

Co-Parenting after a Nonmarital Birth*

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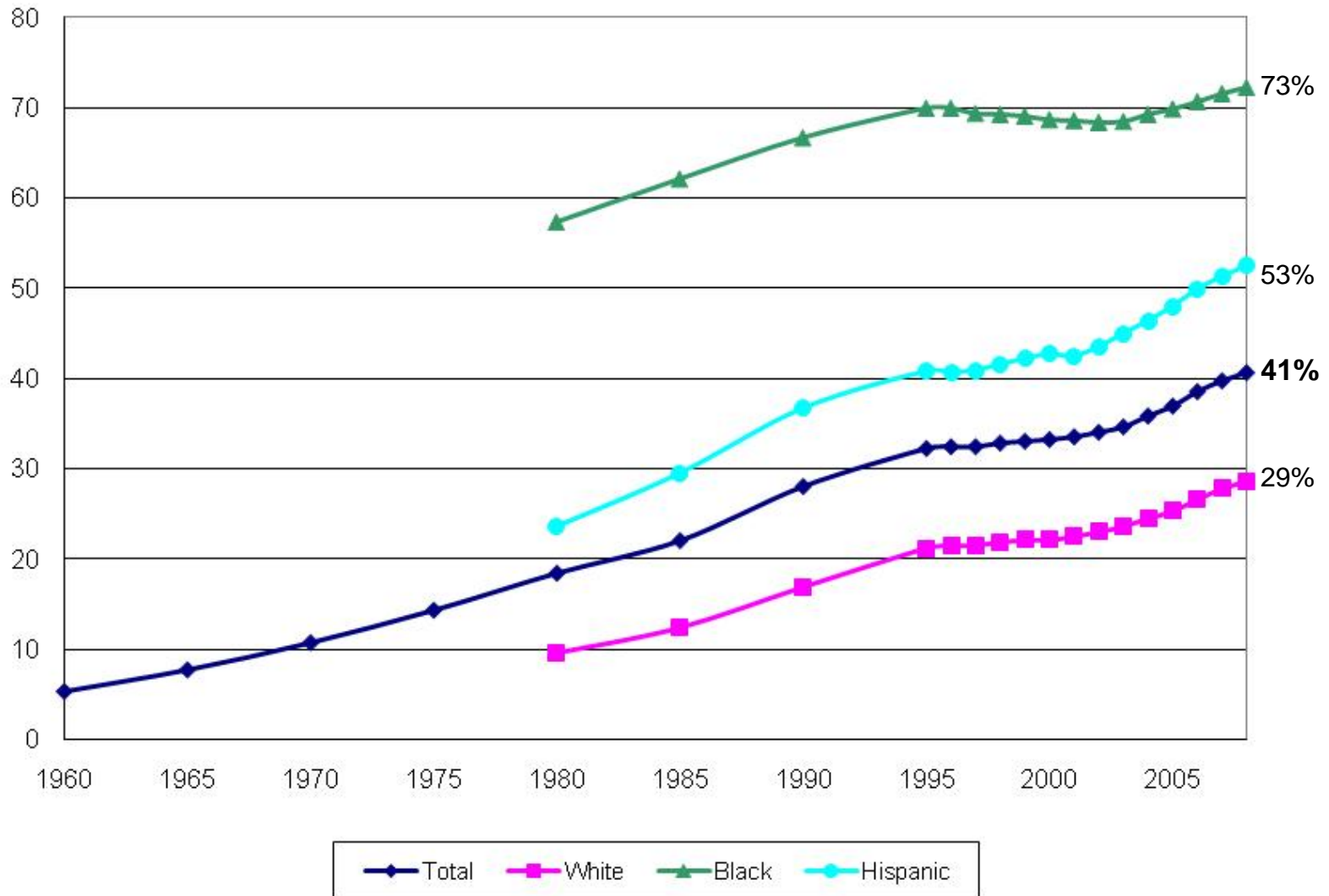
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*With thanks to Robin Högnäs, a collaborator on related work

Background

- Family systems theory emphasizes the interconnectedness of family relationships (Bronfenbrenner 1986)
- Co-parenting:
 - Parents' ability to work together in rearing their common child (McHale 1995)
 - A triadic interaction between parents vis-à-vis their common child (Minuchin 1974) ; distinct from mother-father and parent-child relationships
- Nature of co-parenting differs between parents that live together versus apart
- Early research focused on divorced parents and co-resident (married) parents

Proportion of U.S. Births Outside Marriage



Unmarried Parents' Characteristics at Time of Child's Birth

	<u>Mothers</u>	<u>Fathers</u>
Age (mean)	23.5	27.1
Race/ethnicity (%)		
White	22	18
Black	39	44
Hispanic	36	35
Other	3	4
Education (%)		
Less than HS	45	37
High school	37	39
Some college	16	20
BA+	2	4
Both parents at 15 (%)	40	42

Note: All figures from Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study, weighted by national sampling weights.

Unmarried Parents' Characteristics at Time of Child's Birth (cont.)

	Mothers (%)	Fathers (%)
	<hr/>	<hr/>
Substance problem	3	6
Seriously hurt mother	--	5
Depression	15	12
Ever incarcerated	--	40

Note: All figures from Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study, weighted by national sampling weights.

Relationship (In)stability after Nonmarital Birth

	Birth
	(%)
Married	0
Cohabiting	50
Dating	32
Broken up	18

Note: Fragile Families data, weighted by national sampling weights.

Relationship (In)stability after Nonmarital Birth

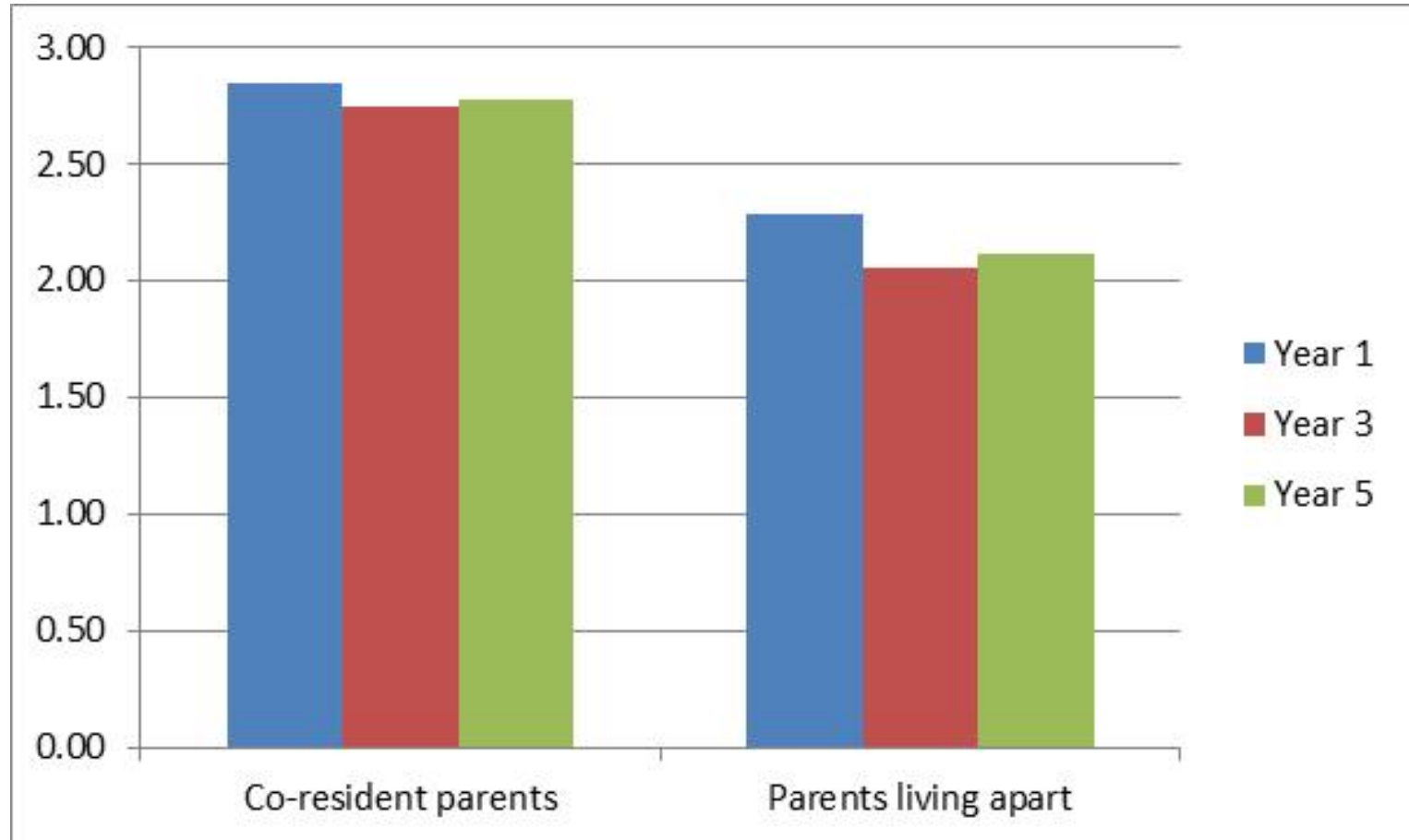
	Birth	1 Year	3 Year	5 Year	9 Year
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
Married	0	10	15	17	18
Cohabiting	50	42	30	19	13
Dating	32	8	3	3	2
Broken up	18	40	52	61	67

Note: Fragile Families data, weighted by national sampling weights;
all columns sum to 100%.

Co-Parenting in the FF Study

- Assessed at years 1, 3, 5 and 9 (if father saw the child since prior survey); same for res. & non-res.
- Mothers' reports about fathers (6 items):
 - 1) When with child, he acts like the father you want for child,
 - 2) You can trust father to take good care of child,
 - 3) He respects the schedules and rules you make for child,
 - 4) He supports you in the way you want to raise child,
 - 5) You can talk with father about problems that come up with raising child, and
 - 6) You can count on father for help when you need someone to look after child for a few hours.
- Responses averaged ($\alpha=.87-.89$), range = 1 (*never/rarely true*) to 3 (*always true*)

Co-Parenting Years 1-5, by Residence Status



Note: Co-parenting is the mean of 6 items, range = 1-3.

Antecedents of Co-Parenting after a Nonmarital Birth (multivariate models)

	<u>Co-Resident</u>	<u>Living Apart</u>
Race/ethnicity (ref=White)		
Black	+	+
Hispanic	+	
Mother depressed	-	-
Father depressed	-	-
Father ever incarcerated	-	-
Child 'difficult' temperament	-	-

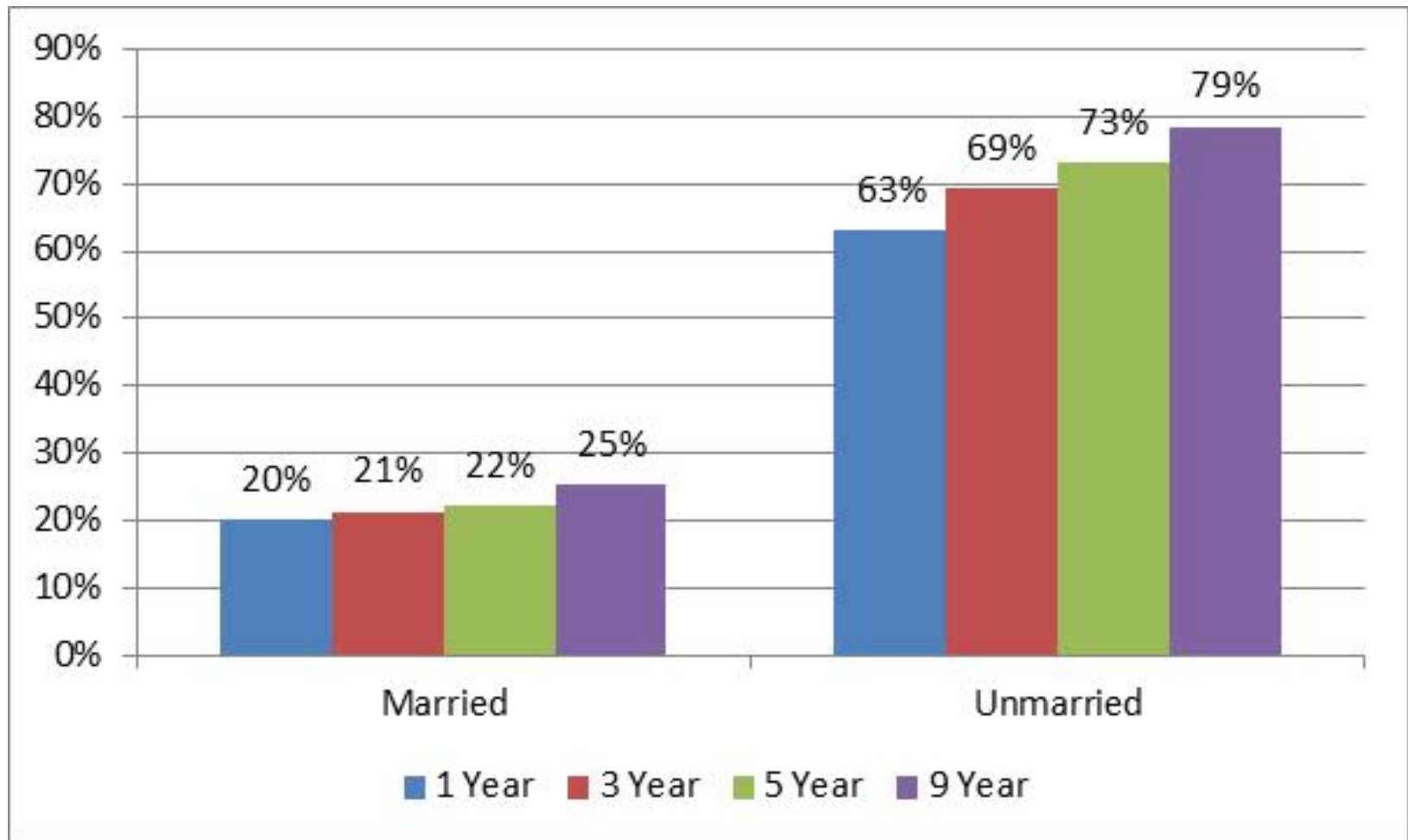
Sources: Bronte-Tinkew & Horowitz 2010; Carlson & Högnäs 2010; Cooper, Beck & Högnäs 2011; Dush, Kotila & Schoppe-Sullivan 2011.

Antecedents of Co-Parenting after a Nonmarital Birth (cont.)

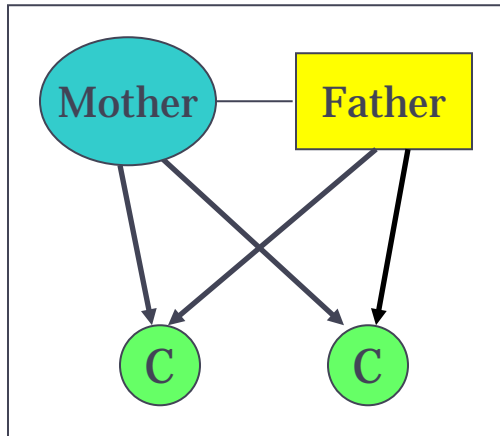
	<u>Co-Resident</u>	<u>Living Apart</u>
Supportiveness in couple rel.	+	+
Father hits/slaps mother	-	
Father child by other partner		-
Mother child by other partner		+
Father has new partner		-
Mother has new partner		-
Number of maternal relationship transitions		-

Sources: Bronte-Tinkew & Horowitz 2010; Carlson & Högnäs 2010; Cooper, Beck & Högnäs 2011; Dush, Kotila & Schoppe-Sullivan 2011.

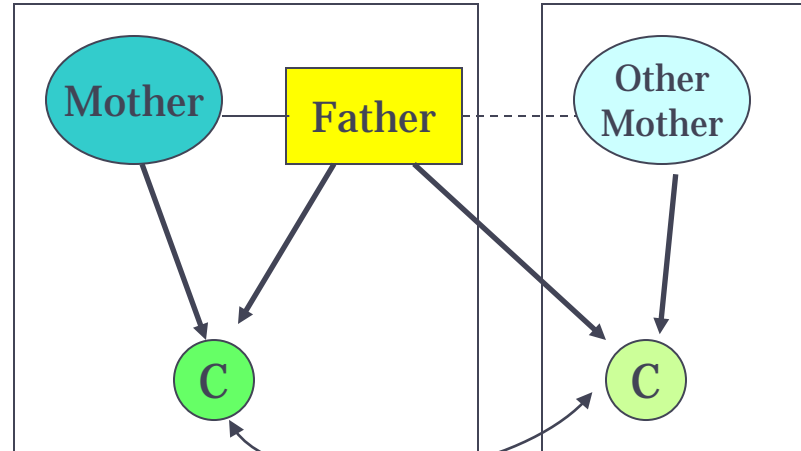
Either/Both Parent(s) Has Child by Another Partner Years 1-9, by Marital Status at Birth



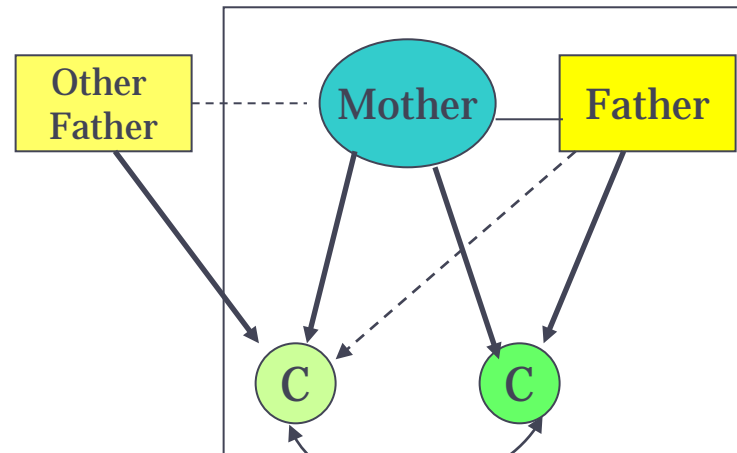
Multi-Partnered Fertility Situations



No MPF
("package deal")



Father has MPF



Mother has MPF

Implications of Positive Co-Parenting

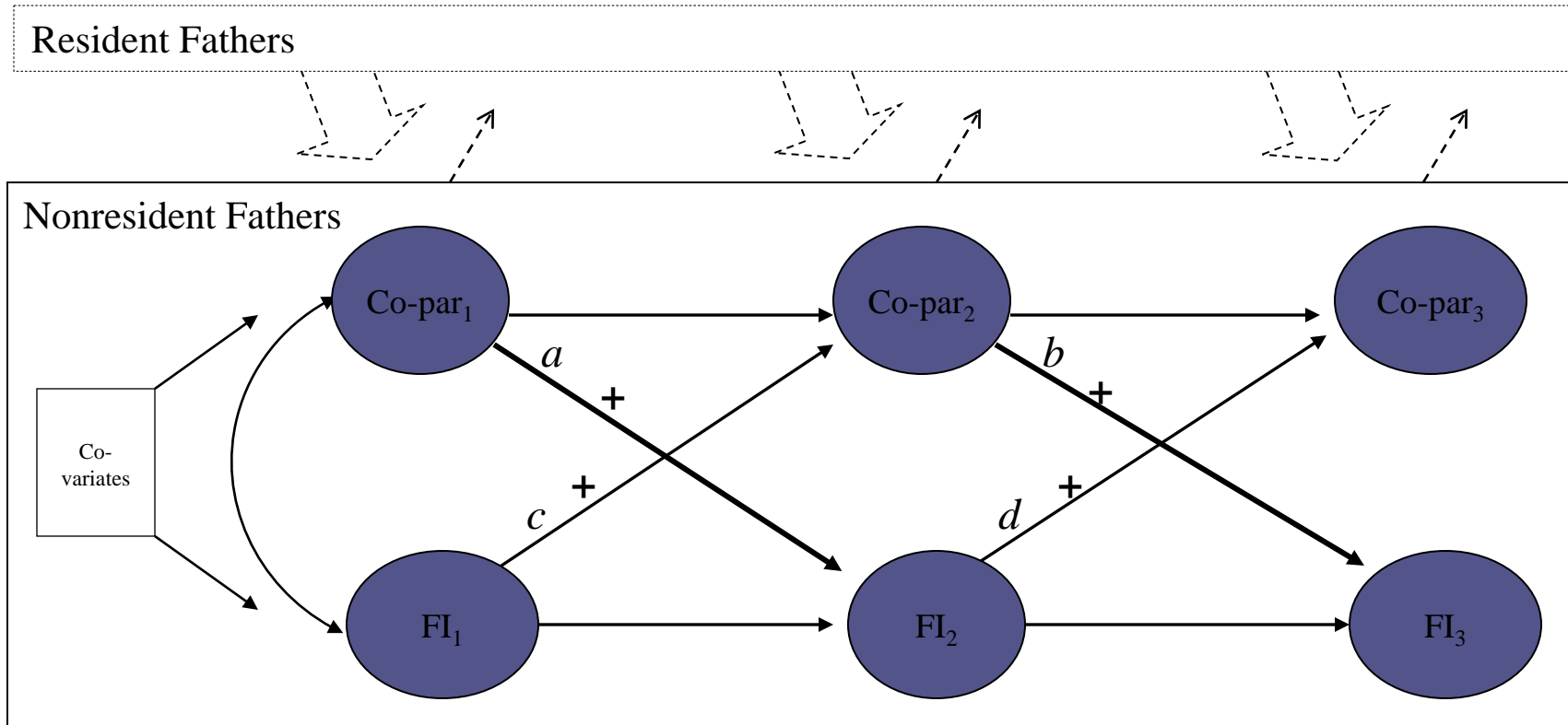
- **Consistent with the divorce literature, positive co-parenting after a nonmarital birth helps keep non-resident fathers involved with their children** (Carlson, McLanahan & Brooks-Gunn 2008) -- **but not vice versa**

Figure 1. Conceptual Model for Residence Status, Co-Parenting and Father Involvement

T1 (Year 1)

T2 (Year 3)

T3 (Year 5)



Note: Co-par = Co-parenting. FI = Father involvement.

Implications of Positive Co-Parenting (cont.)

- **Less evidence about whether more positive co-parenting contributes to the well-being of children born outside of marriage, particularly when parents live apart**

Could Policy Potentially Improve Co-Parenting after a Nonmarital Birth?

- **Building Strong Families results (focused on couple relationships) are not encouraging**
- **Smaller-scale interventions have shown some positive effects (stay tuned for rest of panel), but it's not clear how these could be scaled up**

Topics for Future Research

- Are we measuring the right things? Negative versus positive aspects; allies (Marsiglio); shared values and discipline strategies; same versus different items for resident and non-resident fathers
- What does co-parenting mean to parents themselves? And to kids? (i.e., is it a salient construct in family life?)
- Nature and dynamics of co-parenting in challenging circumstances (MPF, repartnering, incarceration, etc.); may require qual. research

Topics for Future Research (cont.)

- **Individuals managing multiple co-parenting roles—as biological parents and social/step parents to different kids both inside and outside the household**
- **Role of ‘outside’ actors (to bio. mothers and fathers) in encouraging parents’ co-parenting or themselves being co-parents (e.g., grandparents, social/step fathers)**

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