

FATHERING BEHAVIOR: MOTIVATION, CHANGE, AND CONSEQUENCES

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Overview

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- I lay out the critical dimensions of motivation for father involvement in children's lives.
- I examine changes in fathering over time.
- Then I describe two new studies suggesting that father involvement and its impact on children's behavior over time depend upon factors such as his gender role attitudes and the child's level of self-regulation.

Dimensions of fathering behavior – Lamb/Pleck formulation

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- Engagement – time and activities
- Accessibility
- Warmth
- Monitoring/control and rules for behavior
- Responsibility

Factors influencing Involvement

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Four-factor model from Lamb et al. (1985) and Pleck et al. (1985):

- Motivation
- Skills and self-confidence
- Social supports (especially in the co-parental relationship), and
- Absence of institutional barriers (especially in the workplace)

I. Motivation: Two perspectives

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- Evolutionary biology perspective
 - ▣ A higher degree of parental investment increases the chance of the child growing up to be a successful adult/reproduce.
 - ▣ Investment in biological children is most productive but men also invest in nonbiological children; depends on presence of biological children elsewhere
 - ▣ Mating or relationship investment can lead to further childbearing and thus further men's goals
 - ▣ Father family structure – the biological relationship to child and marital status with mother is critical.

Motivation perspectives, cont.

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- Psychosocial perspective
 - ▣ Conceptualized as attitudes towards father involvement
 - beliefs/expectations about what fathers as a group are like and should do
 - ▣ Also conceptualized in other research as paternal identity
 - beliefs about what I as an individual father am like and should do

Skills and Self-confidence

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- Own father's fathering (intergenerational transmission)
- Child age, gender
- Years child lived with father (for stepfathers)

Proxy variables:

- Father age, education, number of children
- Time trends

Social Supports

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- Relationship with child's mother – conflict, coparenting
- Child's mother's level of involvement
- Marital status of child at birth
- Current marital status
- Program supports

Proxy variables:

- Father earnings
- Time trends

Institutional barriers/supports

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- Work hours
- Incarceration, military service
- Paternity, child support policies
- Presence of biological child in another household

Proxy variables:

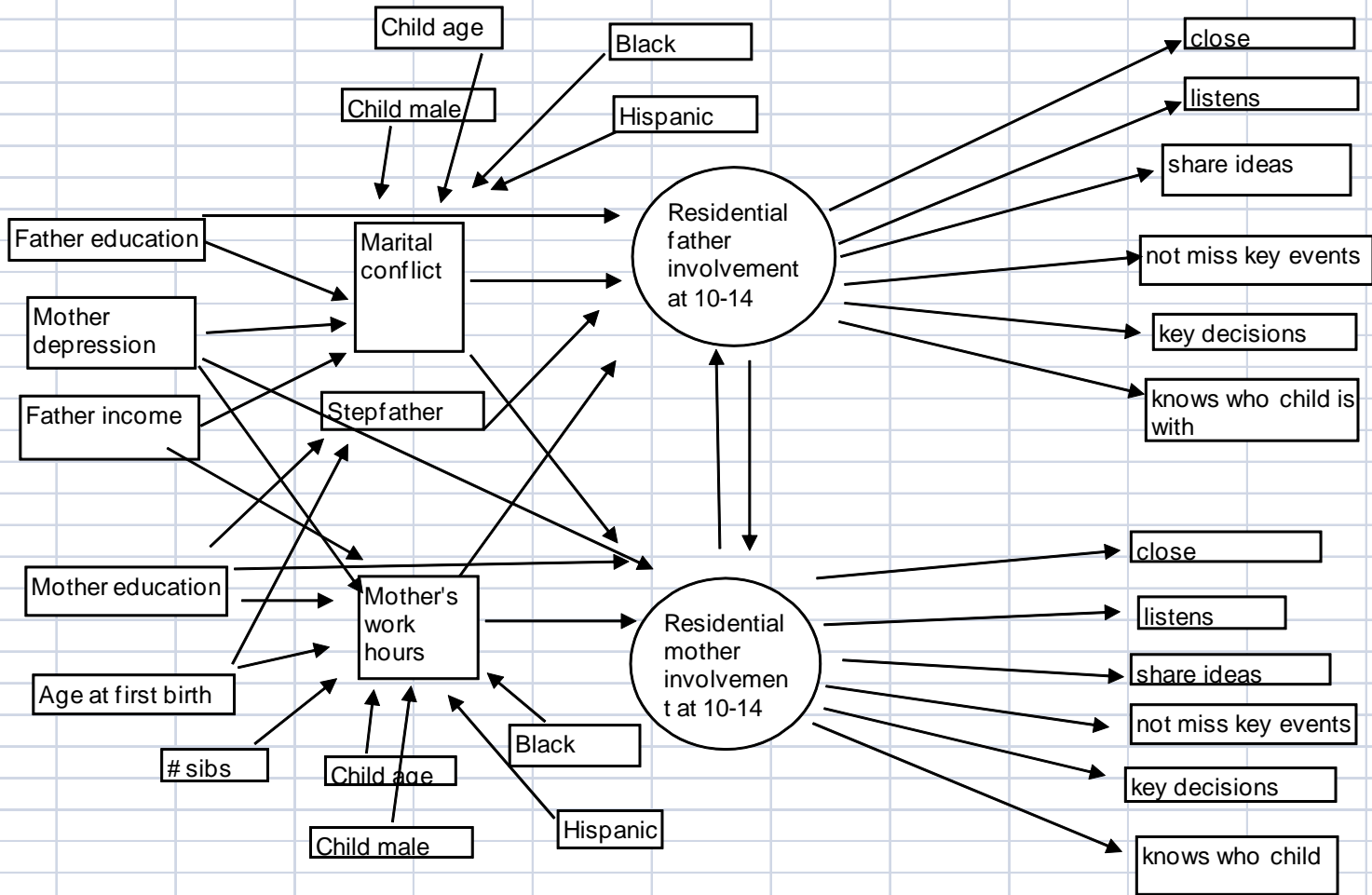
- Father earnings
- Race/ethnicity
- Time trends

Selectivity

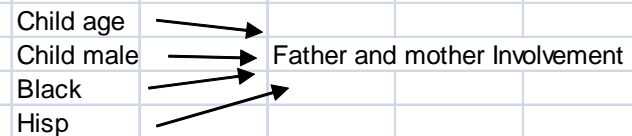
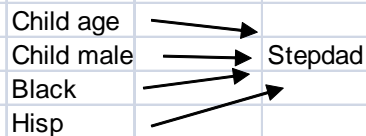
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- Type of family of origin and its stability influence parenting, which influences route of young man out of the home and into fatherhood (Hofferth & Goldscheider 2010).
- How men become fathers in the first place influences the type of father they become (Hofferth 2006)

Figure 1: Theoretical Model of Father Involvement



Every measured (box) and latent (circle) variable has an associated error term; not all covariances are shown in this diagram

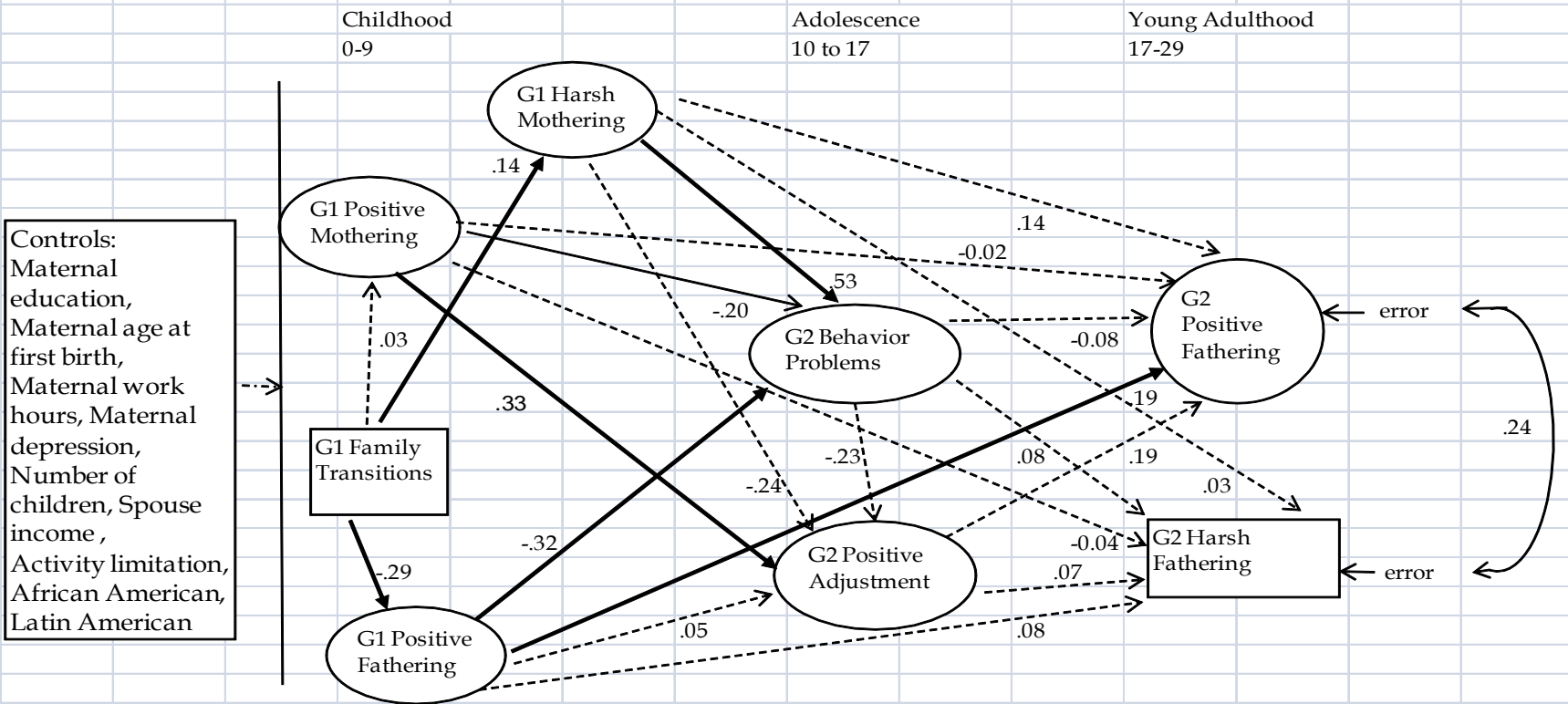


Which arrow predominates?

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- Most variables affect mother involvement, which affects father involvement.
- Father involvement does not reciprocally affect mother involvement in this model

Figure 2: Full Intergenerational Transmission Structural Model^a



^aStandardized coefficients

CFI = .874

RMSEA = .034 (.024-.042)

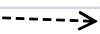
N = 409



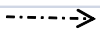
Significant at $p < .05$



Significant at $p < .10$



Not statistically significant



Associations of controls with variables in structural model are shown in Table 4

Factors influencing Residential Father Involvement: summary

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- Motivation matters to some degree
 - Stepfathers are less engaged in play and teaching than biological fathers, but this does not hold across children in the same family
 - Biological fathers not resident with the child's mother (single or cohab father) do more teaching
 - Men with a more positive attitude towards father involvement are more engaged, and this holds in fixed effects models
- Skills matter
 - Fathers more involved with younger and male children
 - Fathers who grew up with an involved father are more involved with their own children
 - More educated men are more involved
- Social support matters
 - Men with a positive relationship with child's mother are more involved
 - The greater the mother involvement, the greater the involvement of the father
- Number of outside barriers matters
 - Men who do not support a child in another household are more engaged
 - Fewer work hours are associated with more engagement
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Caution in arguing that effects of family types on child outcomes are causal

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- Men in different family types are different in ways that influence parenting
- If you examine within family types, little difference in fathering of biological and step children. Children of single fathers get the most involvement, especially if he has no partner.
- An interesting question would be whether fathering second family children differs from fathering of first family children.

Caution: Information source

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- Father
- Mother
- Other (child)
- If all sources are the same, potential same source bias
- Be sure to make clear whether father or child perspective – men may have different biological/social relationships with different children in the same family

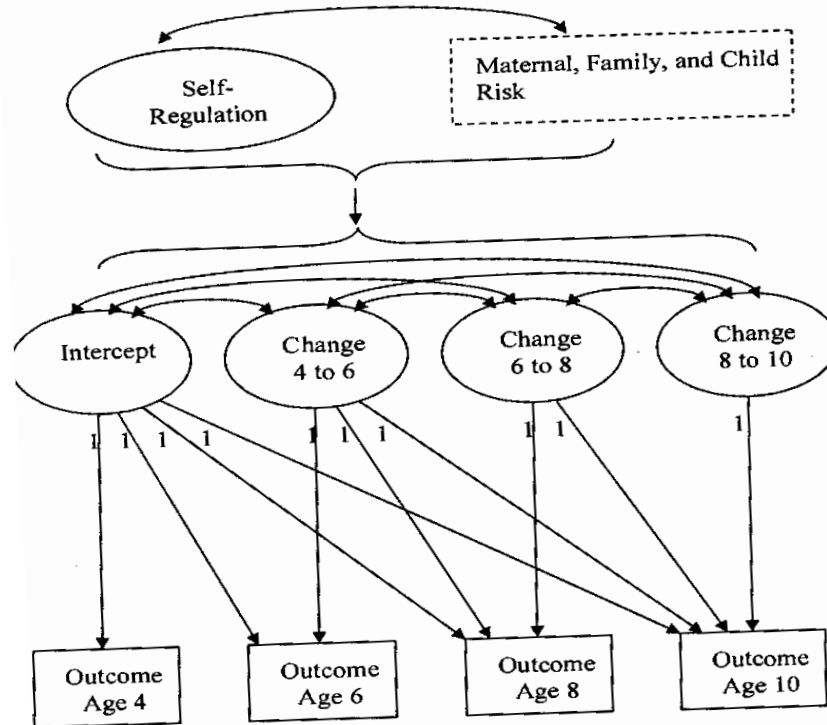
II. The Context of Father Contribution

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- Under what conditions does father presence matter more?
 - ▣ Examined association between family risk factors and change in externalizing child behavior problems over time in the full set of children of the NLSY mothers from age 4 to age 10.
 - ▣ Ability to self-regulate was the most important variable influencing children's behavior over time. We split by self-regulation. Examined differences in the impact of father presence by degree to which the child was self-regulated (high vs. low)

Latent difference growth model

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Trajectories of Behavior Problems

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- We examined both the level of external behavioral problems in kindergarten and change up to age 10, by level of self-regulation.
- Biological father residence at 4 is associated with decline in children's behavioral problems from ages 4 to 6 for all children.
- This coefficient differed across self-regulation groups according to likelihood ratio chi-square tests. That is, it was only significant for those who were less well self-regulated. Biological father presence was not related to a reduction in behavioral problems for children who were more self-regulated.

What about Stepfathers?

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- Children who lived with a stepparent at age 8 had a significantly lower risk of increasing behavioral problems between ages 8 and 10 than children who did not live with a stepparent (and were not living with a biological father). This coefficient was statistically significant only for those who were less well-regulated.
- Tests show that father presence (whether father or stepfather) was more strongly associated with reduced behavioral problems for less self-regulated children than for more self-regulated children.

Changes in Fathering over Time

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- Sandberg & Hofferth (2001) and Sayer et al. (2004) showed increased father involvement with children over time.
- Recent evidence for increase in amount of time fathers spend teaching their children, about 30 minutes of increased caregiving and 20 minutes of teaching per week, on average (Hofferth, Pleck, Goldscheider et al. 2010)
- Also evidence for more positive attitudes towards fathering over time (Hofferth, Pleck, Goldscheider et al. 2010)
- Changes in attitudes are associated with changes in fathering behavior over time – increased warmth and control. (Hofferth, Pleck, Goldscheider et al. 2010)

Change in Men's Employment and Fathering

(Hofferth & Goldscheider 2010)

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- As their own work hours decline do men spend more time caring for children?
- As wives increase work hours will men spend more time caring for children?
 - Fathers will increase time caring for children as wives' work hours increase as long as they themselves are working.
 - When roles are nontraditional, the amount of involvement of the father will depend upon how traditional are his gender role attitudes. More involvement by men with traditional attitudes.

Conclusions and Implications

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- Crucial to keep straight the important dimensions of fathering, from the point of view of the child at least:
 - ▣ Biology, partner presence, partner relationship
 - ▣ We know that father involvement varies by these categories and that men are selected into these categories.
 - ▣ Need to consider whether comparing fathering of children within or across households. Within families differences tend to disappear.

Policy Perspectives

- Increased parental leave or work flexibility may help men do more parenting, but dependent upon men's gender role attitudes. Working less than their partners is a difficult status for men.
- Child support enforcement affects two families.
- Men have become more involved over time. This should result in sons becoming more involved, in spite of the fact that they are more likely to not live with their child
- New Yorker cover – Mother's Day – has children in the park with their fathers.

Citations

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