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**A Role Theory Perspective on Patterns of Separated and Divorced African-American
Nonresidential Father Involvement with Children**

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Abstract

Involvement of African-American fathers with their children after separation and divorce has been minimally addressed in the literature. Using data from the National Survey of Families and Households, this study explores the relationship between nonresidential father involvement and various aspects of father role enactment among separated and divorced African-American fathers. Levels of participation in face-to-face visits, telephone/letter contact, and global decision-making concerning children were analyzed. Support is offered for the relationship between father involvement with children and various factors associated with social role enactment among nonresidential fathers.

Keywords: divorce, nonresidential fathers, father involvement

A Role Theory Perspective on Patterns of Separated and Divorced African-American
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Although the literature is growing, there is still a substantial need for research on ongoing patterns of involvement between children and their nonresidential fathers following divorce or separation. This is especially true for African-American separated and divorced fathers, a group that has received relatively little attention in the research thus far. The majority of the research on parenting following divorce focuses on the residential mother's household. Attention to the experiences of children with their nonresidential fathers is, in comparison, relatively sparse (Amato & Keith, 1991, Braver, 2000) and ethnic perspectives are particularly lacking (Lawson & Thompson, 1999; Pleck, 1997). Utilizing data from the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH), this research addresses this issue through the consideration of residentially separated and divorced African-American fathers' reports of involvement with children and various aspects of their enactment of the father role.

The emphasis on father involvement with children drives many policies related to the divorce process. Child visitation schedules, mandatory co-parenting workshops, and encouragement of joint custody arrangements all reflect attempts by courts to encourage continued father involvement with children. Clearly, with so much emphasis placed on nonresidential parent involvement with children, an understanding of the factors associated with such involvement is critical.

Over the past decade, there has been considerable growth in public, political, and academic attention to low-income and minority fathers who do not fulfill the traditional, married, residential, financial supporter role (Coley, 2001). Because 58% of African-American children

live in female-headed families (Seaton & Taylor, 2002), 34% of African-American children live in poverty (Kids Count, 2004), and African-American fathers are 2 to 3 times more likely to play non-traditional father roles (Coley & Chase-Lansdale, 1999), African-American nonresidential fathers have been the focus of intense policy and professional practice debates in recent years (Anderson, Kohler, & Letiecq, 2005; Cochran, 1997; Waller, 1999). As a result, there has been a relatively recent increase in research attention to African-American nonresidential fathers, their patterns of involvement with their children, and their influence on child well-being. Earlier research has documented a positive relationship between African-American fathers' involvement with their children and a variety of positive child outcomes (Black, Dubowitz, & Starr, 1999; Jackson, 1999; Seaton & Taylor, 2003).

Unfortunately, the large majority of the research on African-American nonresidential fathers has focused on young, unmarried fathers. There has been comparatively little attention to African-American fathers who move into a nonresidential parent role through marital separation and divorce, leaving this group understudied and little understood. This lack of understanding is also a function of the fact that much of the earlier research on African-American nonresidential fathers has relied on mothers' reports (Coley, 2001; Gadsden, Kane, & Armourer, 1997). Partially as a result of this lack of attention, divorced African-American fathers continue to be viewed from a deficit perspective by researchers, policymakers, and practitioners (Lawson & Thompson, 1999). Policymakers and practitioners often assume that a father who loves his child will maintain regular contact with his child. Unfortunately, this assumption fails to consider the barriers to maintaining the father-child relationship when men and their children live apart (Shulman & Seiffge-Krenke, 1997). As a result, African-American nonresidential fathers are typically described in pejorative ways that reflect absence, abandonment, or incompetent

parenting.

Much of the research that has been conducted on African-American nonresidential fathers has focused on structural barriers to their involvement with children. Issues surrounding paternal role enactment, role transitions associated with fatherhood in general, and the transition to nonresidential status in particular have been seldom explored with samples of African-American fathers. As a result, there is a lack of understanding concerning the experience of these role transitions among African-American fathers (Gadsden, Wortham, & Turner, 2003).

This study addresses these earlier deficits through an examination of self-reports of a sample of African-American fathers who have transitioned to the nonresidential father role through separation or divorce. Unlike earlier work that has largely focused on structural barriers to involvement among unmarried fathers, the present study utilizes aspects of role theory to consider the involvement experiences of African-American nonresidential fathers. While role theory has informed other work on nonresidential father involvement (Ihinger-Tallman, Pasley, & Buehler, 1993; Leite & McKenry, 2002; Minton & Pasley, 1996), such a perspective has not been utilized in explicit considerations of African-American nonresidential fathers.

Nonresidential Father Status

Men's enactment of components of the father role is built upon multiple parenting identities incorporating self-meanings and cognitions attached to the status of being a parent (Ihinger-Tallman, Pasley, & Buehler, 1993; Palkovitz, 1997). It is clear that nonresidential status impacts the nature of men's experiences as fathers, carrying the loss of familiar opportunities to parent, and this loss impacts a man's identity as a father (Ihinger-Tallman, et al., 1993). This impact on men's identities as fathers serves to create greater role ambiguity and role complexity (Minton & Pasley 1996). Daly (1995) suggests that fatherhood involves the creation and

reformulation of multiple roles through observation, communication, and negotiation with considerable institutional constraints on how these roles are exercised. Such constraints are often magnified for nonresidential fathers by visitation arrangements, former partners, or even children themselves who may make it difficult for them to feel as if they are substantially involved in a child's life (Marsiglio, Day, & Lamb, 1997).

A central feature of the nonresidential status for many men is the experience of ambiguities associated with the father role. Although men in general do not have a clear set of guidelines for fatherhood (Daly, 1995), there is even less clarity for nonresidential fathers. This ambiguity is evident not only in nonresidential father responsibilities (Seltzer, 1991) but also in the very meaning of father status among those living separate from their children (Minton & Pasley, 1996). Ambiguity is further evident in varying custody and child support laws, varied beliefs about the impact of father involvement, and variations in actual behaviors (Seltzer, 1991). As a result, many men are left feeling as if they are little more than "visitors" in the lives of their children.

Along with this ambiguity, many nonresidential fathers report a sense of loss of various dimensions of the father role (Braver with O'Connell, 1998; Mandell, 1995). This role loss leads to strain and, subsequently, disengagement from children (Kruk, 1993). This sense of role loss is often magnified by an accompanying sense of loss regarding children (Arendell, 1997; Gerson, 1994; Minton & Pasley, 1996).

The experience of ambiguity and loss, then, may account for the diverse levels of involvement among nonresidential fathers. Men may behave very differently in terms of involvement with children largely because of differences in their interpretation of what constitutes "good" fathering when living apart from one's children. Concurrently, men's

behaviors may also reflect their response to the real and imagined expectations of others regarding them as a father. In this respect, the nature of fathers' involvement with children is subject to change resulting from social factors and the attitudes of others (Marsiglio, 1995).

It is not surprising, then, that divorced fathers report lower levels of satisfaction associated with fatherhood. This reduced satisfaction is magnified by the fact that aspects of the father role remain salient to many nonresidential fathers despite the ambiguity and barriers they encounter (Braver with O'Connell, 1998; Minton & Pasley, 1996). Indeed, this issue of salience is central to a role perspective on nonresidential father involvement suggested by Ihinger-Tallman et al. (1993) in which levels of involvement are influenced by both the salience of the father identity in comparison to other identities and the salience hierarchy of the various father roles to be enacted.

Nonresidential African-American Fathers

Even though there are few empirical studies of nonresidential involvement among African-American fathers (Allen & Connor, 1993; Carmen & Virgo, 1993), there is evidence to suggest that the pattern of African-American nonresidential father involvement differs from that of Caucasian fathers. Studies that have examined variations in general between Black and White fathers across family structures have been somewhat inconsistent. However, there is some indication in several small scale studies and recent large-scale surveys that Black fathers demonstrate higher engagement than white fathers. In a recent review of the literature, it was concluded that being African-American actually enhances paternal involvement (Sussman, Steinmetz, & Peterson, 1999). For example, in one recent study, it was found that Black fathers of preschoolers spent more time caring for infants than did White fathers (Ahmeduzaman & Roopnarine, 1992). However fathers' relative accessibility is lower among Blacks in the

National Longitudinal Survey (Pleck, 1997).

In the few studies of Black father involvement after divorce, the literature suggests that Black children as well as their mothers are supported by and involved with nonresidential fathers following divorce (Fine & Schwebel, 1991; Isaacs & Leon, 1986; Morris, 1977; Seltzer, 1991). McLanahan and Sandefur (1994) found Black nonresidential fathers somewhat more likely to maintain contact with their children than fathers from other ethnic groups. Seltzer (1991) found that African-American fathers not living with their children had significantly higher probabilities of visiting and participating in child rearing decisions than non-blacks, although Blacks did not differ from Whites in terms of economic participation. Mott (1990) found among fathers of children seven and younger that Black nonresidential fathers were more likely to live nearby and had higher levels of visitation than White fathers.

Cultural explanations have been used to explain the higher levels of involvement of Black fathers as compared to White fathers, when, in fact, it might be expected that Black fathers would be less involved because of more adverse social and economic circumstances (Cazenave, 1979). Hill (1999) notes that, given the historical economic and social realities of Black families, Black parents by necessity have been individually prepared to function as both mother and father in the best interest of their children. McAdoo (1993) contends that egalitarian decision-making is important to many African-American fathers and appears to promote their involvement with their children. Hines and Boyd-Franklin (1982) state that the issue of “peripheralness” of Black males has been vastly overstated in the literature. Various writers have noted that responsibility to family historically has been fundamental to a Black man’s definition of manhood (Allen & Doherty, 1998; McAdoo, 1993; Taylor, Leashore, & Toliver, 1988).

In addition to determinants of involvement indicated in the general literature, there are

some data to suggest cultural variations. The better adjustment of Black mothers after divorce (Gove & Shin, 1989; McKelvey & McKenry, 2000; Menaghan & Lieberman, 1986) and the extensive kin network available to them may serve as a barrier to Black men's involvement compared to that of White men. Isaacs and Leon (1986) in a study of Black and White visitation among nonresidential fathers found that Black and White fathers both were consistently involved, but the Black fathers were in a sense rendered less necessary by the higher level of family adjustment following divorce with Black women being more self-reliant, benefiting from more kin assistance, more likely to move in with kin, and more likely than White women to have decided to divorce in the first place. Lawson and Thompson (1999) found that a major impediment to nonresidential contact between Black fathers and their children after divorce was conflict with the former spouse. Isaacs and Leon (1986) found that Black fathers may withdraw from their former spouse and children if they are less dependent on them for support.

Also, economics may be more of an issue for Black fathers than White fathers in terms of impacting levels of involvement. The more precarious nature of the economic/good provider role for African-American fathers threatens their ability to play both instrumental and expressive roles with their children (Bowman & Forman, 1997; Lawson & Thompson, 1999). A majority of African-American men list economic support of their families as an essential component of fathering despite structural barriers (Allen & Connor, 1993).

This earlier work on African-American nonresidential father involvement largely consists of comparisons of Black and non-Black fathers. There has been little attention to patterns of variation in involvement among divorced African-American fathers.

A Theoretical Model of Nonresidential Father Involvement with Children

Divorced and separated fathers who residentially separate from their children face the

need to transition from a residential father to a nonresidential father role. Burr, Leigh, Day, & Constantine (1979) suggest the ease of enactment of a new role is largely defined by the degree to which there is freedom from difficulty in activating the role and the availability of resources to utilize in doing so. Within the Burr et al. conceptualization: (a) the salience of a role, (b) strain associated with the role, (c) the clarity with which the role is understood, and (d) levels of conflict associated with the role all contribute to the ease with which one transitions into a new role. A wide variety of structural factors may influence the various elements of role enactment. The Burr et al. conceptualization serves to inform elements of the path model of nonresidential father involvement with children tested here. This model is illustrated in Figure 1. The model reflects various aspects of father status enactment and suggests path relationships that exist among these variables as originally reflected in the Burr et. al. model of role transition.

The dependent variable in this model is level of involvement between fathers and children. The path model is utilized to examine patterns of involvement as reflected in three separate observed involvement indicators: (a) telephone/letter contact between fathers and children, (b) face-to-face visits between fathers and children, and (c) fathers' global participation in decision-making concerning children. Within the assessed model, four aspects of men's status as fathers are postulated as being directly associated with nonresidential father involvement with children. These are institutional role clarity, co-parental conflict over aspects of parenting the focal child, satisfaction with aspects of nonresidential fatherhood, and importance ascribed to the father role.

Consistent with the Burr et al. model, relationships between co-parental conflict and the variables of paternal role satisfaction and institutional role clarity are also built into the path model described in Figure 1. Specifically, co-parental conflict is hypothesized to reduce levels

of satisfaction associated with nonresidential fatherhood and the degree of clarity with which the father experience is defined.

Prior research has also documented a strong relationship between the degree of geographic separation between fathers and their children and levels of nonresidential father involvement with children. Unique to the above model is the inclusion of a mediated relationship between these two variables. Geographic distance is described as negatively contributing to levels of satisfaction with the father role and this satisfaction, in turn, contributing to levels of nonresidential father involvement.

In the present analysis, role satisfaction is measured through fathers' satisfaction with various aspects of the parent role. Institutional role clarity is measured through the degree to which legal custody and visitation agreements that define expected levels of contact between nonresidential fathers and children exist. For many nonresidential fathers, these legal agreements are often the only guidelines they have regarding enactment of the father role as a nonresidential parent. The importance of such agreements is magnified by the lack of clear societal expectations concerning nonresidential parenting. Co-parental conflict is assessed through measures of conflict with the former spouse centered around parenting issues. Importance ascribed to the father role is assessed through father reports of the importance that the father role should hold in a man's life. These various measures reflect items included in the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH)--the data set utilized in the present study.

Although one might argue that the satisfaction, institutional role clarity, and importance ascribed to the father role variables are also directly related to one another; these relationships are not reflected in the analyzed models. This reflects the paths of influence as originally suggested in the Burr et. al. model. Each of these variables may also be influenced by other

factors not assessed here. A man's satisfaction with the experience of fatherhood may, for example, be influenced by the quality of his interactions with his children. Clearly, relationships between these three variables are extremely complex and extend well beyond the scope of the present analysis and the available data.

Utilizing the model described above, this research examines the relationship between various aspects of the father status and patterns of involvement between divorced/separated African-American nonresidential fathers and their children as measured by: (a) telephone or letter contact between fathers and children, (b) face-to-face contacts between fathers and children, and (c) father participation in decision making concerning the child. The primary research question was, "Does the hypothesized model serve to explain variations in involvement between divorced and separated African-American nonresidential fathers and their children?" It is hypothesized that the proposed path model would significantly account for variance in father involvement as measured by telephone/letter contact, face-to-face contact, and global influence in decision-making concerning the child.

Research Methods

Sample Selection

This study consists of an analysis of data included in the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH). The NSFH includes data collected from a nationally representative sample of 9,643 individuals as well as an over-sample of minorities and households containing single-parent families, stepfamilies, recently married couples, and cohabiting couples. 13,017 individuals comprised the total sample for an initial wave of data collected in 1987-88 (Sweet, Bumpass, & Call, 1988). A second wave of data was collected in 1993-94 from 10,008 of the initial respondents (Sweet & Bumpass, 1996). Data from wave 2 was utilized in this study. The

NSFH was utilized because of its inclusion of father reports in the data. As such, it provides an opportunity to explore father experiences from the fathers' perspectives.

The reports of the fathers included in the NSFH are made in relation to a focal child selected from all of the men's children. Thus, although fathers' relationships may vary from child to child, such variation is not included here. In all cases, only father responses are considered.

A primary sample of 119 men was utilized in this study. These men were all living separately from a focal child under the age of 18 as a result of divorce or separation. In all cases, respondents with missing data on any of the measured items were excluded from the sample. Although this exclusion necessarily limits the overall sample size and raises concerns regarding the degree to which the samples are representative, it was necessary for the analysis techniques being utilized (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1996). A descriptive summary of the sample is included in Table 1.

Operationalization of Variables and Instrumentation

A number of items from the NSFH were utilized to measure the variables included in the analyzed models.

Level of Involvement

Level of Involvement between nonresidential fathers and children was the outcome variable of primary interest. Three items were utilized to measure this variable. These included assessments of telephone or letter contact between fathers and children, face-to-face contact between fathers and children, and fathers' global influence in decision-making concerning the child. Concerns about the veracity of the NSFH data led to the decision to exclude provision of financial support as an assessed outcome variable. Because of the large number of respondents

for whom there are missing data in this area, the inclusion of provision of child support as a dependent variable would result in sample sizes too small to be utilized in the structural equation analysis. Although the NSFH provides reports of child support payments missed and the amount of support paid monthly, each of these measures are problematic in that they are tied to the presence of legal agreements concerning child support and also fail to account for less formal forms of financial support. Those without legal agreements concerning child support are less likely to report missing payments since none may be required. Also, reports of amounts paid often fail to include informal financial support and do not necessarily address the income diversity that may exist among the fathers and the mothers of their children.

Telephone/letter contact was assessed through one item asking, “During the past twelve months, about how often did you talk on the telephone or send the child a letter?” Response options were 1-not at all, 2-about once a year, 3-several times a year, 4-one to three times a month, 5-about once a week, or 6-several times a week. Face-to-face contact was assessed through one item asking, “During the past twelve months, how often did you see the child?” with the same response set as the telephone/letter contact item. Global influence in decision-making concerning the child was operationalized through one item asking “How much influence do you have in making major decisions about such things as education, religion, and health care?” with the respondent choosing from a response set including 1-no influence, 2-some influence, or 3-a great deal of influence.

Role Satisfaction

Role satisfaction was a measure of the respondents’ satisfaction with three aspects of their parenting experience with the child: (a) satisfaction with where the child lives, (b) satisfaction with levels of contact with the child, and (c) satisfaction with contributions to the

child's support. Response options included 4-very satisfied, 3-somewhat satisfied, 2-somewhat dissatisfied, and 1-very dissatisfied. While financial contributions were not included as a measure of involvement because of the survey issues described earlier, fathers' satisfaction with contributions was included as a part of the satisfaction measure. This was done because financial contributions are often a contentious issue in cases of divorce and may be assumed to contribute to men's overall assessment of the nonresidential father role. Additionally, unlike measures of levels of involvement, this variable includes a self-report of satisfaction rather than an attempt to accurately quantify an amount of financial contribution. The aggregate variable yielded a Cronbach α of .82.

Importance ascribed to the Father Role

Importance ascribed to the father role was assessed through one item assessing agreement with the statement "It's better for a person to have a child than to go through life childless" with participants responding 5-strongly agree, 4-agree, 3-neither agree or disagree, 2-disagree, or 1-strongly disagree. While this item does not directly address the importance of the father role in the lives of each individual subject, it is the only item in the survey that approaches this construct. As such it provides an assessment of the degree to which subjects perceived the father role as holding global meaning in men's lives.

Institutional role clarity

Institutional role clarity was assessed through the presence of legal agreements specifying aspects of custody, visitation, and provision of financial support. Because the nonresidential father role is one without strongly institutionalized societal norms (Cherlin, 1978), such an agreement often provides the only tangible clarification of the degree to which a nonresidential father is to be involved with his children. Respondents were asked to indicate whether legal

agreements are in place specifically concerning each of three areas: (a) visitation schedules, (b) custody, and (c) levels of child support. The aggregate variable yielded a Cronbach α of .91.

Co-parental Conflict

Conflict between expectations of the father and the former spouse regarding aspects of parenting the focal child was the focus of this construct with items addressing areas of potential conflict with the former spouse aggregated into a single variable. Included were conflict over: (a) where the child lived, (b) how the child was raised, (c) how the nonresidential father spent money on the child, (d) how the residential mother spent money on the child, (e) fathers' visits with the child, and (f) fathers' contribution to child support. Respondents reported levels of conflict with the child's mother as being 1-no conflict, 2-some conflict, or 3-a great deal of conflict. The aggregate variable yielded a Cronbach α of .87.

Geographic Distance

Respondents were asked to indicate in miles how far they lived from the focal child. This variable represents an important aspect of fathers' accessibility to children. While a reliance on a simple measure of distance fails to account for other related issues such as availability of transportation to see children, it represents the only measure available in the dataset.

Data Analysis

The hypothesized model incorporating the various predictor variables was separately analyzed in relation to each of the three distinct measures of involvement: (a) face-to-face visits, (b) telephone/letter contact, and (c) global influence in decision-making. For the purposes of the path analysis, all variables, both endogenous and exogenous, were operationalized as observed variables.

Survey issues were the basis for the decision to exclusively incorporate observed variables in the model. Because of the construction of the NSFH survey, utilization of latent variables created a model that failed to meet conditions for model identification. Specifically, the ratio of estimated parameters to incorporated variables failed to meet identification criteria. For this reason, it was decided to examine each type of contact as a distinct variable rather than utilizing a latent variable. The basic model was examined in relation to each indicator separately. For all sample groups, each of these analyses are included here.

The assessed path model is described in Figure 1. Because the model serves as a test of aspects of a theorized model of role enactment, no attempt was made to revise the model away from the theorized relationships. This is a recursive model in that all proposed relationships incorporate one-way causal flow. Additionally, the model utilizes only observed variables. Thus, there is no measurement model built into the analysis. Correlations between all variables included in the model will provide a stronger conceptual understanding of interrelationships that may exist among those variables beyond the paths specified in the model.

Because of the use of categorical variables and kurtosis and skewness within the data, analysis of an ordinary sample covariance matrix was generally inappropriate. Because both categorical and continuous data are built into the analysis, it was necessary to use polyserial correlations rather than product-moment correlations. In order to analyze polyserial correlations, the asymptotic covariance matrix was utilized. This also provides a mechanism for understanding the large sample behaviors of estimators that are not continuously measured or normally distributed (Bollen, 1989).

Analysis of the asymptotic covariance matrix requires the use of an estimator that allows for non-normality (Bollen, 1989). Such is not the case with the maximum likelihood estimator.

The Weighted Least Squares (WLS) estimator meets this condition and, as such, is the appropriate estimator to use when working with the asymptotic covariance matrix.

Results

Correlations among all variables included in the path model are provided in Table 2. As indicated, the three involvement variables are strongly correlated. Further, strong correlations exist between paternal role satisfaction and two other independent variables: parental conflict and geographic distance. Finally, role satisfaction and geographic distance were strongly correlated with all three involvement measures in expected directions. Parental conflict was correlated with father involvement in decision-making.

Separate models utilizing each of the three involvement indicators were analyzed. Fit indicators for each of the analyses are included in Table 3. WLS estimators and z-values for individual paths within the analyzed models are included in Table 4.

Model Incorporating Telephone/Letter Contact as Involvement Indicator

The model resulted in an $\chi^2(5) = 3.04$ ($p < .69$). The non-significant chi-square statistic suggests a strong model-to-data fit. This assessment is consistent with other, uniformly strong fit indicators (GFI=1.00; AGFI=.98; RMSEA=0.00; PCLOSE ($p < .05$)=0.80). The SRMR statistic of 0.20 suggests the presence of outliers in the data, although these do not seem to dramatically affect other fit indicators. Despite the SRMR statistic, all other involvement indicators are very strong, suggesting a close model-to-data fit. The squared multiple correlations for structural equations indicate the model explains 49% of the variation in fathers' telephone and letter contact with children.

Model Incorporating Face-to-Face Visits as Involvement Indicator

The model resulted in an $\chi^2(5) = 2.94$ ($p < .71$). The non-significant chi-square statistic suggests a strong model-to-data fit. This assessment is consistent with other, uniformly strong fit indicators (GFI=1.00; AGFI=.98; RMSEA=0.07; PCLOSE ($p < .05$)=0.82. The SRMR statistic of 0.19 again suggests the presence of outliers in the data, yet they do not significantly affect the other fit indicators. As a whole, then, the various fit indicators suggest the model provides a strong fit to the data.

The squared multiple correlations for structural equations indicated the model explained 76% of the variation in frequency of fathers' face-to-face visits with children. Thus, in terms of frequency of face-to-face contact between fathers and children, the model holds more explanatory power than it does for frequency of telephone/letter contact between fathers and children among African-American fathers.

Model Incorporating Fathers' Participation in Decision-Making as Involvement Indicator

The model resulted in an $\chi^2(5) = 6.42$ ($p < .27$). The non-significant chi-square statistic suggests a strong model-to-data fit. This assessment is consistent with other, uniformly strong fit indicators (GFI=0.99; AGFI=.96; RMSEA=0.05; PCLOSE ($p < .05$)=0.42. The SRMR of 0.08 suggests there are few outliers in the data, offering another indication of strong model-to-data fit. The various indicators, then, suggest a very strong model-to-data fit.

The squared multiple correlations for structural equations indicate the model explained 8% of the variation in frequency of fathers' participation in decision-making about children. Thus, in terms of individual variables, this model holds considerably less explanatory power for African-American fathers when involvement is defined through participation in decision-making than when the other involvement indicators are utilized.

Discussion

The basic premise of this research was that the hypothesized model addressing factors contributing to men's enactment of aspects of the father role would significantly explain patterns of involvement between divorced and separated African-American nonresidential fathers and children. Strong support was provided for the strength of the model in predicting each of the individual involvement variables.

These data indicate lower levels of involvement with children is related to ongoing conflict with residential mothers, greater geographic distance from children, and a lack of clarity concerning enactment of the father role. Seltzer (1991) suggests such patterns may be magnified by the fact that men's post-divorce definitions of the father role may remain tied to their residential fatherhood experiences. In other words, men may retain a definition of fatherhood based on a residential model even in the face of increased barriers to involvement encountered following residential separation from children. As suggested elsewhere (Arendell, 1995; Fox & Blanton, 1995), for many men this definition of fatherhood may incorporate a hegemonic view that men should retain a strong sense of authority over their relationships with their children. Thus, nonresidential parenting may represent a disruption of preferred gender arrangements within families.

This analysis represents one of the few examinations of divorced or separated African-American fathers in terms of enactment of the nonresidential father role and variations in patterns of involvement with children. These results are consistent with the view that aspects of role enactment are central to patterns of involvement between nonresidential fathers and children. Although it may be assumed that men of different ethnic and social class groups might face differing social barriers to involvement with children, the explanatory power of the elements

of role enactment included here are consistent with earlier research utilizing largely Caucasian samples. Indeed, African-American fathers have been shown to hold strong commitments to the father role (Allen & Connor, 1993; Mott, 1990), and the strength of such commitments might offset the greater structural barriers to involvement these men might face.

The data also suggest varying patterns of influence for the different paths in the model. Role satisfaction and institutional role clarity did not significantly contribute to any of the involvement variables. This pattern appears to be consistent with both the demographic characteristics of the sample and Mott's (1990) report of high role commitment among African-American fathers. A heightened commitment to the father role suggests that involvement would be less contingent on levels of role satisfaction in that such commitment would facilitate involvement despite lower levels of role satisfaction. This would reflect the Black community's expectation for and support of father involvement regardless of legal or residential status (Carmen & Virgo, 1993; Hill, 1999)

Importance ascribed to the father role was significantly and positively associated with frequency of visits among fathers and positively but not significantly associated with telephone and letter contact and participation in decision-making. A similar pattern was also evident in the relationships between co-parental conflict and each of the involvement variables. These patterns suggest the possibility that African-American fathers may be more likely to be involved with their children when the father role is more salient for them and when they experience lower conflict with the mother of their children. If African-American fathers' more precarious economic position tends to threaten both instrumental and expressive involvement (Bowman & Forman, 1997; Lawson & Thompson, 1999), then the importance of the role would loom large as would facilitation of involvement by the child's mother. Also, several authors have noted that

Black fathers' position in the family after separation is prone to be minimized by the strength of the mother role buttressed by community support (Isaacs & Leon, 1986; Lawson & Thompson, 1999; McKelvey & McKenry, 2000).

While the data offer support for the relationships described above, this support is far from conclusive. It is important to acknowledge a number of concerns with the data that was available for this analysis. As with any attempt at secondary analysis of data, the present work was constrained somewhat by the degree to which survey items were appropriate to the variables in the model. As a result, it might be argued that the variables are more narrowly and indirectly operationalized than would be ideal. Role clarity, for example, is likely to develop out of processes and communications that extend well beyond the presence of legal agreements. Similarly, the use of a geographic distance measure without other accessibility information and a global indicator of the importance of the father role to a man's life rather than more specific measures suggest that these data may not fully capture the complexity of men's role enactments.

A further issue concerns the variability that exists within a number of the survey items. For example, a measure of face-to-face or telephone/letter contact that includes a choice of "1 to 3 times per month" leads to broad within-item variability. Clearly, the experiences of a man seeing his child only once a month compared to a man who sees his child more frequently are very different. These items also do not provide any assessment of the regularity of contact or qualitative aspects of that contact. In many ways, the measures available through the NSFH dataset are somewhat simplistic measures of the variables as described. These issues suggest that further work is needed that more fully explores the complex relationships among the variables studied here.

The relationships supported here appear to address ongoing patterns of enactment of

aspects of the father role among African-American divorced and separated nonresidential fathers. Even with the data concerns identified above the strength of the overall model fit suggests a pattern of relationships that bear further and more complex research attention. The population of divorced and separated African-American fathers is one that remains largely understudied, especially in terms of aspects of paternal role enactment.

Although the assessed model provided a strong fit to the data for each of the three involvement indicators, substantial variation in father involvement was not explained by the assessed model. This clearly suggests further research is needed that explores other factors that may be associated with aspects of role transition and role enactment and contribute to patterns of nonresidential father involvement. Some of this unexplained variance may be due to the fact that the path model assessed here included elements of the full Burr et. al. (1979) model. Because of the limitations of survey construction and sample size, a number of additional originally-hypothesized variables were not included in this analysis. These include factors such as length of time in a role, the presence of substitute gratifications (in this case, possibly other children for whom the man assumes a social father role), the amount of normative change associated with the transition into the role, and the degree to which the father role is isolated or integrated with other social roles the man may hold. Obviously, each of these is potentially impactful and bear further study. Future research is needed that attends to all the elements of the originally-hypothesized model of role transition.

A further possibility is that some of the unexplained variation may be due to the nature of the survey items used to operationalize the variables in the model. This concern is one that often arises when conducting secondary analysis of a large data set. In this case, it serves as a counterpoint to the advantages the dataset offers in terms of sample size and representativeness

and the inclusion of father self-reports in the data.

Although this work focused on elements of a role transition model, it is also important to acknowledge the influence of other structural and systemic factors on nonresidential father involvement. While these were not built into the model, there is ample previous research addressing these factors with samples of never-married African-American fathers and primarily Caucasian divorced fathers that suggests these factors contribute to patterns of involvement in meaningful and complex ways. Future research should attend to the degree to which structural barriers identified elsewhere may contribute to the quality of men's enactment of the nonresidential father role.

Particularly important to consider is the issue of the length of time subjects have spent in the nonresidential father role. It is reasonable to assume a substantial number of men in the present sample had held the nonresidential father role for many years, suggesting that they had moved beyond a period of transition into a new social role. Although time since separation from children was not controlled in this analysis, there are indications that factors contributing to the ease with which men enact the nonresidential father role as explored here continue to exist as significant forces in the lives of these men as they maintain the role over time. Unfortunately, the present sample was not of sufficient size to support a more extensive longitudinal analysis of the relationships explored here. This is an important dimension that bears further study, however.

It is reasonable to expect that ongoing revision of men's definitions of the father role will occur throughout their lives. The strong fits between a model of role enactment and aspects of fathers' behavior in the present study suggest that similar relationships might exist across a broad spectrum of father attitudes and behaviors. There is a need, then, for further longitudinal

attention to the relationships reported here. Such examinations would clarify the ongoing influence of the relationships explored here, and would also serve to encourage considerations of nonresidential father involvement as a process rather than an event.

Also suggested is the need for further research attention to aspects of father role enactment and nonresidential father attitudes and behaviors. The results achieved in the present study provide support for the calls of others (Braver with O'Connell, 1998; Doherty, Kouneski, & Erickson, 1998; Marsiglio & Cohan, 1997; Palkovitz, 1997) for greater attention to barriers to father role enactment that may exist in the lives of nonresidential fathers. Support is offered for the causal influence of barriers to father role enactment on nonresidential fathers' involvement with children. Ongoing attention to the presence and complex impacts of such barriers in the lives of divorced and separated African-American nonresidential fathers is needed.

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Table 1

Sample Descriptive Information

Category	
Father's Age	
Mean	34.96 yrs
Std. Dev.	8.84
Range	20 to 52
Father's Education	
Mean No. Years	12.15
Std. Dev.	2.68
Below H.S. Grad.	30 (25.64%)
H.S. Graduate	52 (44.44%)
Some College	25 (21.37%)
Bachelor's Degree	8 (6.84%)
Graduate School	2 (1.71%)
Father's Income	
Mean	\$21,975
Std. Dev.	\$19,860
Below \$10,000	23 (22.55%)
\$10,000 - \$19,999	34 (33.33%)
\$20,000 - \$29,999	21 (20.59%)
\$30,000 - \$49,999	18 (17.65%)
\$50,000 - \$99,999	5 (4.90%)
\$100,000 or more	1 (0.98%)

Father's Religion

Protestant	82 (69.49%)
Catholic	8 (6.78%)
Jewish	0 (0.00%)
Other	13 (11.02%)
None	15 (12.71%)

No. of Marriages

Mean	1.31
Std. Dev.	0.57
1 marriage	89 (74.79%)
2 marriages	23 (19.33%)
More than 2	7 (5.88%)

Focal Child Age

Mean	10.52 yrs
Std. Dev.	5.01
Age Range	1 to 17

Focal Child Sex

Female	58 (49.2%)
Male	60 (50.8%)

Table 2

Correlations among Variables

	Face- to-Face Visit	Telephone Letter Contact	Decision -Making	Satis.	Clarity	Conflict	Imp. Ascribed to Father Role
Face-to- Face Visit							
Telephone or Letter Contact	.618**						
Decision- making	.446**	.460**					
Satisfaction	.248**	.216**	.228**				
Clarity	-.017	-.018	-.105	.041			
Conflict	-.027	.077	-.182*	-.336**	.007		
Importance Ascribed to Father Role	-.094	-.149	-.050	.068	.001	.020	
Geographic Distance	-.291**	-.644**	-.220**	-.162**	.056	-.009	.088

** p < .01

* p < .05

Table 3

Model Fit Indicators for Each Sample Group

Model	$\chi^2(df)$	P	GFI	AGFI	SRMR	RMSEA	PCLOSE
(n=119)							
Telephone/Letter Contact	3.04(5)	.69	1.00	0.98	0.20	0.000	.80
Face-to-Face Visit Contact	2.94(5)	.71	1.00	0.98	0.27	0.000	.82
Decision-Making	6.42(5)	.27	0.99	0.96	0.08	0.050	.42

Table 4

Weighted Least Square Estimates and z Values for Paths in Models

Path	(n-119)
Satisfaction to Telephone/Ltr.	-.02 (-0.08)
Satisfaction to Visits	-.13 (-0.54)
Satisfaction to Decision-Making	.15 (1.33)
Saliency to Telephone/Letter	.49 (1.10)
Saliency to Visits	.65 (2.03)*
Saliency to Decision-Making	.04 (0.14)
Clarity to Telephone/Letter	.50 (1.08)
Clarity to Visits	.57 (1.58)
Clarity to Decision-Making	.09 (0.32)
Conflict to Telephone/Letter	-.03 (-0.10)
Conflict to Visits	-.05 (-0.18)
Conflict to Decision-Making	-.18 (-1.06)
Conflict to Satisfaction	-.35 (-3.62)*
Conflict to Clarity	-.02 (-0.12)
Distance to Satisfaction	-.16 (-1.73)*

* z value > 1.96 = p < .05

Figure 1. A path model of nonresidential father involvement with children

