident fathers is consistent with these results. About 17% of children reported not knowing anything about their fathers, so they were not asked about closeness. Of those children who reporting knowing about their fathers, about 30% report a relationship that is not close. About 18% report a relationship that is somewhat close. Only about a third of children report they have a very or extremely close relationship with their fathers.

Turning to the multivariate analysis, I estimate the effect of aspects of the quality of the nonresident father-child relationship on children's emotional distress, delinquency, and academic achievement. Table 2 shows the effect of certain types of involvement with fathers and closeness to fathers on emotional distress. The first model presents the bivariate relationship between each measure of relationship quality and emotional distress. Children who went shopping, played sports, or went on outings with their nonresident father in the previous month show lower levels of emotional distress than children who did not engage in these activities. Whereas children who talked to their father about other things at school are less emotionally distressed, children who talked to their father about a personal problem showed higher levels of emotional distress. Working on a project for school, talking about dating or a party, and talking about schoolwork or grades is not related to emotional distress at the bivariate level. However, children who are closer to their nonresident fathers exhibit lower levels of emotional distress.

Table 2 about here

The second model includes the father involvement variables and controls for visitation frequency and socioeconomic characteristics. In contrast to the bivariate results, this model

indicates that fathers' involvement in leisure activities is not related to emotional distress in children.¹ Intermediate models could not identify a particular control variable responsible for the reduction in the effect of leisure activities on emotional distress (results not shown). Fathers' participation in certain authoritative parenting behaviors is significantly related to children's negative feelings about themselves, net of controls. Whereas talking to fathers about personal problems and schoolwork is positively associated with emotional distress, talking about other things at school shows a negative relationship. These findings indicate that fathers may be accessed to discuss personal and school-related problems when children have trouble. These results are similar to Furstenberg and Hughes (1995) findings that youth that received help with homework experienced less positive outcomes in early adulthood.

The third model estimates the effect of closeness to nonresident fathers on emotional distress. The impact of this measure is assessed net of children's closeness to their resident mothers. Closeness to nonresident fathers is associated with significantly less emotional distress in the child. These results mirror those of Buchanan et al. (1996), who found that closeness to nonresident fathers is related to less depression in children.

The fourth model includes involvement with nonresident fathers and closeness to fathers in the same model, to assess whether father involvement has a direct effect on children's emotional well-being, or whether the effect of father involvement operates through closeness. The effects of the father involvement variables in this model are very similar in direction and magnitude to the effects in the second model. Results are similar when closeness to resident mothers is removed, suggesting that closeness to mothers is not influencing these findings (results not shown). These results suggest that nonresident fathers' involvement in certain types of authoritative parenting have a direct effect on children's emotional distress. In other words, closeness to the nonresident

father does not mediate the effect of father involvement. Additionally, including an interaction term for talking about other things at school and closeness to the nonresident father does not improve model fit (results not shown). Thus, talking about other things at school with fathers has a similar effect on emotional distress in children no matter how close the child feels to his or her nonresident father. However, children are less emotionally distressed when they are closer to their nonresident fathers.

Table 3 presents tobit estimates of the effect of nonresident father-child relationship quality on delinquency. The initial model shows the bivariate relationship between each measure of father involvement, closeness to fathers, and delinquency. Whereas shopping with fathers is associated with less delinquency, children who discussed personal problems with their fathers in the last month report more delinquent behaviors. No other measures of involvement are associated with delinquency at the bivariate level, nor is closeness. The second model includes controls for frequency of visits and socioeconomic factors. The negative effect of shopping is reduced to nonsignificance, and intermediate models could not identify a particular control variable responsible for explaining this effect (results not shown). In addition, failing to control for frequency of visits and socioeconomic variables suppresses the negative effect of playing sports and talking about other things at school, and the positive effect of discussing schoolwork or grades. Talking with fathers about personal problems continues to have a positive effect on delinquency. These positive effects may indicate that nonresident fathers become involved in academic issues and discipline when children get into trouble.

Table 3 about here

The third model presents results with respect to closeness. Similar to the bivariate results, children who are closer to their nonresident fathers do not exhibit less delinquency, net of

closeness to mothers and family characteristics. The final model assesses the effect of fathers' involvement in leisure activities, authoritative parenting, and children's closeness to fathers, net of visitation frequency, closeness to mothers, and socioeconomic characteristics. The negative effect of playing sports seen in the second model is reduced to nonsignificance once closeness to parents is controlled. These effects are explained by closeness to mothers rather than fathers (results not shown). Talking to fathers about other things at school remains negatively related to delinquency, and discussing personal problems and grades continue to have a positive effect. These effects are similar in direction and magnitude across models, suggesting that closeness does not mediate these effects. Additionally, interaction models suggest that these effects do not depend on how close the child feels to the nonresident father (results not shown).

Table 4 presents results with respect to overall GPA, which is restricted to a sample of children who report being in school in the last marking period. The first model shows the bivariate relationship between each measure of nonresident father involvement, closeness to fathers, and children's overall GPA. Shopping and going on outings with nonresident fathers appears to enhance a child's grades. Additionally, children who talked to their nonresident fathers about someone they are dating or a party, schoolwork or grades, and other things at school show a higher level of academic achievement than other children, as do children who are closer to their fathers.

Table 4 about here

The second model introduces controls for visitation frequency and socioeconomic characteristics. Results indicate that participating in leisure activities with children is not related to academic achievement, controlling for frequency of visitation and family characteristics. Fathers' involvement in authoritative parenting behaviors is not generally associated with the

child's overall GPA. The exception is talking with fathers about other things at school, which is associated with a higher grades. The positive bivariate effects largely disappear when the father involvement variables are all included in the same model, and are reduced to a nonsignificant level when the controls variables are included in the model (results not shown).

The third model examines the effect of closeness to nonresident fathers on GPA. Unlike the bivariate results, closeness to fathers is not related to the child's grades, net of closeness to mothers and other controls. The last model includes father involvement and closeness together in the same model along with controls. The effect of father involvement on academic achievement is similar across models. The only aspect of fathers involvement associated with grades is talking to fathers about other things at school, which continues to have a positive effect. Although slightly smaller in this model than in the initial model, results suggest that this effect is not mediated by closeness to fathers (which continues to have no effect). Moreover, a test for an interaction between talking about other things at school and closeness suggests that this effect does not depend on how close the child feels to his or her nonresidential father (results not shown).²

In sum, although often significant at the bivariate level, multivariate results do not support the hypothesis that fathers' involvement in leisure and recreational activities with children is positively associated with adolescent adjustment. There is evidence that one authoritative parenting behavior benefits children. Talking to nonresident fathers about "other things at school" is consistently positively related to children's social and psychological well-being. However, talking to fathers about personal problems and grades is related to higher levels of emotional distress and delinquency. In contrast to my second hypothesis, closeness to nonresident fathers does not mediate any of these effects.

DISCUSSION

Coleman (1988) argues that family social capital, parents' availability and attention to children, is an important determinant of children's developmental success. It is important to extend this discussion to include the half of all children in the United States who will have a biological father living in another household. The results of this study provide limited evidence that nonresident fathers' involvement in certain parenting behaviors may promote children's well-being, net of visitation frequency. These results add some support to previous work based on select samples of children. However, in assessing the effects of various parenting behaviors separately, I found that only certain types of nonresident father involvement are associated with child outcomes.

First, engaging in leisure activities with nonresident fathers has no effect on adolescent adjustment, controlling for frequency of visitation and other factors. Thus, Amato and Gilbreth's (1999) suggestion that engaging in recreational pursuits with children would contribute little to their developmental success cannot be rejected. Second, only one measure of authoritative parenting considered here is positively associated with adolescent adjustment (talking to fathers about other things at school). Working on school projects and talking about dating or a party is not related to any of the outcomes examined. These results suggest that even nonresident fathers who engage in "high quality" parenting practices may not significantly improve their children's well-being. Greif's (1997) work illustrates the many challenges that nonresident parents face in their efforts to maintain "normal" relationships with children living in other households. It may be unreasonable to expect similar outcomes under conditions of strict visitation schedules, competing activities, and conflicting loyalties. Working on a project for school may have a fundamentally different meaning for fathers and children who live separately.

The results of this study provide less evidence of the benefits of authoritative parenting than prior work on nonresident fathers. Simon et al.'s (1994) scale measuring the "quality of father's parenting," which includes items similar to the Add Health, shows a positive association with externalizing and internalizing problems in children. However, their scale includes items not available in Add Health (e.g., consistency of punishments and supporting the parenting decisions of the mother). Although the Simon et al. (1994) study is based on a select sample of children, it is likely that other measures of authoritative parenting would have a positive effect had they been available.

One measure of authoritative parenting, "talking to fathers about other things at school," is consistently positively related to all three measures of adolescent adjustment. However, because "other things at school" could include any number of topics it is difficult to determine the meaning of this item. One possibility is that this item is indicative of a "low pressure" form of interaction between nonresident fathers and their children. With many topics of conversation "off limits" (i.e., the child's mother) talking about other things at school may be a safe way for fathers and children communicate. Moreover, unlike "working on projects" and "talking about a party," this item has an "everyday" quality that may provide nonresident fathers with a window into their child's daily activities, problems, and concerns that is good for children. The positive effect of talking about things at school may be welcome news for nonresident fathers who often worry about how to spend time with their children (Greif, 1997). That is, elaborate and/or expensive outings with children are not required to produce positive outcomes. Moreover, the lack of a mediating or moderating effect of closeness indicates that having a close relationship is not necessary for children to benefit from contact with their fathers.

Talking with fathers about personal problems and grades is positively associated with emotional distress and delinquency. Since it is doubtful that talking to nonresident fathers leads to negative outcomes, it appears that children with problems come to fathers to discuss serious issues, or mothers may encourage their child's father to become involved when the child is having difficulty. However, an important issue that arises when using cross-sectional data is the inability to assess the causal ordering of the variables. Most researchers assume, on theoretical grounds, that it is the parent's behavior that influences the child's development rather than the reverse. Simons et al. (1994) tests this idea empirically and results suggest that the relationship between parenting behavior and child well-being for the most part operates in the expected direction. Thus, the positive association between some measures of nonresident father involvement and poor adjustment is likely an artifact of the data.

There are several limitations to this study. Although Simons et al.'s (1994) study does not find much evidence of a reciprocal relationship between parental involvement and children's behavior, the questions addressed in this study would be enhanced by a longitudinal research design. Second, because adolescents' reports are used for both father involvement and adolescent adjustment, these results may be affected by shared-method variance (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999). However, because mothers may underestimate father involvement and closeness between fathers and children (Seltzer & Brandreth, 1994; Smith & Morgan, 1994), children are probably better reporters of their relationships with their fathers. With the possible exception of grades, the child would also provide the best assessment their emotional state and involvement in delinquent behaviors. This study also focuses on adolescents and therefore cannot be generalized to all children.

A final issue is that the measures of father involvement available in Add Health are limited in scope and refer to recent contact. Although Add Health assesses a broader array of fathering behaviors than other surveys, these items are unable to assess the full extent of involvement of nonresident fathers. These measures only capture activities occurring in the previous month, which is not representative of the activities fathers and children may engage over the course of a year. The low level of involvement in leisure activities of Add Health children compared to the NSFH children appears to bear this out. On the other hand, the relatively high level of fathers' involvement in some authoritative parenting behaviors (e.g., talking about schoolwork and other things at school) indicates that fathers may be expanding their repertoire to include activities beyond recreational ones. It is possible that the low levels observed here may represent a real reduction in fathers' reliance on "Disneyland" activities in the decade since the first wave of the NSFH. Either way, this measurement strategy is an unfortunate aspect of Add Health that limits our understanding of long-term nonresident parent-child interaction patterns.

This study extends our knowledge of the effect of nonresident father involvement on child well-being. However, findings with respect to the benefits of authoritative parenting are not clear-cut. These results do not provide overarching evidence that nonresident fathers' participation in authoritative parenting benefits children. Rather, only specific aspects of authoritative parenting among nonresident fathers may matter to children's developmental success. The relationship between nonresident father involvement and children's well-being appears to be a complex one that will require additional research to disentangle. Future research should continue to consider the specific settings under which nonresident parent-child interaction occurs to determine exactly which aspects of authoritative parenting are most crucial to children's adjustment.

NOTES

1. Following the strong recommendation of Winship and Radbill (1994), all multivariate results are unweighted. However, borderline results (p-values between .01 and .05) still might be interpreted with caution due to potential underestimation of the standard errors (see Chantala & Tabor, 1999).
2. Parallel analyses were conducted among children who have at least some contact with their fathers (N = 1,100). Results are very similar for this group of children, with a few additional effects. For emotional distress, frequency of daily contact exerts a weak negative effect in the final model. Engaging in sports and closeness to fathers exert a negative effect on delinquency whereas talking about dating shows a positive relationship. With respect to GPA, talking about other things at school and closeness to fathers show a positive effect at $p < .06$.

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TABLE 1**Distribution of Independent Variables**

	Percent (<i>N</i> = 1535)
Control variables	
Frequency of visitation with nonresident father	
<i>In-person, phone, letter contact</i>	
Not at all	29.7
Once/several times a year	30.9
Monthly or more	39.4
<i>Frequency of overnight visits</i>	
Not at all	58.5
Once/several times a year	23.5
Monthly or more	18.0
Closeness to resident mother	
Not/not very close	1.8
Somewhat close	7.3
Quite/extremely close	90.8
Characteristics of child	
Gender	
Female	50.6
Male	49.5
Age (mean)	15.3
Race	
White	66.7
Non-White	33.3
Characteristics of resident mother	
Age (mean)	42.0
Education	
< 12	16.9
12	34.3
13 - 15	33.0
16 +	15.8

(Table 1 continued)

	38.9
<i>Married or cohabiting</i>	
Total family income (mean)	\$32,455
Characteristics of nonresident father	
	69.7
<i>Ever lived with child</i>	
Years since separation (mean)	10.8
Amount of child support paid	
None	53.1
\$100 or less	11.5
\$101-\$200	15.3
\$201-\$500	16.4
More than \$500	3.7
	Percent
	(N=1535)
Relationship quality	
Involvement with nonresident father	
<i>Leisure/recreational activities</i>	
	19.2
Shopping	
Played a sport	15.0
Movie, play, museum, etc.	15.7
Authoritative parenting behaviors	
	6.8
<i>Worked on a project for school</i>	
Talked about someone dating or a party	25.1
Talked about personal problem	18.0
Talked about school work or grades	41.1
Talked about other things at school	32.7
Closeness to nonresident father	
Don't know anything about father	17.4
Not/not very close	30.7
Somewhat close	18.3
Quite/extremely close	33.6

NOTE: Characteristics of resident mothers and nonresident fathers are based on the mother's report. All other measures are based on the child's report. These are weighted percentages.

TABLE 2
OLS Regression Estimates of Child's Level of Emotional
Distress on Nonresident Father-Child Relationship Quality

	Involvement & Closeness ^a	Involvement & Controls	Closeness & Controls	Involvement, Closeness & Controls
Relationship Quality				
Involvement with nonresident father				
Leisure/recreational activities				
Shopping	-.091***	-.045		-.029
Played a sport	-.120***	-.052		-.039
Movie, play, museum, etc.	-.101***	-.021		-.018
Authoritative parenting behaviors				
<i>Worked on a project for school</i>	-.042	.005		.016
Someone dating or a party	-.023	.001		-.002
Personal problem	.084**	.149***		.154***
School work or grades	-.027	.074*		.081*
Other things at school	-.074***	-.088**		-.074*
	-.031***		-.017**	-.022*
Closeness to nonresident father				
Controls				
Frequency of visitation with father				
In-person, phone, letter contact		-.025**		-.016
Overnight visits		.016		.015
Closeness to resident mother			-.120***	-.117***
Characteristics of child				
Sex (female)		.104***	.087***	.079***
Age		.020***	.017**	.015*
Race (non-White)		.041	.052*	.050*
Characteristics of resident mother				
Age		.000	.000	.000
Education ^b				
< High school		.045	.035	.044
Some college		-.048	-.061*	-.060*
College degree +		-.105***	-.110***	-.104***
Married or cohabiting		-.018	-.009	-.016
Total family income (thousands)		-.001	-.000	-.000

(continued)

TABLE 2
Continued

	Involvement & Closeness ^a	Involvement & Controls	Closeness & Controls	Involvement, Closeness & Controls
Characteristics of nonresident father				
Ever lived with child		-.046	-.023	-.027
Years since separation		-.002	-.001	-.002
Level of child support paid		-.005	-.009	-.006
Intercept	---	.374***	.983***	1.012***
² r	---	.091	.111	.136
n	1,535	1,535	1,535	1,535
Degrees of freedom	1	22	14	24

a. These are bivariate estimates.

b. Reference category is high school.

*p < .05. ** p < .01. ***p < .001.

TABLE 3
Tobit Regression Estimates of Child's Level of Delinquency on
Nonresident Parent-Child Relationship Quality

	Involvement & Closeness ^a	Involvement & Controls	Closeness & Controls	Involvement, Closeness & Controls
Relationship Quality				
Involvement with nonresident father				
Leisure/recreational activities				
Shopping	-.055*	-.068		-.057
Played a sport	-.049	-.074*		-.064
Movie, play, museum, etc.	-.014	.034		.038
Authoritative parenting behaviors				
Worked on a project for school	-.036	-.006		.002
Someone dating or a party	.037	.061		.057
Personal problem	.074**	.100**		.104***
School work or grades	.013	.090**		.093**
Other things at school	-.042	-.112***		-.102**
	-.008		-.003	-.013
Closeness to nonresident father				
Controls				
Frequency of visitation				
In-person, telephone, letter contact		.002		.008
Overnight visits		-.007		-.009
Closeness to resident mother			-.104***	-.101***
Characteristics of child				
Sex (female)		-.148***	-.155***	-.170***
Age		-.008	-.006	-.012
Race (non-White)		-.052*	-.041	-.045
Characteristics of resident mother				
Age		.000	.000	.000
Education ^a				
< High school		.039	.030	.038
Some college		.047	.039	.036
College degree +		-.027	-.023	-.025
Married or cohabiting		-.027	-.025	-.027
Total family income (thousands)		-.000	-.000	-.000

(continued)

TABLE 3
Continued

	Involvement & Closeness ^a	Involvement & Controls	Closeness & Controls	Involvement, Closeness & Controls
Characteristics of nonresident father				
Ever lived with child		-.013	.007	.001
Years since separation		-.001	.000	-.000
Level of child support paid		-.022*	-.023*	-.023*
Intercept	---	.506***	.965***	1.053***
-2 log likelihood	---	1837.028	1824.776	1785.772
n	1,535	1,535	1,535	1,535
Degrees of freedom	1	22	14	24

a. These are bivariate estimates.

b. Reference category is high school.

*p < .05. ** p < .01. ***p < .001.

TABLE 4
OLS Regression Estimates of Child's Overall GPA on
Nonresident Parent-Child Relationship Quality

	Involvement & Closeness ^a	Involvement & Controls	Closeness & Controls	Involvement, Closeness & Controls
Relationship Quality				
Involvement with nonresident father				
<i>Leisure/recreational activities</i>				
Shopping	.209***	.079		.075
Played a sport	.104	-.020		-.027
Movie, play, museum, etc.	.204***	.050		.048
Authoritative parenting behaviors				
	.007	-.112		-.118
<i>Worked on a project for school</i>				
Someone dating or a party	.173***	.067		.069
Personal problem	.069	-.090		-.090
School work or grades	.169***	.004		.004
Other things at school	.199***	.125*		.119*
	.041***		.022	.003
Closeness to nonresident father				
Controls				
Frequency of visitation				
In-person, telephone, letter contact		.002		-.000
Overnight visits		-.010		-.008
Closeness to resident mother			.070**	.069**
Characteristics of child				
Sex (female)		.286***	.307***	.300***
Age		-.031**	-.025*	-.027*
Race (non-White)		-.000	-.011	-.003
Characteristics of resident mother				
Age		.000	-.000	-.000
Education ^a				
< High school		-.037	-.025	-.035
Some college		.054	.068	.061
College degree+		.348***	.364***	.347***
Married or cohabiting		.092*	.088*	.092*
Total family income (thousands)		.001	.001	.001

(continued)

TABLE 4
Continued

	Involvement & Closeness ^a	Involvement & Controls	Closeness & Controls	Involvement, Closeness & Controls
Characteristics of nonresident father				
Ever lived with child		-.031	-.049	-.039
Years since separation		.001	.000	.001
Level of child support paid		.051**	.058***	.052**
Intercept	---	2.719***	2.290***	2.345***
² r	---	.113	.108	.117
n	1,469	1,469	1,469	1,469
Degrees of freedom	1	22	14	24

a. These are bivariate estimates.

b. Reference category is high school.

*p < .05. ** p < .01. ***p < .001.