

National Center for  
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# Supportiveness, Father Involvement, & Coparenting: Union Transitions Among Cohabiting Parents

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## Background

- Currently, half of all nonmarital births are to cohabiting parents (Child Trends, 2007)
- Fifty nine percent of women who conceive a child within cohabitation remain in the cohabiting union after the birth (Manning, 2001)
- Parents and children typically fare worse in cohabiting unions than in any other family structure (Brown, 2005)
- The family processes underlying unmarried parents' union formation and transition patterns have received less attention
- Relationship quality and expectations are associated with transitions out of cohabitation among cohabiters in general (Brown, 2000), although relationship features have not been examined among cohabiting *parents* specifically

## Research Questions

- Is supportiveness associated with transitions out of cohabitation among new parents?
  - H1: Supportiveness will be positively associated with marriage (stronger for fathers) and negatively associated with separation (stronger for mothers)
- Are father involvement and coparenting associated with transitions out of cohabitation among new parents?
  - H2: Both will have a positive association with marriage and a negative association with separation; coparenting will be stronger

## Current Study

- The goal of this study is to extend prior research by focusing on the role of:
  - Supportiveness - Father involvement
  - Coparenting - Relationship expectations
 on the union transitions of cohabiting parents within the first five years of their child's life
- Relationship quality has not been a focus specifically among new cohabiting parents
- Father involvement and coparenting have not been examined previously in the union transitions of cohabiting parents
- Father involvement is conceptualized as a symbol of commitment to the mother and the family (Levy-Shiff, 1994)
- Among cohabiters, who ostensibly have lower levels of commitment than marrieds, father involvement and supportive coparenting may be important for their union transitions

## Data

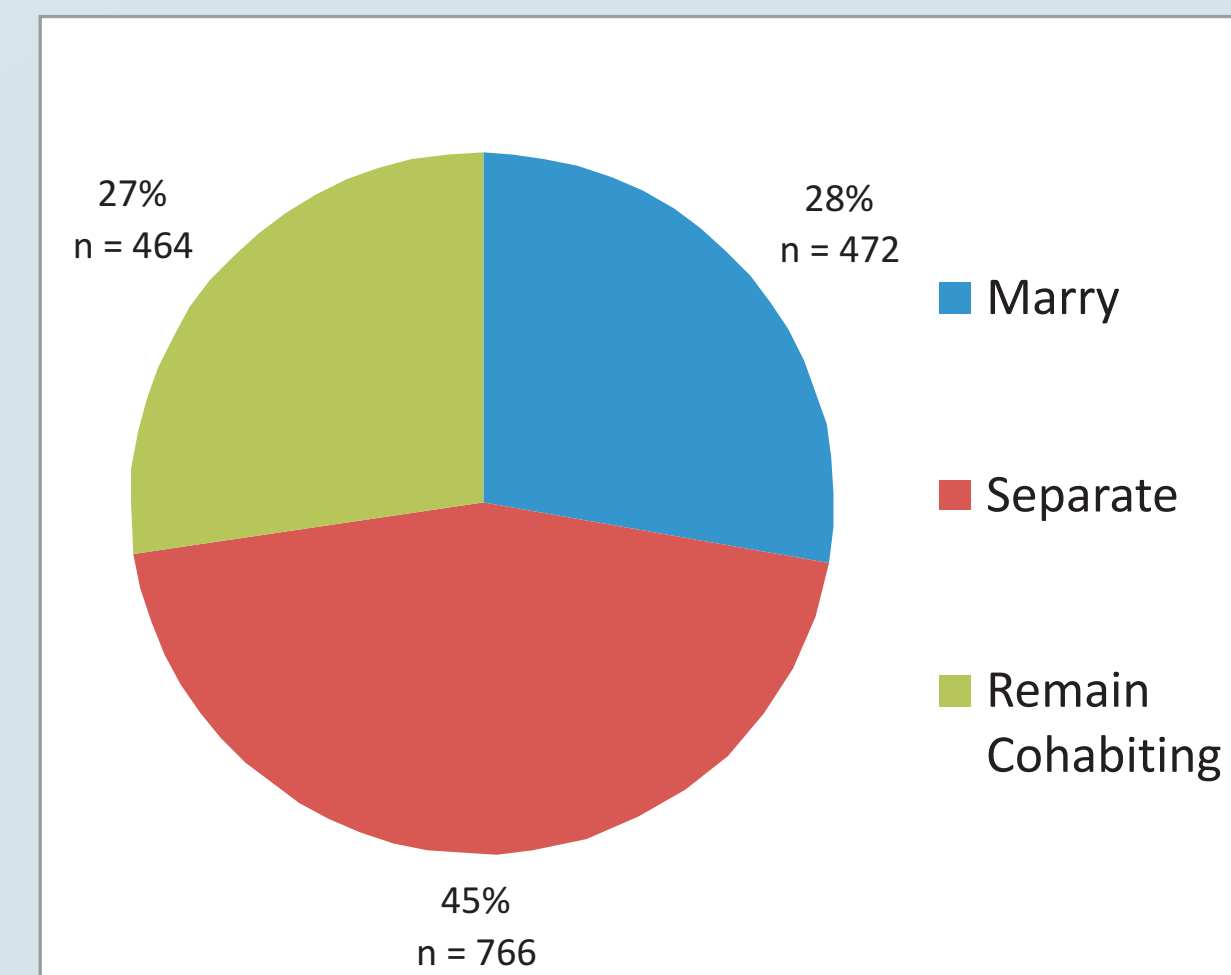
- Fragile Families and Child Well-Being Study
  - Mothers interviewed in hospitals within 48 hours of giving birth (1998 – 2000)
    - Fathers interviewed in hospital if possible or as close to birth as possible
  - Parents re-interviewed at the child's
    - 1st birthday (1999 – 2002)
    - 3rd birthday (2001 – 2003)
    - 5th birthday (2003 – 2006)
- Representative of births in cities with populations over 200,000 in 2000 (when weighted)
- Oversample nonmarital birth by a factor of 5
- Most representative of cohabiting fathers than any other study
- Analytic sample – N = 1,702 cohabiting couples
  - Data from cohabiting mothers and fathers at birth
  - Interviewed at two or more waves

## Event History Data

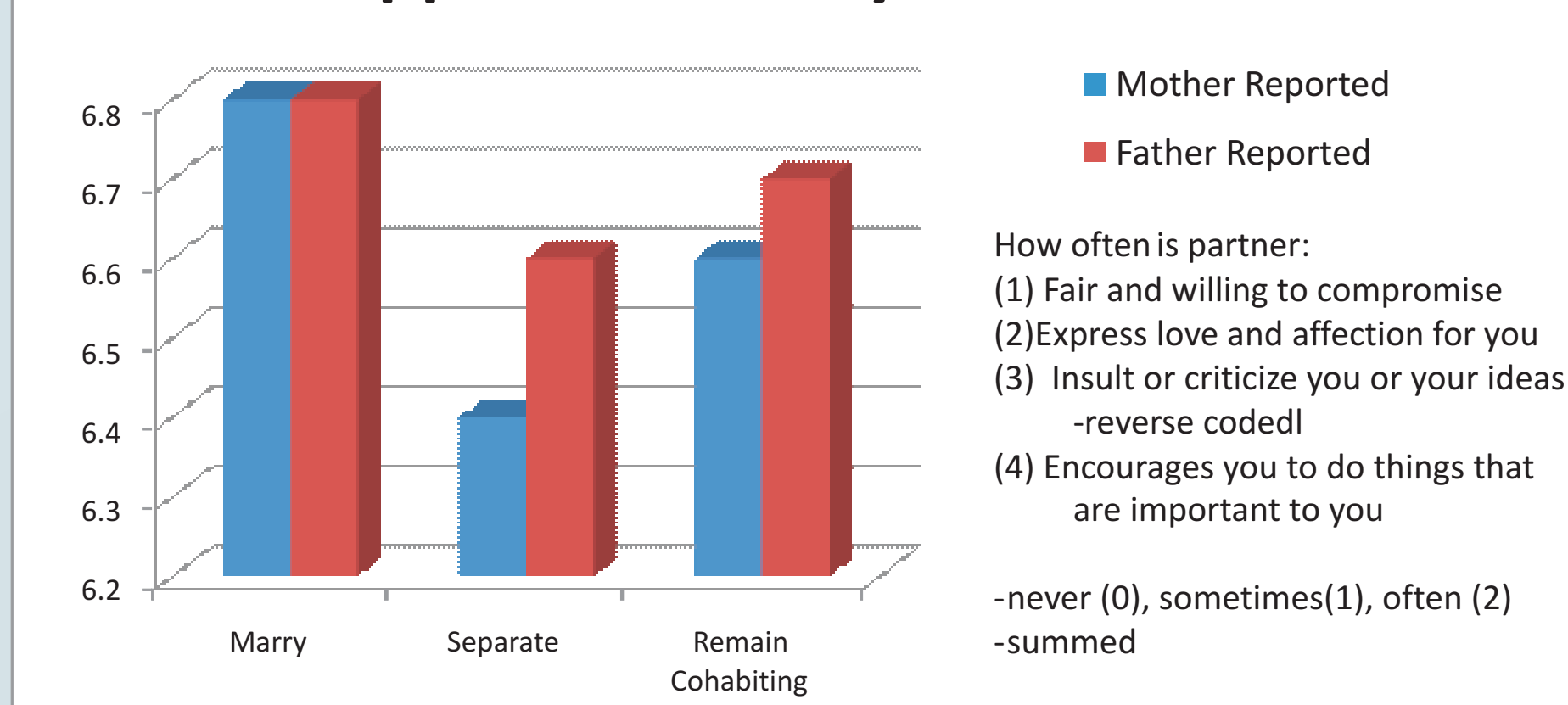
- Left-truncated sample – cohabiters were at risk to marry or separate before the birth
  - Utilize a maximum likelihood approach
- Focus is on transitions after birth, therefore, risk is assessed beginning at birth, while controlling for time in union before the birth
- Couple-month data file
  - n = 55,123 observations

## Relationship Outcome

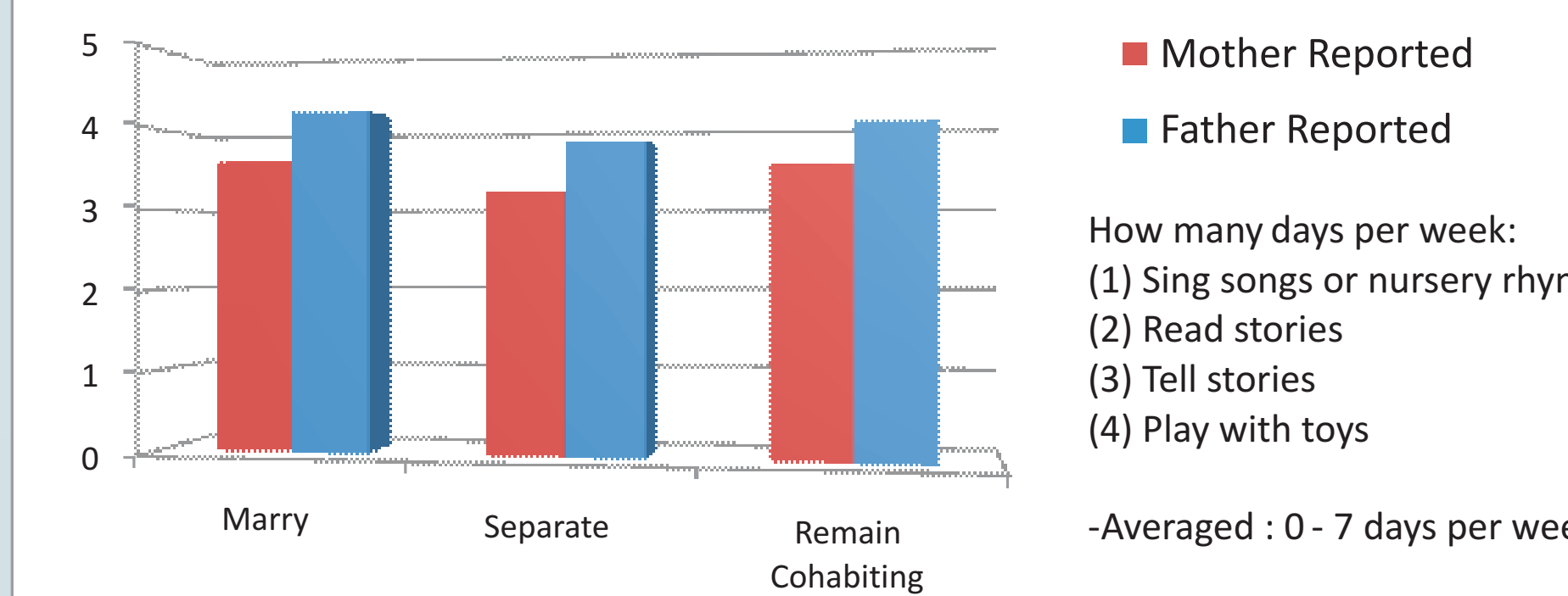
- Using event history analysis, there are three relationship outcomes a couple could reach which end the hazard time:



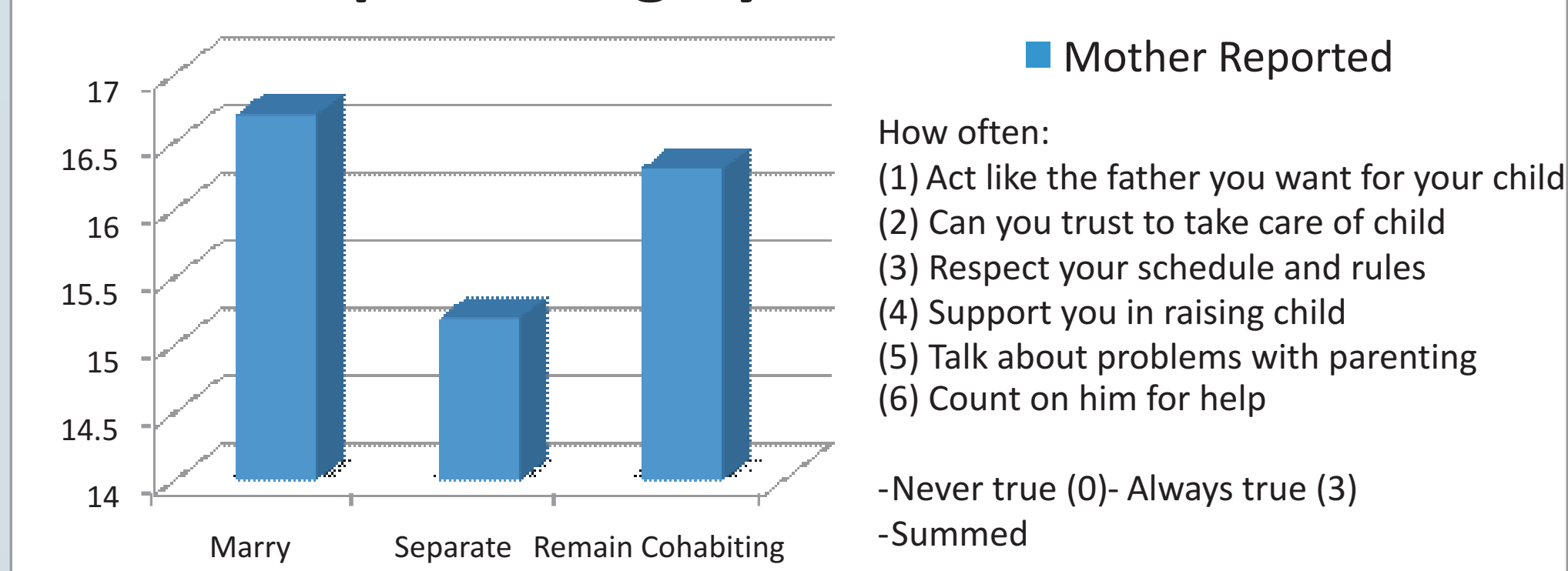
## Supportiveness by Union Outcome



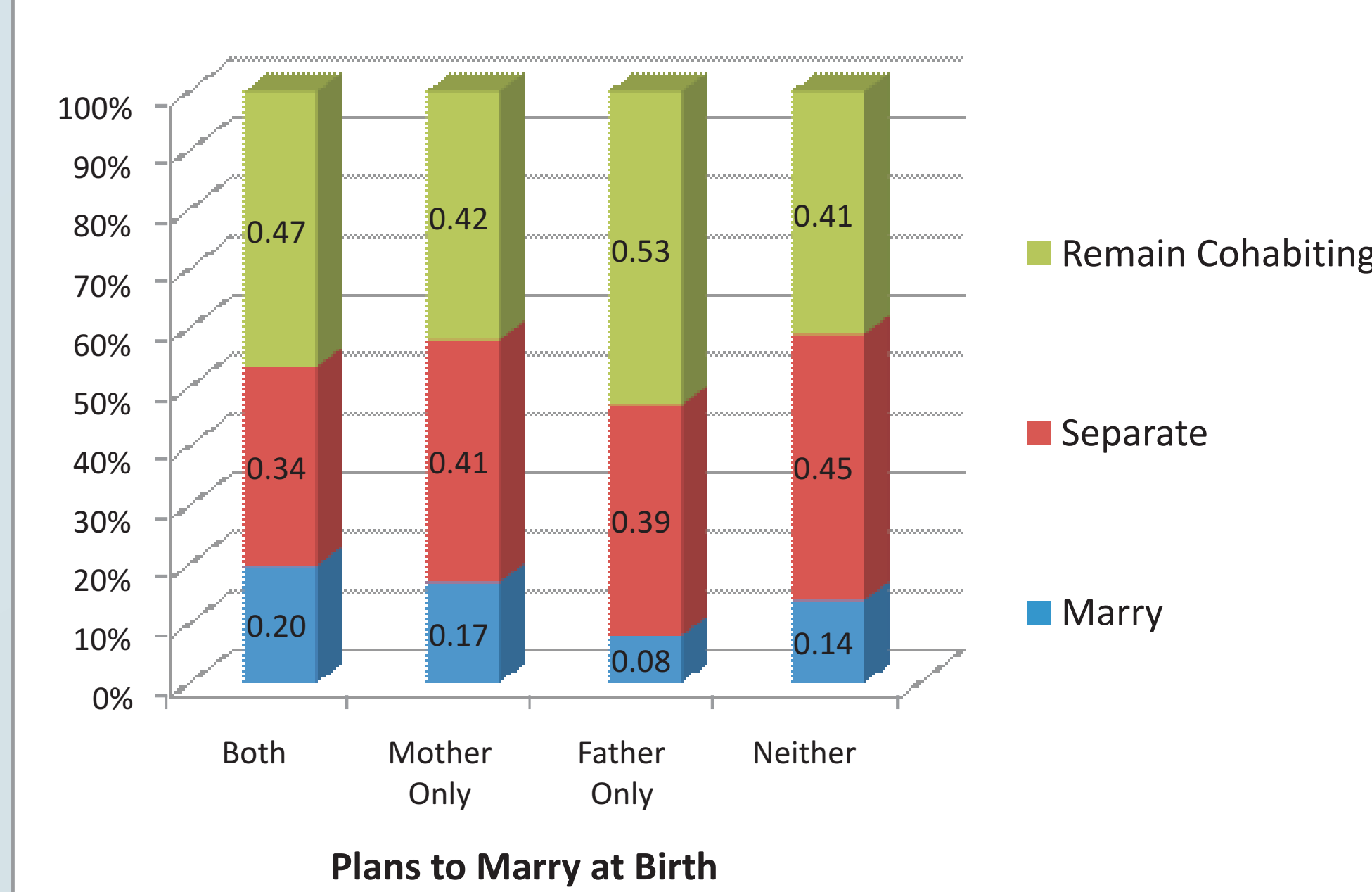
## Father Involvement by Union Outcome



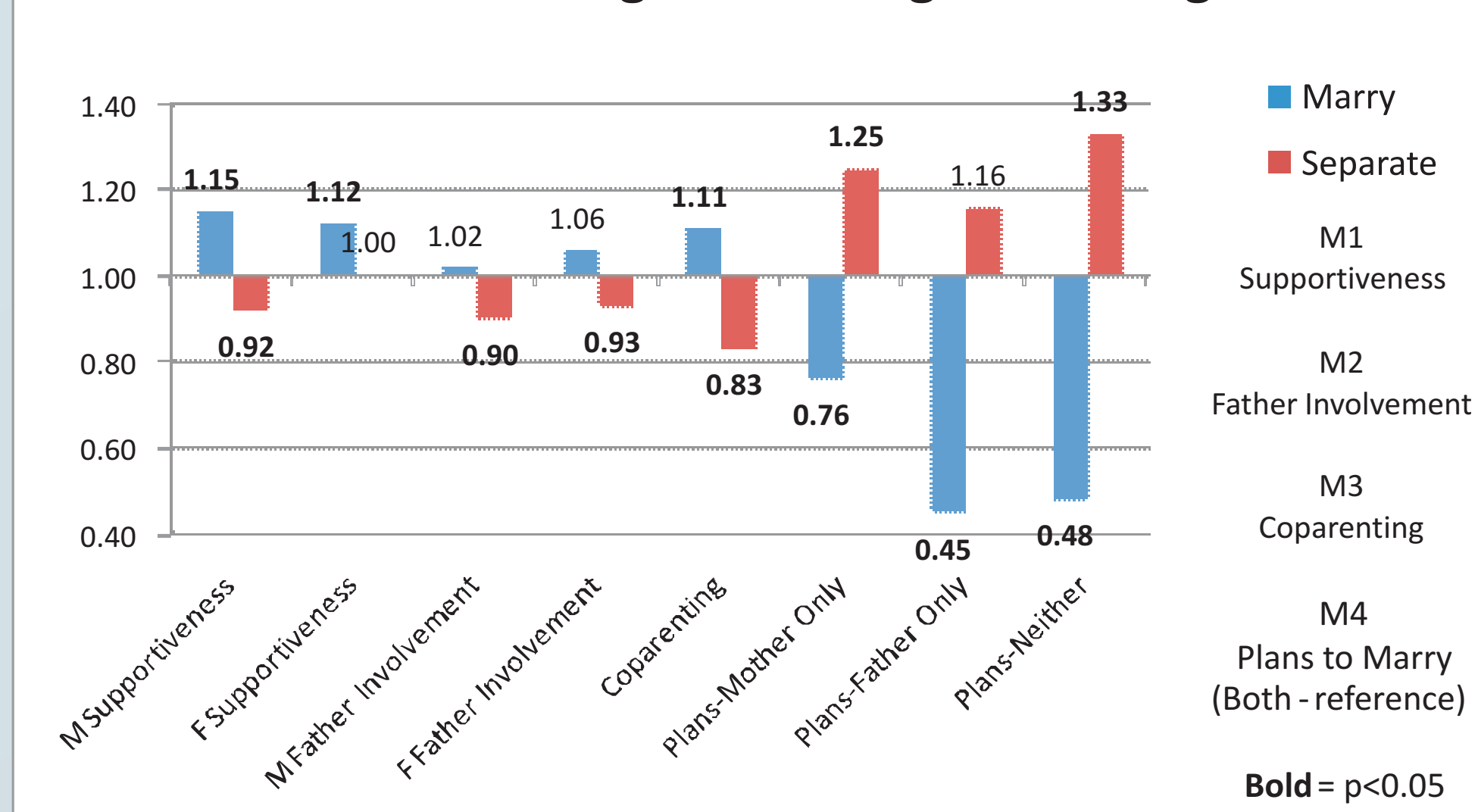
## Coparenting by Union Outcome



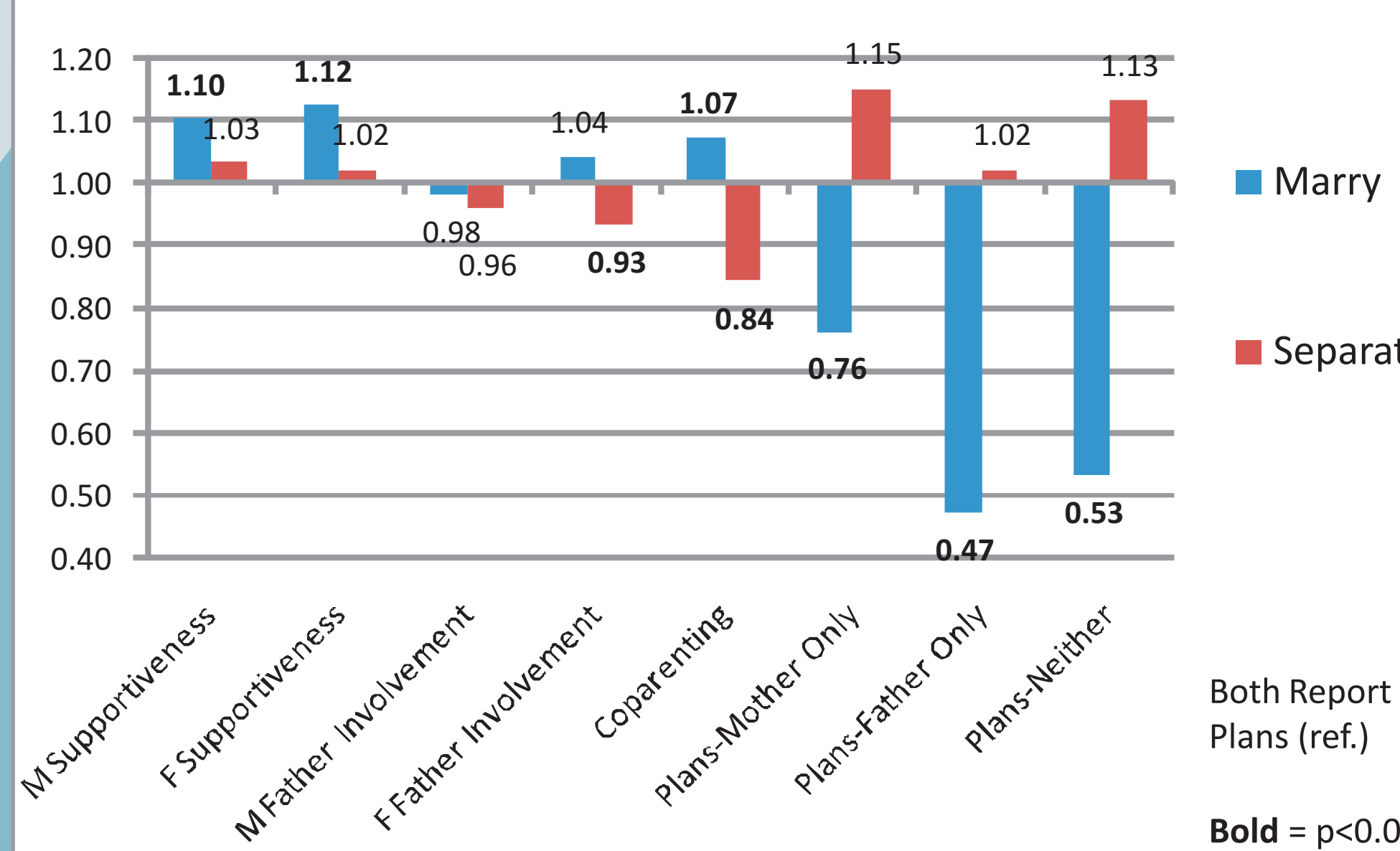
## Plans to Marry at Birth by Union Outcome



## Zero-Order Odds Ratios of the Relative Risk of Transitioning vs Remaining Cohabiting



## Odds Ratios Controlling for These Variables



Event History Analysis of the Relative Risk of Transitioning to Marriage or Separation vs Remaining Cohabiting (N = 1702; Person-Months = 55,123)

Independent Variables	Full Model	
	Marry vs. Remain Cohabiting	Separate vs. Remain Cohabiting
<b>Focal Independent Variables</b>		
Mother Reported Supportiveness	1.04	1.03
Father Reported Supportiveness	1.08 *	1.01
Mother Reported Father Involvement	0.97	0.96
Father Reported Father Involvement	1.04	0.92 **
Coparenting	1.08 **	0.84 ***
Both Report Plans to Marry	1.00	1.00
Mother Only - Plans to Marry	0.87	1.11
Father Only - Plans to Marry	0.52 **	1.07
Neither Plans to Marry	0.53 **	1.17
<b>Time and Duration Variables</b>		
Duration - Beginning of Cohabitation to Birth	1.00	1.00
Year 1	1.00	0.49 ***
Year 2	1.33	0.44 **
Year 3	0.76	0.74 **
Year 4	1.04	0.08 ***
Year 5 or later	1.00	1.00
<b>Father Characteristics</b>		
Father Less than High School	1.02	0.87 ***
Father High School	1.00	1.00
Father Some College	1.10	1.01
Father College	2.37 ***	1.33
Father Age at Birth	1.00	0.97 ***
<b>Mother Characteristics</b>		
Mother Less than High School	0.80	1.25 *
Mother High School	1.00	1.00
Mother Some College	1.15	1.01
Mother College	1.87 **	1.16
<b>Child Characteristics</b>		
Gender of Child	1.05	1.01
Child Low Birth Weight	0.94	1.10
Child Health	1.05	1.18 *
<b>Dyad Characteristics</b>		
<i>Race</i>		
Both White	1.00	1.00
Both Black	0.56 ***	1.15
Both Hispanic	0.99	0.68 **
Both Other Race	1.00	0.99
Interracial Couple	1.00	1.08
<i>Multi-Partner Fertility</i>		
Focal Child Only	1.00	1.00
Other Biological Children Only	1.17	0.96
Mother has Child by another Dad	1.06	1.05
Father has Child by Another Mom	0.89	1.35 **
Both Have Children from Other Parents	1.05	1.40 **
<i>Labor Force Participation</i>		
Both Full-Time	1.00	1.00
Father Only Full-Time	1.21	0.79 **
Mother Only Full-Time	0.83	0.74 *
Neither Full-Time	1.32	0.58 **
Time Difference between M & F Interview	1.00 **	1.00

\*p<.05; \*\*p<.01; \*\*\*p<.001

## Highlighted Results

### Supportiveness

- Supportiveness increases the likelihood of marriage and decreases the likelihood of separation (mothers only)
- Coparenting accounts for the positive association between mothers' supportiveness and the odds of separation
- Time accounts for the positive association between mothers' supportiveness and the odds of marriage
- Fathers' supportiveness slightly increases the odds of marriage, net of all controls

### Father Involvement and Coparenting

- Father involvement and coparenting serve as a buffer against the likelihood of separation
- Coparenting accounts for the negative association between mothers' report of father involvement and separation
- Net of all controls, coparenting still matters for cohabiting parents' transitions out of cohabitation

### Plans to Marry

- Cohabiting parents who both report plans to marry are the most likely to marry
- When only mothers report plans or neither partner reports plans, couples are most likely to separate
- Coparenting increases the likelihood of marriage among all groups and eliminates the differences in the likelihood of separation

## Conclusions

- Coparenting is a driving force behind cohabiting parents' transitions out of cohabitation, particularly to marriage
- Time spent cohabiting before the birth is not associated with union transitions
- Transitions are more likely to occur in the first year after birth
- Characteristics of the father, mother, child, and dyad have little explanatory power with few significant associations with union transition

## Limitations

- A small number of cohabiters at birth were not followed over time (n = 81) or were not followed through T5 (still included, n = 91)
- Relationship quality is only measured by a single dimension (supportiveness)
- Coparenting is only measured from the mother

## Future Directions

- Include a stronger focus by race/ethnicity
- Employ qualitative data to understand fathers' perspectives on coparenting and couples' perceptions of the roles of father involvement and coparenting in their overall relationship quality

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The conference is free of charge, but seating is limited so please register by May 25th.

**To register** contact NCMR at 419.372.4910 or [ncmr@bgsu.edu](mailto:ncmr@bgsu.edu).

*The National Center for Marriage Research, established in 2007 by the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE) in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, aims to improve our understanding of how marriage and family structure affect the health and wellbeing of families, adults, children, and communities, and to inform policy development and programmatic responses.*