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Race/Ethnic Differences in Nonresident Fathers' Involvement after a Nonmarital Birth

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Abstract

Objectives—This article examines how the levels of nonresidential father involvement (over child ages 1 to 9) differ by race/ethnicity (comparing White, Black and Hispanic fathers), and then considers how individual and couple characteristics may 'account for' any observed differences.

Method—Data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study (N = 2,447) and random effects models were used to examine how nonresidential father involvement (with respect to time, engagement, shared responsibility, and coparenting with mothers) is differentiated by race and ethnicity.

Results—Overall, Black nonresident fathers were significantly more likely to spend time and engage in activities with their children as compared to Hispanic fathers—but not White fathers. Black fathers also shared responsibilities more frequently and displayed more effective coparenting than Hispanic and White fathers.

Conclusions—Fathers' involvement with children is shown to differ across major race/ethnic groups, with implications for children as well as for future research and public policy.

Keywords

Father Involvement; nonresident fathers; unmarried parents; race/ethnicity; Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study

Since the 1960s, the proportion of U.S. births that occur outside of marriage has risen dramatically. In 2015, fully 40% of all births in the U.S. were nonmarital, with much higher fractions among major race/ethnic minority groups—72% for Blacks and 54% for Hispanics (Hamilton, Martin and Osterman 2016). Although many nonmarital births occur within a

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committed relationship, unmarried couples are likely to break up soon after a baby's birth; by age 5, nearly two-thirds of children born to unmarried parents will be living away from their biological father (McLanahan 2011). The term "fragile families" is often used to describe unmarried parents and their children to highlight the greater risk of relationship dissolution and living in poverty than is generally found among married parents and their children. Given the deleterious outcomes associated with father absence (McLanahan and Sandefur 1994, McLanahan, Tach and Schneider 2013), researchers have become increasingly interested in studying factors that will encourage father involvement among these vulnerable populations.

There are important race/ethnic differences in family patterns. In addition to being more likely to have births outside of marriage, Blacks are less likely to maintain stable cohabiting unions, especially compared to Whites (Cooper et al. 2015). At the same time, there is some evidence that once nonresident, Black fathers are actually more likely to remain involved with their children (Edin, Tach and Mincy 2009). Much less is known about other minority groups, especially Hispanics (Landale and Oropesa 2001). This topic is also relevant for public policy, as policy efforts over many decades have endeavored to keep families together and encourage paternal involvement by nonresident fathers. One recent program was the Building Strong Families (BSF) project launched in 2002, which focused on providing relationship skills training to improve relationship quality, enhance union stability, and encourage marriage among unmarried parents with children. Unfortunately, the BSF project was found to be largely unsuccessful (Wood et al. 2014), and more recent policy efforts have focused on increasing 'responsible fatherhood' (HHS 2015).

Given the much higher likelihood that children of minority fathers will be born outside of marriage and live away from their fathers by a young age, it is useful to understand key factors that may differentiate paternal involvement across race/ethnic groups and might be targets of intervention. This paper explores how the levels of nonresidential father involvement (over child ages 1 to 9) differ by race/ethnicity (comparing White, Black and Hispanic fathers) and then considers how individual and couple characteristics may 'account for' any observed differences. We extend previous research by using a national longitudinal sample of unmarried fathers, by focusing on a recent birth cohort of children in large U.S. cities, and by examining multiple dimensions of father involvement.

Background

Studies about father involvement have often focused on three main aspects of involvement including accessibility (time), engagement, and responsibility (Lamb 2004). Accessibility reflects the father's availability to see or talk to the child, often measured by the frequency of time spent with the child. Engagement focuses on the interactions fathers have with children in particular activities such as playing, reading, and providing instruction. Responsibility relates to how often fathers coordinate (with mothers) arrangements necessary for the child's care, such as taking the child to doctors' appointments or daycare. Also, when biological parents live apart, how well mothers and fathers relate to one another regarding parenting—often called 'coparenting'—is important, since such cooperation facilitates nonresident fathers' seeing the child (who typically lives with the mother)

(McHale and Lindahl 2011). Especially for nonresident fathers (who by definition are not sharing a household—and hence the household division of labor—with mothers), shared responsibility may be closer in concept to coparenting than for resident fathers; we thus focus on shared responsibility and coparenting as two aspects of mother-father interaction vis-à-vis their common child.

With respect to race/ethnic differences in nonresident fathers' involvement with children, we highlight both economic and cultural factors:

Economic factors

Employment and economic stability have been identified as key predictors of father involvement, because 'breadwinning' remains an important aspect of the father role (Christiansen and Palkovitz 2001). Black men face a particularly hostile job market and diminished economic opportunities, compared to other groups (Mincy 2006). This is because of low levels of education (Sum, Khatiwada and Palma 2010), a lack of access to jobs (Wilson 2003), a high prevalence of incarceration (Sum et al. 2009), and discrimination due to both race and incarceration history (Pager 2003). Hispanics are also less educated and more likely to be unemployed than non-Hispanic Whites (Therrien and Ramirez 2001). The lower socioeconomic status of minority groups reduces the 'opportunity cost' of nonmarital childbearing (Willis 1999), contributing to its higher prevalence, and among unmarried parents, Whites tend to be socioeconomically slightly better off (Hummer and Hamilton 2010).

Cultural factors

Racial variation in paternal involvement may also arise from differences in attitudes, values, and social mores that affect how fathers relate to children and coparent with mothers. Although Blacks and Whites tend to share generally similar views of marriage (Harknett and McLanahan 2004), Blacks are much more accepting of out-of-wedlock childbearing than Whites (Cherlin et al. 2008). More generally, the family roles of Black men may be less circumscribed by the 'package deal' that typically links the partner and paternal roles of White (and especially higher-SES) men (Tach, Mincy and Edin 2010). Blacks often view childrearing as a responsibility that should be shared with extended kin (grandmothers, aunts, etc.) (Gerstel 2011). Even at the same level of economic resources, Black fathers may view financial provision as a less important aspect of fathering as compared to spending time with children or providing emotional support (Mincy and Nepomnyaschy 2005). Hispanic families also have a longstanding tradition of strong family ties that emphasize familism and interdependence over individualism (Baca Zinn and Pok 2002). Resident Hispanic fathers have been found to be highly involved with their children and to share childrearing responsibilities with their partners at least as often as White fathers (Coltrane, Parke and Adams 2004). Much less is known about nonresident Hispanic fathers especially in comparison to other racial groups, further demonstrating the need for the present work.

Empirical Evidence

Earlier studies of nonresident fathers focused on divorced fathers (who had been resident at one time) or a mixture of both divorced and never-married fathers (Mott 1990; Seltzer and Bianchi 1988). Some studies found nonresident minority fathers to be *less* engaged or similarly engaged in childrearing as White fathers (King, Harris and Heard 2004, Seltzer and Bianchi 1988), while others found that nonresident Black and Hispanic fathers are *more* involved with their children than White fathers (Cabrera et al. 2008, Mott 1990, Swisher and Waller 2008). More recent studies focused specifically on unmarried fathers demonstrated that many Black fathers remain involved after a nonmarital birth (Cabrera et al. 2008, Edin, Tach and Mincy 2009, Mincy and Pouncy 2007). Although father involvement after a nonmarital birth declines steeply for all race/ethnic groups, Black fathers experience the least drastic decline as compared to White and Hispanic fathers (Edin, Tach and Mincy 2009, Tach, Mincy and Edin 2010). Even in the case of incarceration which diminishes involvement overall (Geller 2013), minority fathers maintained contact with their children more often than White fathers (Swisher and Waller 2008). Although there is limited research on racial differences in coparenting, there is some evidence that Black (Cooper et al. 2015) and Hispanic (Carlson and Högnäs 2011) mothers reported more positive coparenting with nonresident fathers than White mothers.

Drawing on the extant literature, we expect to find race/ethnic differences in nonresident father involvement, with Black fathers demonstrating more involvement than both White and Hispanic fathers on both father-child involvement and coparenting measures. We also expect that some of the individual and couple characteristics that reflect economic and cultural factors will help ‘explain’ any race/ethnic differences observed.

Data

We use data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study, a nationally-representative birth-cohort study of 4,896 children born in large (population 200,000+) U.S. cities between 1998 and 2000. The study is based on a stratified, multi-stage probability sample, with an oversample of children born to unmarried parents (3,709 unmarried, 1,187 married) (Reichman et al. 2001). Baseline in-person interviews with mothers and fathers were conducted shortly after the child’s birth—mothers in the hospital, fathers in the hospital or elsewhere. Follow-up interviews with both parents were conducted when the child was about 1, 3, 5, and 9 years old. Response rates among eligible parents at baseline were 87% for unmarried mothers and 75% for unmarried fathers. The 1-, 3- and 5-year follow-up interviews were completed by 90%, 88%, and 87%, of eligible mothers, respectively and 71%, 69%, and 67%, of eligible fathers (where eligibility is a completed baseline mother interview). At the 9-year survey, overall (i.e., regardless of marital status at birth), 76% of eligible mothers and 59% of eligible fathers completed interviews. Our analyses use information from all survey waves to focus on fathering behaviors among ever-nonresident fathers after a nonmarital birth from the early to middle childhood years.

Sample

To maximize the number of observations (since fathers were less likely to be interviewed), we used mothers' reports of father involvement. Also, we conduct a robustness check using father-reported measures where available, and our results are substantively similar (results not shown but summarized in the Results section). We limited our sample to unmarried births (n = 3,709). Observations were excluded when the mother reported that the father was unknown (n = 26) or the father lived with the child over all of the 1-, 3-, 5-, and 9-year survey waves (n = 836). We used only cases where the child lived with his or her mother, and we had valid information about the fathers' residence (268 additional cases dropped). We also excluded respondents not identifying as White, Black, or Hispanic because of inadequate sample size of 'other' race (n = 129).

Our final analytic sample included 2,447 ever-nonresident fathers contributing 6,736 person-year observations across survey years 1, 3, 5 and 9. We used multiple imputation to impute missing covariates. The imputation model included race/ethnicity, variables related to our independent and dependent variables of interest, and the likelihood of being missing. Our final analyses included only complete cases on race/ethnicity and the dependent variables.

Variables

Fathers' Involvement

We used five measures of father involvement from the 1-, 3-, 5-, and 9-year surveys that reflect four aspects of father involvement (accessibility [time], engagement, shared responsibility, and coparenting). As noted above, we used mothers' reports of fathers' involvement. Our first measure is the *number of days* the nonresident father saw the focal child in the past month, ranging from 0 to 30. Our second measure is how often fathers *spent one or more hours* with the child in the past month, ranging from 1 = *never* to 5 = *every day*. The third measure (reported if the father saw the child more than once in the past month) reflects how often the father *engaged in activities* with the child in the past week, reflecting the mean number of days in the past week (0 to 7) that the father engaged in activities with the child (e.g., singing, reading stories, playing with toys—see Table 1 for full list of items) (α = .92–.93 over years 1–5). We assigned to 0 days the cases where the father had not seen the child more than once in the past month (and hence had no report on engagement). The engagement items were updated at each interview wave, so we included all available items at each interview. At the 9-year interview, the response scale changed to reflect activities in the past month (ranging from 1 = *never* to 5 = *every day*); we assigned the 1–5 scores to 0–7 days to yield a range of variation similar to those at prior waves (α = .92). We then standardized the average scores at each wave to mean 0 and standard deviation 1, similar to prior research with these data (McClain and DeMaris 2013). The fourth measure is how often fathers *shared responsibilities with mothers* as identified by three items—looking after the child, running errands for mother, and taking the child to places such as to daycare or the doctor (α =.90–.91 over years 1–9); responses ranged from 1 = *never* to 4 = *often*. The fifth measure, *coparenting*, was constructed from mothers' responses to six items: 1) "when father is with child he acts like the father you want for the child," 2) "you can trust the father to take good care of the child," 3) "father respects the rules you make for the child," 4)

"father supports the way you raise the child," 5) "you and father can talk about the problems that come up with raising the child," and 6) "and you can count on father for help when you need someone to look after child for a few hours;" responses ranged from 1 = *never* to 3 = *always* (α = .86 – .89 over years 1–9).

Controls

We included a range of control variables in order to 'account for' differences in father involvement potentially observed across race/ethnic groups. These variables measured demographic and social/psychological characteristics about fathers (and mothers), as well as child gender. We included a dummy variable for whether or not the parents were a mixed-race couple, an indicator of whether the father was born outside the U.S., fathers' and mothers' age at the birth of the child (in years), and variables for whether the father or mother each reported living with both parents at age 15. Socioeconomic characteristics included fathers' education (less than high school, high school degree, some college, and college degree or more) and a dummy variable for whether the father had more education than the mother.

Social/psychological characteristics (measured at baseline unless otherwise indicated) included a measure of fathers' self-reported attitudes toward fathering based on three items, with responses ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 4 = *strongly agree*: 1) "Being a father and raising children is one of the most fulfilling experiences a man can have," 2) "I want people to know that I have a new child," and 3) "Not being a part of my child's life would be one of the worst things that could happen to me" (α = .73). Fathers' and mothers' gender role attitudes were assessed with two items (using the same 1–4 scale as above): 1) "The important decisions in the family should be made by the man of the house," and 2) "It is much better for everyone if the man earns the main living and the woman take cares of the home and family" (α = .48 for fathers and 56 for mothers). How often fathers attended religious services was reported from 1 = *never* to 5 = *once a week or more*. Fathers' impulsivity was measured at year 1 using the Dickman scale of dysfunctional impulsivity (Dickman 1990) with five items (reverse-coded as necessary) with response choices from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 4 = *strongly agree*: 1) "Often, I don't spend enough time thinking over a situation before I act," 2) "I often say and do things without considering the consequences," 3) "I often get into trouble because I don't think before I act," 4) "Many times, the plans I make don't work out because I haven't gone over them carefully enough in advance," and 5) "I often make up my mind without taking the time to consider the situation from all angles" (α=.80). We also control for whether the father has a substance abuse problem based on mothers' response to: "Does (baby's father) have problems such as keeping a job or getting along with family and friends because of alcohol or drug use." Mothers also report on their own substance problems ("In the past year, has drinking or using drugs ever interfered with your work on a job or with your personal relationships?"). Physical partner violence toward the mother reflects whether the mother reported at the 1-year survey that she was ever "seriously hurt" by the father at some point before the baby's birth.

The parents' relationship status characteristics included mothers' report of fathers' supportiveness at the baseline interview measured by four items assessing how often the father was 1) "Fair and willing to compromise when you had a disagreement," 2) "Expressed affection or love for you," 3) "Insulted or criticized you or your ideas (coding reversed)," and 4) "Encouraged or helped you to do things that were important to you." Responses ranged from 1 = *never* to 3 = *often* (α = .67). A series of dummy variables denote mothers' and fathers' relationship status at baseline (mothers' report) – friends or no relationship (reference), visiting (romantically involved but living apart), or cohabiting. We control for overall relationship quality based on mothers' report about the relationship with the father at baseline, ranging from 1 = *excellent* to 5 = *poor*. We also control for whether the child is a boy.

Finally, in order to adjust for changes in circumstances over time (which may partially explain variation in paternal involvement), we included several time-varying variables: fathers' hours worked in the previous week, fathers' annual earnings (2008 dollars), whether the father provided any financial support to the child (informally or via the formal child support enforcement system), whether the father was currently in prison or jail (fathers' and mothers' reports), fathers' and mothers' self-reported health (1 = *poor* to 5 = *excellent*), whether the father or mother was depressed (via the Composite International Diagnostic Interview Short Form) (Kessler et al. 1998), the number of biological children the focal parents have together, whether the father has children with another partner, whether the grandmother lived with the focal child, whether the father has a new partner or the mother has a new partner (social father to the child), and number of months since the relationship with the mother ended.

Method

We first summarize means on the father involvement measures by race/ethnicity across the survey waves. Then, we use random effects models to examine how nonresidential father involvement with respect to time, engagement, shared responsibility, and coparenting with mothers is differentiated by race and ethnicity. We pool data from the 1-, 3-, 5-, and 9-year surveys. The primary assumption in random effects models is that unobserved differences between individuals are random, and as a result, the error term is uncorrelated with the independent variables. Random effects estimates essentially reflect an average of between-individual and within-individual variation. In Model 1, we assess bivariate differences in paternal involvement by race/ethnicity; in Model 2, we include all covariates to evaluate whether any race/ethnic differences persist.

Table 2 provides descriptive information about our primary analytic sample of nonresident fathers after a nonmarital birth, by race and ethnicity (N = 2,447). The average unmarried father was in his mid-20s when his baby was born and is of minority race/ethnicity (63% non-Hispanic Black, and 31% Hispanic). White and Hispanic fathers were more likely than Black fathers to report living with both parents at age 15. Fathers overall reported working about 33 hours in the previous week and earning nearly $18,213 (2008 dollars) from all jobs in the past year; White and Hispanic fathers reported working significantly more hours than Black fathers, and White fathers' annual earnings exceeded those of both Black and

Hispanic fathers. The majority of fathers also reported providing financial support to their child. Most fathers held positive attitudes toward being a father but attended church infrequently. Most fathers were in good health, and only a small fraction of mothers reported that the father had a substance problem or was physically violent. Yet, 10% of fathers were currently incarcerated. Fully 81% of parents were romantically involved at the time of the birth. On average, fathers had about 1.50 children with the biological mother (including the focal child), and about 51% had at least one child by another mother (much lower for Whites). Finally, 51% of the focal children were boys.

Results

Descriptive Results

Table 3 shows the levels of nonresident father involvement 1, 3, 5 and 9 years after a nonmarital birth by race/ethnicity. There are notable differences at the 1-year interview, especially between Black and other racial/ethnic groups for whom statistically significant differences were observed on all five involvement measures: Black nonresident fathers saw their children more days per month, spent 1+ hours with the child more frequently, engaged more frequently in father-child activities, showed higher shared responsibility, and demonstrated better coparenting with mothers than their White and Hispanic counterparts. Additionally, Hispanic nonresident fathers were significantly different from Whites (higher) with regard to shared responsibility and coparenting.

Over time, however, the difference in father involvement between Black and White fathers diminished as it relates to measures of father-child interaction, but significant differences persist with regards to shared responsibilities and coparenting. On the other hand, the difference between Black and Hispanic fathers grew, largely due to a greater drop-off in involvement levels among Hispanics. At the 9-year interview, Black and White fathers each saw their children about six days in the past month, while Hispanic fathers saw their children about three days in the past month; also Hispanic fathers spent 1+ hours in the past month less frequently than either Black or White fathers. Hispanic fathers also had significantly lower coparenting than Black fathers (but not White fathers) at 9 years.

The changes in mean involvement levels over time may reflect real changes in the frequency of parenting behaviors by race or changes in the sample composition, as an increasing number of couples broke up and new (previously-resident) fathers became nonresident. By child age 1, approximately 50%, 34%, and 39% of Black, White, and Hispanic fathers, respectively, lived away from the focal child. By child age 9, these figures increased to 78%, 57% and 54% for Black, White, and Hispanic fathers, respectively. In results not shown, among fathers who were nonresident across *all* waves (i.e., holding constant the sample composition), there were similar initial differences between Blacks and other racial/ethnic groups and significant differences persist with respect to engagement in father-child activities and coparenting.

Multivariate Results

We begin by discussing our results by racial and ethnicity in our three measures pertaining to father-child interaction (Table 4) and next in our two measures that reflect mother-father interaction vis-à-vis their common child (Table 5).

Our bivariate results (Model 1) suggest that across all survey waves, Hispanic fathers spent significantly fewer (−1.80) days with their child in a month than Black fathers; this translates to about 22 fewer days with their child in a year. The significant difference between Hispanic and Black fathers persists (and decreases slightly) when we include the full array of covariates (Model 2); Hispanic fathers see their children about (−1.71) fewer days in the past month (or roughly 20 fewer days over the year) in comparison to Black fathers. White fathers spend significantly fewer (−1.06) days per month than Black fathers. The effect size (i.e., regression coefficient divided by the sample standard deviation across all waves [Cohen 1977]) for Hispanics (.16) is moderate and small for Whites (.10).

The results for spending one or more hours in the past month follow the same general pattern. In our baseline estimate (Model 1), Hispanic nonresident fathers are significantly less likely (−.23) to spend one or more hours with the child in the last month as compared to Black fathers. This difference persists and becomes slightly smaller (−.21) in the full model (Model 2) after all covariates have been included. The effect size for Hispanics (.14) is moderate. There are no significant differences between Black and White fathers in their frequency of spending one or more hours with the child in the past week.

With respect to engagement in father-child activities, Hispanic nonresident fathers are significantly less likely to participate in activities with their children than Black fathers. In our bivariate estimate (Model 1), being a Hispanic father is associated with a −.10 standard deviation decrease in engagement in activities with their children in comparison to Black fathers. The association persists with the inclusion of controls (Model 2). We find no significant differences in engagement were observed between Black and White fathers.

Next, we examine racial and ethnic differences in the mother-father interaction vis-à-vis their common child. Shared responsibility with mothers is significantly lower for both White and Hispanic fathers as compared to Black fathers. The magnitude of the association is moderate (ranging from 18% to 20% of a mean standard deviation). The difference becomes slightly smaller for Whites and Hispanics when all covariates are included (Model 2). A similar pattern of racial variation holds for the measure of coparenting. In the baseline estimate, both White and Hispanic fathers are shown to engage in significantly lower coparenting than Black fathers, −.20 and −.11 units (31% and 17% of a mean standard deviation), respectively (Model 1). These significant differences between the racial/groups persist after accounting for all associated covariates (and the gap grows between Hispanic and Black fathers). Overall, net of various confounding factors, nonresident Black fathers appear to coordinate parenting activities more effectively with mothers than do White or Hispanic fathers (based on mothers' reports).

It is important to note that mothers' reports of fathers' involvement may provide only limited knowledge of the frequency and nature of paternal involvement with children, especially if

fathers are nonresident (Coley and Morris 2002, Seltzer and Brandreth 1995). Fathers would have better information about their own involvement with children, but many fathers were not interviewed; by the child's ninth birthday, only 59% of fathers completed an interview (note that attrition rates do not vary substantially by race/ethnicity). We conducted supplemental analyses to examine whether our results were similar using fathers' reports of involvement (where available), and we were reassured by the general similarity of the results. Time and engagement were the only variables available which could be similarly coded; the bivariate results show that Hispanic fathers spent significantly fewer (−1.45) days with their child in the past month than Blacks. After associated characteristics are included, Hispanic fathers spent even fewer (−1.64) days with their child in the past month. In examining the engagement aspect of father involvement, after controlling for our full set of associated characteristics, we find no race/ethnic differences. Taken together, our results provide some (but not consistent) evidence that Hispanic fathers are significantly less involved with their children in comparison to Black fathers.

In results not shown, we separated mixed-race and same-race parents to assess whether our main results differed by whether the father shared the same racial/ethnic background as the child's mother. Overall, these results were largely similar to our main results with one exception – White fathers who had a child with a woman of a different racial/ethnic background did *not* significantly differ from Black fathers who had a child with a Black mother on any of the five outcomes (whereas significant differences—consistent with our main results—were found comparing White same-race partnerships to Black same-race partnerships for number of days, shared responsibility and coparenting); this suggests that the observed overall Black-White differences in fathers' involvement are driven by fathers who had same-race partners.

Discussion

In this research, we examined race/ethnic differences in paternal involvement among nonresident fathers following a nonmarital birth in large U.S. cities. We evaluated four aspects of fathers' involvement—accessibility (time) with children, engagement in developmental activities, shared responsibility, and coparenting with mothers—using data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study across four survey waves over years 1, 3, 5, and 9 after a child's birth. Because of the rapid increase in nonmarital childbearing in recent decades (Hamilton et al. 2016), along with the positive link between paternal involvement and children's wellbeing (Adamsons and Johnson 2013), it is important to understand the nature of fathers' involvement with children following relationship dissolution. Given the notable differences by race/ethnicity in the prevalence of nonmarital births—as well as in socioeconomic and cultural characteristics, we might also expect differences in fathers' involvement across race/ethnic groups.

Results for Hispanic fathers were particularly notable. Across our four domains (and five measures) of paternal involvement, after adjusting for a host of covariates, Hispanic fathers were less likely to spend time with children, engage in developmental activities, share responsibility for the child, and effectively coparent with mothers in comparison to Black fathers. These results both confirm and contradict comparable studies which suggest that

Hispanics displayed the lowest levels of contact with children, but were no different in the frequency of activities they engaged in with children as compared to other groups (King et al. 2004). Given that nonmarital childbearing is most prevalent among Blacks, we might expect that nonresidential parenting behaviors are better institutionalized (having more established norms and expectations about the responsibilities of nonresidential fathers) among Blacks than among Hispanics.

In terms of Black-White differences, we found no differences in spending 1+ hours with children and engaging in father-child activities, but White fathers saw their children 1 less day per month and had lower levels of both shared responsibility and coparenting with mothers than Black fathers. Following relationship dissolution, it seems that White and Black fathers are similarly able to maintain their relationship with their children, but White fathers may minimize interaction with mothers. The family roles of Black men look to be less subject to what is often called the 'package deal' that typically links the partner and paternal roles of White (and especially higher-SES) men (Tach, Mincy and Edin 2010). This may be in part because unlike most White families, Black families view childrearing as a responsibility that goes beyond the relationship they have with the mother. Also, since Black fathers may be less able to economically contribute to the family, they may compensate by engaging in other parenting activities.

We were also interested in whether race/ethnic variation in paternal involvement was a function of differences in demographic, social/psychological, prior relationship status, and socioeconomic characteristics. In our multivariate models, we found that some factors did partially account for differences in paternal involvement between Black and White fathers and Black and Hispanic fathers, notably the relationship characteristics we accounted for. Father's incarceration, depressed fathers and fathers who provided any support (formal or informal) significantly impacted involvement. On the other hand, we did not find that the socioeconomic characteristics of the father explained race and ethnic differences in paternal involvement. This result was surprising, given that various studies have shown education and economic status to be important factors in accounting for racial differences in father involvement (King et al. 2004). We suspect that this is because nonresident fathers after a nonmarital birth are a rather economically-disadvantaged group, so there is little heterogeneity in socioeconomic status as compared to national samples of fathers. Also, our White sample is very small (only 6% of the overall weighted sample), so the Black-White comparisons may be less robust than the Black-Hispanic comparisons, where the numbers are larger.

A main strength of the present work was to explore a wider range of involvement variables than most prior studies of nonresident fathers using national samples. We examined four key dimensions of father involvement (using five measures) that have been identified as important in the literature—time, engagement, and responsibility from the father involvement literature (Lamb 2004), along with coparenting, which has emerged as a key construct vis-à-vis fathers' roles in family life (McHale and Lindahl 2011). Although our study adds new information about nonresidential father involvement, we must consider several limitations. First, as is typical with survey research, we are limited by missing data, especially survey non-response. By using a hospital-based design, the Fragile Families

Study was able to obtain higher response rates than other studies of fathers, who are typically under-represented in national surveys (Nelson 2004). At the same time, about 25% of fathers were not interviewed at baseline. We attempted to minimize the problem of fathers not being interviewed or being lost to attrition by using mothers' reports of fathers' involvement at years 1, 3, 5, and 9. Second, we recognize that nonresident fathers may be involved in other ways that are not measured here. For example, we did not measure forms of communication from afar such as emails/letters or phone calls.

These findings have implications for public policies designed to increase fathers' involvement among unmarried parents. Former President Obama's Responsible Fatherhood Initiative intends to improve fathers' relationships with the mothers of their children, help them become better fathers, and enable them to contribute financially to their children's lives (HHS 2015). While in our multivariate models, we were not able to fully 'account for' the differences across race/ethnic group in paternal involvement, our results suggest that several key factors are associated with involvement among nonresident fathers. In particular, relationship factors are particularly important for fathers' involvement over time; fathers who were romantically involved with the child's biological mother and who were in a more supportive relationship at the time of the baby's birth are more likely to be involved even after becoming nonresident. By contrast, fathers' having children by new partners and mothers' having new partners are associated with diminished paternal involvement. While policy efforts during the Bush administration were focused on *couple* relationships—especially promoting union stability and healthy marriage, such programs were shown to have essentially no effect on the desired outcomes (Wood et al. 2014). Given the high dissolution rates among unmarried parents (McLanahan 2011), policy might be better served to focus on the *coparenting* relationship among parents who have a common child and helping ensure that parents can work together to rear their common child if/when their own relationship dissolves. Also, fathers' providing financial support was strongly linked to fathers' direct involvement with children and interaction with mothers, suggesting that facilitating fathers' contributions to children may enhance their involvement in other ways—or vice versa (Nepomnyaschy 2007).

In sum, this paper adds to our understanding of how race/ethnicity is related to nonresident paternal involvement. Hispanic fathers are less engaged on every aspect of paternal involvement included in our analysis (compared to Blacks), while White and Hispanic fathers are less likely to maintain a strong coparenting relationship with mothers after union dissolution (compared to Blacks). These differences persist even as we account for a robust set of associated characteristics. To the extent that nonresident father involvement benefits children (Adamsons and Johnson 2013), our research suggests that after unmarried couples break up, Hispanic children's well-being may be additionally compromised by the father's low level of involvement. Future research would be well-served to examine if these persistent race/ethnic differences in paternal involvement continue as children age across the life course.

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Table 1

Engagement in Father-Child Activities: Items by Wave

	1-Year	3-Year	5-Year	9-Year
Play games like "peek-a-boo" or "gotcha"	X			
Sing songs or nursery rhymes	X	X	X	
Read stories	X	X	X	
Tell stories	X	X	X	
Play inside with toys such as blocks or legos	X	X	X	
Take child to visit relatives	X	X		
Change child diapers	X			
Feed or give bottle to child	X			
Hug or show affection to child	X	X		
Put child to bed	X	X		
Tell child you love him/her		X		
Let child help you with simple chores		X		
Play imaginary games with him/her		X		
Tell child that you appreciated something he/she did		X	X	
Go to a restaurant or out to eat with him/her		X		
Assist child with eating		X		
Play outside in the yard, park, or a playground with child			X	
Take child on an outing, such as shopping, or to a restaurant, church, museum, or special event			X	
Watch TV or a video together			X	X
Do dishes, prepare food, or do other household chores together				X
Play sports or do outside activities together				X
Play video or computer games together				X
Read books with child or talk with him/her about books he/she reads				X
Participate in indoor activities together such as arts and crafts or board games				X
Talk with child about current events, like things going on in the news				X
Talk with child about his/her day				X
Check to make sure the child has completed his/her homework				X
Help child with homework or school assignments				X

Table 1

Nonresident Fathers: Descriptive Characteristics by Race/Ethnicity

	Total Sample		Black		White		Hispanic	
	M or %	***SD***	***M or %***	***SD***	***M or %***	***SD***	***M or %***	***SD***
Demographic Characteristics								
Mixed-race couple	16.5		9.7		8.9		32.0	
Father foreign-born	11.6		6.7		5.5		25.2	
Father age at baby's birth (range = 15–53)	26.4	(7.28)	26.7	(7.79)	26.1	(6.19)	25.6	(6.07)
Mother age at baby's birth (range = 15–43)	23.9	(5.62)	22.9	(5.11)	23.9	(5.64)	24.1	(5.66)
Father lived with both parents at age 15	35.1		27.5		42.1		52.0	
Mother lived with both parents at age 15	33.4		29.7		41.6		39.3	
Child is a boy	50.9		54.3		50.5		44.2	
Socioeconomic Characteristics								
Father's education								
Less than high school	36.0		32.9		37.9		42.4	
High school degree	43.0		45.3		42.8		38.2	
Some college	17.8		18.2		13.3		17.6	
College or above	3.2		3.6		6.0		1.8	
Father has more education than mother	26.4		27.4		23.5		24.8	
Hours worked in a week (range = 0–80)[1]	32.8	(24.48)	29.7	(24.79)	48.0	(20.21)	37.7	(22.21)
Father's annual earnings (*adjusted for inflation in 2008 dollars*)[1]	$18,213	($22,899)	$16,408	($23,038)	$28,217	($18,391)	$20,303	($22,918)
Father provided any support to child[1]	62.1		62.4		56.5		62.5	
Social/psychological Characteristics								
Positive fathering attitudes (1 = *strongly disagree* to 4 = *strongly agree*)	3.7	(0.45)	3.6	(0.49)	3.8	(0.35)	3.8	(0.38)
Father's traditional gender attitudes (1 = *strongly disagree* to 4 = *strongly agree*)	2.3	(0.64)	2.3	(0.65)	2.3	(0.50)	2.3	(0.62)
Mother's traditional gender attitudes (1 = *strongly disagree* to 4 = *strongly agree*)	2.0	(0.56)	2.0	(0.57)	2.0	(0.56)	2.1	(0.53)
Father's religious attendance (1 = *never* to 5 = *once a week or more*)	2.5	(1.28)	2.5	(1.29)	2.4	(1.10)	2.7	(1.32)
Father currently incarcerated[1]	10.0		9.7		3.4		11.7	
Father's self-reported health (1 = *poor* to 5 = *excellent*)[1]	3.9	(1.07)	3.9	(1.09)	3.9	(0.94)	3.8	(1.04)
Mother's self-reported health (1 = *poor* to 5 = *excellent*)[1]	3.7	(1.11)	3.7	(1.07)	3.6	(1.16)	3.5	(1.18)

	Total Sample		Black		White		Hispanic	
	M or %	***SD***	***M or %***	***SD***	***M or %***	***SD***	***M or %***	***SD***
Father depression[1]	16.3		14.1		14.5		22.6	
Mother depression[1]	16.5		15.3		19.6		18.1	
Father's impulsivity (1 = *strongly disagree* to 4 = *strongly agree*)	2.1	(0.77)	2.0	(0.81)	2.2	(0.69)	2.1	(0.68)
Father has substance problem	6.3		5.0		12.7		7.6	
Mother has substance problem	1.3		1.5		3.2		0.5	
Father is physically violent towards mother	5.0		4.6		13.1		4.2	
Relationship status Characteristics								
Father supportiveness towards mother (1 = *never* to 3 = *often*)	2.2	(0.37)	2.2	(0.37)	2.3	(0.36)	2.2	(0.37)
Relationship status (ref = Friends/no relationship)	18.7		16.0		24.5		23.1	
Cohabiting	38.3		32.8		53.1		46.9	
Visiting	43.0		51.2		22.5		30.0	
Number of children with biological mother[1]	1.5	(0.83)	1.5	(0.85)	1.5	(0.71)	1.5	(0.82)
Father has child(ren) with another woman[1]	51.1		53.8		34.3		48.5	
Grandmother lived with the focal child[1]	31.9		27.1		31.1		41.6	
Father has a new partner[1]	25.9		26.0		21.4		27.0	
Presence of social father[1]	25.2		25.8		33.6		22.5	
Time since end of relationship (months)[1]	10.3	(10.37)	10.3	(11.43)	11.5	(10.92)	10.8	(7.48)
Relationship quality (1 = *excellent* to 5 = *poor*)	2.9	(1.31)	2.8	(1.33)	2.8	(1.51)	2.9	(1.22)
Number of cases (*N*)	2,447		1,608		233		606	

Note: All figures are weighted by 1-year city sampling weights that adjust for the over-sampling of nonmarital births in the Fragile Families Study. M = mean; SD= standard deviation.

[1]Time-varying characteristics.

Table 2

Means on Nonresident Father Involvement by Race/Ethnicity over Years 1–9 after a Nonmarital Birth

	1-Year						3-Year					
	Black		White		Hispanic		Black		White		Hispanic	
	M	*(SD)*	*M*	*(SD)*	*M*	*(SD)*	*M*	*(SD)*	*M*	*(SD)*	*M*	*(SD)*
Number of Days Saw Child Past Month (Range=0–30)	13.09_a	(13.04)	6.96_b	(10.55)	9.28_b	(10.95)	9.01_a	(11.86)	6.59_b	(10.33)	5.40_b	(9.24)
Spent One or More Hours in Past Month (Range=0–5)	3.19_a	(1.70)	2.32_b	(1.51)	2.67_b	(1.63)	2.51_a	(1.63)	$2.28_{a,b}$	(1.56)	2.09_b	(1.56)
Engagement in Activies (Range=0–7)	2.24_a	(2.27)	1.08_b	(1.76)	1.19_b	(1.45)	1.39_a	(1.82)	0.90_b	(1.39)	0.78_b	(1.31)
Sharing Responsibilities (Range=1–4)	2.37_a	(1.20)	1.63_b	(0.96)	2.01_c	(1.09)	1.95_a	(1.11)	1.65_b	(0.95)	1.58_b	(0.94)
Coparenting (Range=1–3)	2.48_a	(0.56)	1.93_b	(0.76)	2.24_c	(0.62)	2.24_a	(0.67)	2.03_b	(0.73)	2.00_b	(0.68)
n	1,063		135		360		1,155		150		377	
Unmarried (at birth) fathers who are nonresident at wave (%)	49.6		33.8		39.0		65.0		42.5		49.6	

	5-Year						9-Year					
	Black		White		Hispanic		Black		White		Hispanic	
	M	*(SD)*	*M*	*(SD)*	*M*	*(SD)*	*M*	*(SD)*	*M*	*(SD)*	*M*	*(SD)*
Number of Days Saw Child Past Month (Range=0–30)	7.42_a	(10.56)	7.15_a	(9.62)	3.85_b	(8.23)	5.92_a	(9.15)	6.06_a	(8.70)	2.84_b	(5.74)
Spent One or More Hours in Past Month (Range=0–5)	2.39_a	(1.55)	2.47_a	(1.45)	1.80_b	(1.33)	2.04_a	(1.38)	2.11_a	(1.35)	1.57_b	(1.04)
Engagement in Activies (Range=0–7)	1.16_a	(1.69)	1.00_a	(1.45)	0.48_b	(0.98)	0.74_a	(1.26)	$0.61_{a,b}$	(1.11)	0.38_b	(0.88)
Sharing Responsibilities (Range=1–4)	1.82_a	(1.07)	1.62_b	(0.93)	1.41_b	(0.78)	1.04_a	(0.27)	1.11_b	(0.48)	1.01_a	(0.12)
Coparenting (Range=1–3)	2.24_a	(0.61)	2.02_b	(0.72)	2.12_b	(0.71)	2.25_a	(0.63)	2.02_b	(0.62)	2.10_b	(0.69)
n	1,263		164		437		1,115		153		364	
Unmarried (at birth) fathers who are nonresident at wave (%)	71.0		51.7		55.3		78.2		56.6		53.8	

Note: All figures are weighted by city sampling weights for each respective year. M: mean; SD: standard deviation. Means in the same row that do not share subscripts differ at $p<.05$ in the Bonferroni comparison.

Table 3

Random Effects Regression Results: Involvement among Non-Resident Fathers over Years 1–9 after a Nonmarital Birth

	Number of Days Saw Past Month (range=0–30)				Spent 1 + Hours Past Month (range=1–5)				Engagement in Father-Child Activities[2]			
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 1		Model 2		Model 1		Model 2	
	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE
Race (ref=Black, Non-Hispanic)												
White, Non-Hispanic	−1.160†	(.667)	−1.063*	(.533)	−.006	(.093)	−.035	(.074)	−.053	(.051)	−.044	(.043)
Hispanic	−1.800***	(.455)	−1.714***	(.409)	−.231***	(.063)	−.211***	(.055)	−.103**	(.034)	−.076*	(.032)
Demographic Characteristics												
Mixed-race couple			.253	(.427)			−.006	(.058)			−.018	(.034)
Father foreign-born			−.828	(.588)			−.178*	(.082)			−.133**	(.047)
Father age at baby's birth			.027	(.028)			.002	(.004)			−.000	(.002)
Mother age at baby's birth			−.018	(.034)			−.004	(.005)			−.002	(.003)
Father lived with both parents at age 15			.233	(.340)			.046	(.044)			.019	(.026)
Mother lived with both parents at age 15			.391	(.316)			.006	(.043)			.026	(.026)
Baby is a boy			.141	(.284)			.001	(.039)			.037	(.023)
Socioeconomic Characteristics												
Father Education (ref=Less than HS)												
Dad HS degree			−.407	(.364)			−.074	(.050)			−.044	(.029)
Dad some college			−.928†	(.488)			−.078	(.068)			−.082*	(.040)
Dad college or above			−.824	(1.021)			−.218	(.145)			−.092	(.086)
Dad more educated than mother			.352	(.390)			.037	(.053)			.049	(.031)
Father's hours worked[1]			−.002	(.007)			−.000	(.001)			−.001*	(.001)
Father's annual earnings ($ 2008) ($1000s)[1]			.005	(.005)			.000	(.001)			−.000	(.001)
Father provided any support to child[1]			4.280***	(.262)			.785***	(.038)			.325***	(.023)
Social/Psychological Characteristics												
Attitudes toward fathering			.648*	(.310)			.114**	(.042)			.043†	(.026)
Father traditional gender roles			.265	(.286)			.016	(.041)			.009	(.019)

	Number of Days Saw Past Month (range=0–30)				Spent 1 + Hours Past Month (range=1–5)				Engagement in Father-Child Activities[2]			
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 1		Model 2		Model 1		Model 2	
	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE
Mother traditional gender roles			−.060	(.252)			−.011	(.034)			.026	(.020)
Father's religious attendance			−.139	(.120)			−.016	(.016)			−.003	(.010)
Father currently incarcerated			−5.515***	(.375)			−.927***	(.052)			−.368***	(.031)
Father's impulsivity			.245	(.310)			.036	(.040)			.007	(.022)
Father's health[1]			.040	(.126)			.005	(.019)			.009	(.010)
Mother's health[1]			−.173	(.113)			−.014	(.016)			.004	(.009)
Father depression[1]			−1.44**	(.453)			−.209***	(.057)			−.104**	(.033)
Mother depression[1]			−.894*	(.403)			−.091†	(.054)			−.050	(.032)
Father has substance problem			.361	(.592)			.053	(.083)			.019	(.047)
Mother has substance problem			−.152	(.866)			−.087	(.119)			.038	(.070)
Father is physically violent towards mother			−.951†	(.574)			−.197*	(.079)			−.095*	(.048)
Relationship Status Characteristics												
Father supportiveness towards mother			1.023*	(.492)			.137*	(.067)			.099*	(.039)
Relationship status (ref = Friends/no relationship)												
Cohabiting			1.270**	(.461)			.242***	(.064)			.115**	(.037)
Visting			1.862***	(.426)			.242***	(.059)			.137***	(.034)
Biological parity (# kids w/ bio dad)[1]			.414**	(.155)			.024	(.021)			.000	(.012)
Mom says dad has kid(s) by someone else[1]			−1.765***	(.284)			−.302***	(.040)			−.155***	(.023)
Grandmother live with focal child[1]			−.999***	(.300)			−.091*	(.042)			−.081***	(.024)
Father has new partner[1]			−2.572***	(.312)			−.302***	(.048)			−.119***	(.029)
Presence of social father[1]			−3.090***	(.242)			−.316***	(.033)			−.145***	(.019)
Time since end of relationship (months)[1]			−.039***	(.006)			−.004***	(.001)			−.003***	(.000)
Relationship quality			−1.422***	(.137)			−.211***	(.019)			−.115***	(.010)
Wave	−.741***	(.038)	−.236***	(.067)	−.111***	(.005)	−.046***	(.009)	.017***	(.003)	.055***	(.005)
Observations	2,418		2,418		2,431		2,431		2,392		2,392	

	Number of Days Saw Past Month (range=0–30)				Spent 1 + Hours Past Month (range=1–5)				Engagement in Father-Child Activities[2]			
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 1		Model 2		Model 1		Model 2	
	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE
Person-Period Observations	6,375		6,375		6,374		6,374		6,034		6,034	

†$p<.10$

*$p<.05$

**$p< .01$

***$p<.001$

[1]Time-varying characteristics.

[2]This measure is standardized with a mean of 0 and standard deviation of 1.

Table 4

Random Effects Regression Results: Father-Mother Interaction among Nonresident Fathers over Years 1–9 after a Nonmarital Birth

	Shared Responsibility for Child (range=1–4)				Coparenting (range=1–3)			
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 1		Model 2	
	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE
Race (ref=Black, Non-Hispanic)								
White, Non-Hispanic	−.209***	(.055)	−.161***	(.044)	−.198***	(.043)	−.184***	(.037)
Hispanic	−.182***	(.037)	−.138***	(.032)	−.112***	(.030)	−.122***	(.028)
Demographic Characteristics								
Mixed-race couple			.005	(.035)			−.046	(.030)
Father foreign-born			−.101†	(.052)			−.030	(.041)
Father age at baby's birth			.001	(.002)			.002	(.002)
Mother age at baby's birth			−.010	(.003)			.005†	(.002)
Father lived with both parents at age 15			−.017	(.032)			.022	(.024)
Mother lived with both parents at age 15			.024	(.026)			−.021	(.022)
Baby is a boy			.008	(.024)			−.018	(.020)
Socioeconomic Characteristics								
Father Education (ref=Less than HS)								
Dad HS degree			−.030	(.032)			−.018	(.030)
Dad some college			−.090	(.042)			−.045	(.035)
Dad college or above			−.096	(.085)			−.071	(.085)
Dad more educated than mother			.034	(.032)			.046	(.028)
Father's hours worked[1]			−.009	(.001)			.000	(.000)
Father's annual earnings ($ 2008) ($1000s)[1]			.000	(.001)			−.001	(.001)
Father provided any support to child[1]			.459***	(.024)			.285***	(.019)
Social/Psychological Characteristics								
Attitudes toward fathering			.014	(.028)			.002	(.025)
Father traditional gender roles			−.012	(.020)			.018	(.017)
Mother traditional gender roles			.020	(.021)			.031†	(.018)

	Shared Responsibility for Child (range=1–4)				Coparenting (range=1–3)			
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 1		Model 2	
	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE
Father's religious attendance			−.002	(.011)			−.001	(.008)
Father currently incarcerated			−.207***	(.034)			.030	(.030)
Father's impulsivity			.030	(.024)			−.016	(.018)
Father's health[1]			.001	(.014)			−.004	(.009)
Mother's health[1]			.016	(.010)			.030***	(.008)
Father depression[1]			−.118***	(.035)			−.059†	(.031)
Mother depression[1]			−.088**	(.033)			−.113***	(.027)
Father has substance problem			−.019	(.048)			−.070	(.044)
Mother has substance problem			.041	(.071)			.045	(.059)
Father is physically violent towards mother			−.071	(.051)			−.119*	(.046)
Relationship Status Characteristics								
Father supportiveness towards mother			.135***	(.039)			.072*	(.033)
Relationship status (ref = Friends/no relationship)								
Cohabiting			.107**	(.039)			.049	(.034)
Visting			.149***	(.035)			.069*	(.031)
Biological parity (# kids w/ bio dad)[1]			.019	(.013)			.002	(.011)
Mom says dad has kid(s) by someone else[1]			−.165***	(.025)			−.105***	(.019)
Grandmother live with focal child[1]			−.075**	(.028)			−.037†	(.021)
Father has new partner[1]			−.209***	(.029)			−.076***	(.021)
Presence of social father[1]			−.265***	(.022)			−.151***	(.018)
Time since end of relationship (months)[1]			−.000	(.001)			−.001**	(.000)
Relationship quality			−.162***	(.012)			−.136***	(.009)
Wave	−.137***	(.003)	−.118***	(.006)	−.030***	(.003)	−.010*	(.004)
Observations	2,425		2,425		2,146		2,146	
Person-Period Observations	6,453		6,453		4,786		4,786	

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† $p<.10$

* $p<.05$

** $p<.01$

*** $p<.001$

1 Time-varying characteristics.