

Divorce-Related Variables as Predictors of Young Adults' Retrospective Fathering Reports

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ABSTRACT. The present analysis examined the relationships of the child's age at the time of divorce, the number of years elapsed since the divorce, and postdivorce coresidence with the father on retrospective reports of paternal nurturance and involvement in an ethnically diverse sample of 497 young adults from divorced families. Results indicated that participants who resided with their fathers at some point after the divorce rated their fathers significantly more favorably than did those who did not reside with their fathers following divorce. Moreover, the child's age at the time of divorce was significantly and positively related to paternal involvement and nurturance, suggesting that divorces occurring earlier in the child's life were more detrimental to the father-child relationship. The effects of timing of the divorce on father involvement were especially strong for instrumental fathering functions (e.g., involvement

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in school, discipline, protection). Implications for family court practices are discussed. [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2005 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

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Many have argued that father involvement is important in the lives of children and adolescents (e.g., Palkovitz, 1997, 2002; Rohner & Veneziano, 2001). In particular, research has found that paternal nurturance and involvement are associated with positive outcomes such as self-competence (O'hannessian, Lerner, Lerner, & von Eye, 1998), school bonding (Flouri, Buchanan, & Bream, 2002), and social relationships (van Schaick & Stolberg, 2001) in youth. Moreover, Vazsonyi (2003) found that, in four different Western countries, paternal closeness, support, and supervision significantly predicted adolescent deviance (in a negative direction) even after the corresponding maternal processes had been taken into account. In short, fathers appear to have a substantial, and perhaps unique, contribution to child and adolescent development.

The father's role in his children's lives, however, has been undermined by divorce (Finley, 2003). Nationally, approximately half of American children experience parental divorce before they reach 18 years of age—with Blacks and Hispanics disproportionately affected (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999). In approximately 85% of cases in which parents divorce, primary physical custody is assigned to the mother (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999). With the rise in divorce rates since the 1970s, fathers have been increasingly cast into nonresidential roles where the father's role in the child's life is marginalized or severed (Finley, 2003).

The effects of divorce on the father-child relationship have been well-documented (e.g., Arditti & Prouty, 1999; Fabricius & Hall, 2000). When fathers are cast into nonresident roles, their opportunities for nurturance and involvement in their children's lives are greatly reduced. Individuals from divorced families often report lower levels of paternal nurturance and involvement than do individuals from intact families (Schwartz & Finley, 2005).

Although father involvement generally is measured using mother or father reports (Fabricius & Hall, 2000), children of divorce themselves also may be appropriate reporters of father involvement. Use of child reports of father involvement may help to alleviate two potential methodological problems associated with mother and father reports: (a) mothers may underreport postdivorce levels of father involvement, and fathers may overreport their own postdivorce involvement (Coley & Morris, 2002); and (b) fathers' reports of involvement in their children's lives may also be largely a function of their own life situations, rather than of their relationships with their children (Seltzer & Brand-reth, 1994).

The transition to adulthood may be an appropriate time to gather father involvement reports from children of divorce. As Arnett (1998, 2000) has argued, young adulthood is the time when individuals both reflect back and look forward as they prepare to face the decisions and challenges of adulthood. Further, young adulthood is the time when young people begin to undertake adult roles such as gainful employment and committed partnership, both of which may be compromised in adult children of divorce (Amato & DeBoer, 2001). Therefore, in our program of research we obtain retrospective reports of fathering from young adults.

TIMING OF THE DIVORCE AND PATERNAL CUSTODY AS PREDICTORS OF POSTDIVORCE FATHER INVOLVEMENT

Although it has been reported in the research literature that divorce is associated with decreases in father-child relationship quality (Finley, 2003; Schwartz & Finley, 2005), a large amount of variability exists in nonresident fathers' involvement with their children (Leite & McKenry, 2002). Some divorced fathers drop out of their children's lives soon after the divorce, whereas others remain closely involved. A number of potential explanations for this variability have been evaluated, including mother-father cohesion and conflict (Whiteside & Becker, 2000), the father's identity as a parent (Minton & Pasley, 1996), the father's physical proximity to the mother and child (Arditti & Keith, 1993), and joint custody arrangements (Stephen, Freedman, & Hess, 1993). What has been less extensively studied, however, is the effect of timing of the divorce on fathers' postdivorce involvement. Because many nonresident fathers tend to decrease their involvement with their children soon after the divorce (see Ihinger-Tallman, Pasley, & Buehler, 1993, for a review), it is possible that when the divorce occurs ear-

lier in the child's life, and when more years have elapsed since the divorce, young adults would be expected to retrospectively report lower levels of father nurturance and involvement. However, a search of the PsycINFO and Sociological Abstracts literature databases from January 1985 through August 2004 yielded no empirical studies examining the child's age at the time of divorce as a predictor of postdivorce father involvement.

Another critical, but unknown, variable in need of study regarding postdivorce father involvement is the role of time spent residing with the father after divorce. In the approximately 15 percent of divorces in which the mother is not awarded sole physical custody, the father is generally the resident parent for some portion of the child's life, and his relationship with the child would be expected to be more positive than are those of nonresident fathers. In some cases, children are assigned joint physical custody, and in other cases custody is initially awarded to the mother but the child ends up living with the father for some number of years for a variety of reasons. Research indicates that fathers awarded joint physical custody tend to enjoy more positive relationships with their children and to be more involved with them (Arditti & Keith, 1993; Stephen et al., 1993). Although many studies have documented that the quality of the father-child relationship decreases following divorce (e.g., Riggio, 2004), the majority of these studies have not separated children who had resided with their fathers at some point following the divorce from those who had not. Additionally, the length of such coresidence has not been studied as a predictor of paternal nurturance and involvement. As a result, the effects of paternal coresidence or custody on postdivorce father involvement have received scant attention. Studying the effects of paternal coresidence may shed light on both the positive and negative consequences of nonresident fathering for children.

Methodological Framework for the Present Study

The program of research from which the present study has emerged operationalizes father involvement in a multidimensional, content-based way. The measure designed within this program of research (Finley & Schwartz, 2004) affords the potential to contribute to the understanding of postdivorce father involvement by moving beyond proxy measures of involvement (e.g., child support payments, adherence to visitation schedules) by specifying how specific domains of fathering are affected by divorce-related variables.

Focus on Retrospective Reports. Our focus on young adult children's retrospective perceptions of father involvement and nurturance is adapted from Rohner's (1986) phenomenological theory. Rohner and colleagues (Khaleque & Rohner, 2002; Rohner, 1986; Rohner & Britner, 2002; Rohner & Veneziano, 2001) have demonstrated that young adult children's retrospective perspectives on father acceptance-rejection are uniquely associated with these individuals' psychological and behavioral adjustment. Drawing on the work of Rohner and colleagues, we (Finley & Schwartz, 2004) were able to develop highly face-valid and internally consistent measures of young adults' retrospective perceptions of father involvement and nurturance.

Conceptualizations of Paternal Nurturance and Involvement. Our conception of nurturant fathering, which represents the extent to which young adult children perceive their fathers as having been emotionally available, loving, and caring, is related to Rohner's work on parental acceptance and father love (see Rohner & Britner, 2002; Rohner & Veneziano, 2001, for reviews). Our model of father involvement is drawn from Hawkins and Palkovitz's (1999) call for the study of father involvement to move beyond time-based measures and to attend to multiple domains of fathering. Accordingly, our measure of father involvement surveys instrumental and expressive domains of fathering, both of which have been found to mediate the effects of proxy measures (e.g., time spent with the child) on adolescent psychosocial functioning (Salem, Zimmerman, & Notaro, 1998).

The Current Study: Research Questions and Hypotheses

The present analysis was conducted as an exploratory investigation of the role of the respondent's age at the time of divorce, number of years elapsed since the divorce, and coresidence with the father as predictors of young adults' retrospective perceptions of paternal nurturance and involvement. The study is exploratory in that the data were taken from a larger project and because a number of contextual factors known to be associated with postdivorce father involvement, such as conflict between parents (Whiteside & Becker, 2000) and parental relocation (Braver, Ellman, & Fabricius, 2003), were not available in the dataset. Moreover, the present study assessed young adults' overall ratings of father involvement and did not specifically ask about predivorce and postdivorce involvement. Such a strategy was adopted

in light of Rohner's (1986) argument that child and adolescent development is affected by the *long-term residue* (i.e., overall effects) of parental involvement during childhood and adolescence.

Two research questions were investigated in the present study. The first research question concerned the extent to which participants' ratings of father involvement differed between those who had resided with their fathers at some point following the divorce (heretofore referred to as the coresident group) and those who had not (heretofore referred to as the non-coresident group). It was hypothesized that coresident participants would rate their fathers as having been more nurturant and involved than would non-coresident participants.

The second research question concerned the extent to which the divorce-related variables assessed in the present analysis (participant's age at the time of divorce, years elapsed since the divorce, and years of coresidence with the father after divorce) would explain the observed variability in fathering ratings beyond the effects of demographic variables. It was hypothesized that (a) the participant's age at the time of divorce would be positively related to retrospective ratings of father nurturance and involvement (i.e., divorces occurring earlier would be associated with lower nurturance and involvement ratings); (b) the number of years elapsed since the divorce would be negatively related to fathering ratings; and (c) number of years of coresidence with the father after divorce would be positively related to fathering ratings.

The participant's age at the time of divorce and the number of years elapsed since the divorce were considered as separate variables in the present study. Although these two indices would be expected to be highly intercorrelated ($r = -.72$ in the present sample), and although the sum of these two variables equals the participant's chronological age, it should be noted that there was considerable variability in participants' ages (see the *Participants* section, below). It is therefore possible that the participant's age at the time of divorce, as an index of the number of years that the child's family was intact, and the number of years elapsed since the divorce, as an index of the length of the father's nonresident status (in the non-coresident group, which represents 82% of the sample), would make separate contributions to the young adult child's retrospective ratings of the father's nurturance and involvement.

METHOD

Participants

The sample for the present analysis was a subset of the sample gathered by Finley and Schwartz (2004), consisting of participants who (a) identified their biological father as the most important father figure in their lives and (b) reported that their parents were divorced or permanently separated. The present sample consisted of 497 young adults (25% male, 75% female) attending a large, ethnically diverse public university in Miami. The mean participant age was 21 years (SD 4.66), with 96% of participants between 17 and 30 years of age. Seventy-nine participants (16% of the present sample) reported residing with their fathers at some point following the divorce. The present sample represents 21% of the total sample collected and 25% of all participants rating biological fathers. The mean participant age at the time of parental divorce was 8.6 years (SD 5.4). Participants' parents had been divorced for a mean of 12.5 years (SD 6.7) at the time of assessment.

In terms of ethnicity, the sample was 24% non-Hispanic White, 10% non-Hispanic Black, 56% Hispanic, 7% Asian, and 4% mixed ethnicity. The majority of participants (67%) were U.S.-born, whereas the majority of fathers (72%) were born abroad. The overrepresentation of ethnic minorities and individuals from immigrant families is not representative of the current U.S. population. However, the present sample is consistent with the current rapid increases in the representation of immigrants (Schmidley, 2003; Schmidley & Deardorff, 2001) and minorities (especially Hispanics; Day, 1996; Ramirez & de la Cruz, 2003) in the United States.

Measures

Demographics. Data were gathered on demographic indices commonly assessed in family research (Amato & Keith, 1991)—age, gender, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and father's education—along with other demographics appropriate for a minority college sample (nativity and year in school). Participants were asked to indicate how old they were at the time of divorce and their living arrangements during the remainder of their childhood and adolescence.

Nurturant Fathering. The Nurturant Fathering Scale (Finley & Schwartz, 2004) consists of nine items that participants use to characterize their relationship with their fathers. Participants are asked to read

each item and to respond using a five-point rating scale, the endpoints of which vary as a function of item content. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for scores on the Nurturant Fathering Scale in this sample was .95. A sample item from this scale is, "When you needed your father's *support*, was he there for you?"

Father Involvement. Participants were asked to complete the Father Involvement Scale (Finley & Schwartz, 2004) regarding their biological fathers. The Father Involvement Scale lists 20 domains of father involvement selected from the review and critique by Hawkins and Palkovitz (1999). For each fathering domain listed, participants are asked to indicate: (a) how involved, on a scale of 1 (*not at all involved*) to 5 (*very involved*), their fathers had been in their lives; and (b) how involved they wanted their fathers to have been, relative to the level of involvement reported, on a scale of 1 (*desired much less involvement*) to 5 (*desired much more involvement*). A sample item from this scale reads, "_____ developing competence _____," where the participant is instructed to write the reported involvement rating into the left-hand blank and to write the desired involvement rating into the right-hand blank. Only the reported involvement items and subscales were analyzed for this report.

Factor analyses of the reported involvement items from the Father Involvement Scale in the total sample yielded three reported involvement scales (Finley & Schwartz, 2004). These scales were expressive involvement (caregiving, companionship, sharing activities, emotional development, social development, spiritual development, physical development, and leisure; $\alpha = .95$); instrumental involvement (discipline, protecting, providing income, monitoring schoolwork, moral development, developing responsibility, career development, and developing independence; $\alpha = .94$), and mentoring/advising involvement, which represents the empirical overlap between expressive and instrumental involvement (intellectual development, developing competence, mentoring, and giving advice; $\alpha = .92$).

Procedure

Participants completed the Nurturant Fathering Scale, the Father Involvement Scale, and the demographic form in class. Research assistants administered the measures as a single questionnaire. The administration time for the entire assessment ranged from 10 to 20 minutes. Data were collected between June 1998 and February 2000.

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics for the four fathering measures, separately by ethnicity, can be found in Schwartz and Finley (2005). When the sample was divided according to whether or not participants had resided with their fathers following the parents' divorce, a number of demographic differences emerged. Only demographic differences that were statistically significant and associated with nontrivial effect sizes are described here. Ethnicity, $\chi^2(4, N = 497) = 10.17, p < .04, \phi = .15$; father's education, $F(1, 483) = 13.27, p < .001, \eta^2 = .03$; and family income, $F(1, 390) = 19.12, p < .001, \eta^2 = .05$, differed significantly between coresident and non-coresident participants. Regarding ethnicity, non-Hispanic Whites and non-Hispanic Blacks were overrepresented, and Hispanics and Asians were underrepresented, among coresident participants. Twenty-three percent of non-Hispanic White participants, 18% of non-Hispanic Black participants, and 27% of mixed-ethnicity participants reported having resided with their fathers following divorce, compared to 12% of Hispanic participants and 12% of Asian participants. Father's education was slightly higher in coresident families than in non-coresident families. Coresident participants tended to report that these fathers had finished college ($M = 4.59$ on a 1-6 scale), whereas non-coresident participants tended to report that their fathers had started college but did not finish ($M = 3.93$). Family income was higher among coresident fathers than non-coresident fathers. Participants who resided with their fathers following divorce reported mean annual family incomes of \$50,000 to \$100,000, whereas participants who did not reside with their fathers following divorce reported mean annual family incomes of \$30,000 to \$50,000.

Bivariate Correlations

Bivariate correlations between the fathering indices and divorce-related variables are presented in Table 1. All four fathering indices were positively correlated with the participant's age at the time of divorce, negatively correlated with the number of years elapsed since the divorce, and positively correlated with the number of years the participant resided with the father following the divorce. All correlations were significant at $p < .001$. Although the correlations of instrumental involve-

TABLE 1. Bivariate Correlations Between Divorce-Related Variables and Fathering Indices^a

Variable	Nurturant Fathering	Expressive Involvement	Instrumental Involvement	Mentoring/ Advising
Participant's Age at Time of Divorce	.25*** (.06)	.26*** (.07)	.36*** (.13)	.29*** (.09)
Years Elapsed Since Divorce	-.24*** (.06)	-.27*** (.07)	-.34*** (.12)	-.29*** (.09)
Years of Residence with Father After Divorce	.24*** (.06)	.22*** (.05)	.26*** (.07)	.22*** (.05)

*** $p < .001$ ^aEffect sizes are in parentheses.

ment with the divorce-related variables were somewhat higher than were the corresponding correlations involving nurturant fathering, expressive involvement, or mentoring/advising, these correlation differences were not statistically significant.

Research Question 1: Fathering Ratings by Coresidence with Father

As would be expected, ratings of nurturant fathering and father involvement were significantly higher in individuals who had resided with their fathers following divorce than in individuals who had not, Wilks' $\lambda = .89$, $F(4, 482) = 15.50$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .11$ (see Table 2). All four fathering indices were significantly higher in the coresident group than in the non-coresident group: nurturant fathering, $F(1, 480) = 51.80$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .10$; expressive involvement, $F(1, 480) = 46.59$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .08$; instrumental involvement, $F(1, 480) = 59.93$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .11$; and mentoring/advising, $F(1, 480) = 46.24$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .09$. Adding the participant's age at the time of divorce and the number of years elapsed since the divorce as covariates did not change the results appreciably.

Research Question 2: Divorce Related Variables as Predictors of Fathering Ratings

Hierarchical regression analyses were conducted on each of the fathering indices by demographics and divorce-related variables. In each

TABLE 2. Fathering Indices by Coresidence Status

Variable	Coresident (<i>M, SD</i>)	Non-Coresident (<i>M, SD</i>)	F Ratio (η^2)
Nurturant Fathering	3.88 (0.91)	2.89 (1.11)	51.80*** ($\eta^2 = .10$)
Expressive Involvement	3.48 (0.95)	2.52 (1.13)	46.59*** ($\eta^2 = .09$)
Instrumental Involvement	4.02 (0.85)	2.88 (1.21)	58.93*** ($\eta^2 = .11$)
Mentoring/Advising	3.85 (1.01)	2.87 (1.27)	46.24*** ($\eta^2 = .09$)

Note: Possible scores for all means range from 1 to 5.

*** $p < .001$

model, the demographic variables that differed significantly and meaningfully between the coresident and non-coresident groups—father's education, family income, and ethnicity—were entered as predictors on the first block. Ethnicity was entered as dummy-coded variables for White, Black, Hispanic, and Asian. Participant's age at the time of divorce, number of years elapsed since the divorce, and number of years living with the father were entered on the second block.

Because participant age at the time of divorce and number of years elapsed since divorce were highly intercorrelated ($r = -.72, p < .001$), we tested for multicollinearity problems involving these two variables. According to Cohen and Cohen (1983), tolerance values below .10 suggest the presence of multicollinearity problems. In the present study, tolerance values between participant's age at divorce and years elapsed since the divorce ranged from .17 to .48, with all but one above .40.

The regression models explained 23% of the variability in nurturant fathering, 23% of the variability in expressive father involvement, 35% of the variability in instrumental father involvement, and 28% of the variability in mentoring/advising involvement (see Table 3). Because more variability was explained in instrumental fathering than in any of the other fathering indices, we compared the variability explained in instrumental fathering to that explained in the other fathering indices. These differences were evaluated by comparing the multiple correlation coefficients (i.e., the square root of the total variance explained) and using the q index of effect size (Cohen, 1988). Significantly more variability was explained in instrumental involvement than in either nurturant fathering or expressive fathering (for both comparisons, $z = 2.43, p < .05, q = .15$). No significant differences emerged in the variability

TABLE 3. Demographics, Child's Age at Divorce, Years Elapsed Since Divorce, and Coreidence with Father as Predictors of Nurturant Fathering and Father Involvement Ratings

Step	Variable	Nurturant Fathering ΔR^2	β	Expressive Involvement ΔF^2	β	Instrumental Involvement ΔR^2	β	Mentoring/Advising ΔR^2	β
Demographics									
	Gender	.15***	-.05	.13***	-.06	.17***	-.04	.17***	-.08
	Year in School		-.13		-.10		-.15*		-.10
	Participant Nativity		-.01		.01		.03		.03
	Father Nativity		-.07		-.11		-.07		-.08
	Father's Education		.08		-.06		.06		.12
	Family Income		.21**		.23**		.30***		.27***
	Ethnicity (White)		-.08		-.09		-.11		-.11
	Ethnicity (Black)		-.27*		-.21*		-.17		-.19
	Ethnicity (Hispanic)		-.10		-.11		-.08		-.10
	Ethnicity (Asian)		-.09		-.09		-.06		-.08
Divorce Variables									
	Participant's Age at Divorce	.08***	.28**	.10***	.27**	.18***	.45***	.11***	.35***
	Number of Years Since Divorce		.07		.02		.08		.06
	Number of Years Living with Father		.22**		.22**		.24***		.20**
Total Variability Explained		.23***		.23***		.35***		.28***	

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

explained in instrumental involvement versus mentoring/advising, $z = 1.38$, ns, $q = .09$.

Among the demographic variables, family income was positively related to nurturant fathering and to all three dimensions of father involvement. Being Black was negatively associated with nurturant fathering and expressive father involvement. Among the divorce-related variables, the respondent's age at the time of divorce and the number of years the respondent lived with the father following the divorce were positively related to nurturant fathering and to reported father involvement. The number of years elapsed since the divorce was not significantly related to any of the fathering indices at the multivariate level. The regression coefficient for the child's age at the time of divorce predicting instrumental involvement was unusually strong ($\beta = .45$) and was significantly larger than the corresponding regression coefficients for nurturant fathering ($z = 3.10$, $p < .01$, $q = .20$) or expressive involvement ($z = 3.27$, $p < .01$, $q = .21$). Participants who resided with their fathers for longer periods of time following the divorce tended to rate their fathers as more nurturant and involved than did those who resided with their fathers for shorter periods of time (or did not reside with their fathers at all) following the divorce.

These results suggest that participants whose parents divorced earlier in their lives tended to rate their fathers as less nurturant and involved than did those whose parents divorced later in their lives. The strength of the relationship between the child's age at the time of divorce and instrumental involvement is noteworthy and suggests that instrumental aspects of the father's role may be particularly compromised in cases where parents divorce early in the child's life. It is surprising that years elapsed since the divorce was not significantly related to the fathering indices in the presence of the other divorce-related variables. Given the strong correlation between the child's age at the time of divorce and the number of years elapsed since the divorce, much of the variability in the fathering indices that was shared between these two predictors likely was subsumed by the child's age at the time of divorce.

DISCUSSION

The present analysis was conducted to examine the effects of postdivorce coresidence with father on reports of fathering in children of divorce. The present analysis also examined the timing of divorce as

a predictor of postdivorce father involvement. We were not able to find any previous empirical studies addressing these issues.

Not surprisingly, participants who resided with their fathers at some point following the divorce rated those fathers more favorably in terms of nurturance and involvement than did those who did not live with their fathers following the divorce. Moreover, the regression results indicated that the number of years spent residing with the father following divorce was positively related to young adults' retrospective reports of paternal nurturance and involvement. This pattern of findings clearly suggests that postdivorce residential status enhances the father-child relationship and that nonresident status is detrimental to the father-child relationship. The results also suggest that residing in the father's home for some time following divorce enhances and may be critical to preserving the father-child relationship, particularly for the father's instrumental roles and responsibilities. This suggestion is consistent with Arditti and Keith (1993) and with Stephen et al. (1993), both of whom reported that joint custody was positively associated with father-child contact and involvement.

The relationship between the child's age at the time of divorce and all four fathering variables suggests that divorces that occur earlier in the child's life are more detrimental to the father-child relationship than are those that occur later. Moreover, although the number of years elapsed since the divorce was negatively related to all four fathering indices, the effect of the participant's age at the time of divorce subsumed this relationship at the multivariate level. Supplemental analyses (not presented in the tables) revealed that these relationships continued to emerge when only participants in the non-coresident group were included in analysis. What can be concluded from this pattern of results is that the amount of time during which the individual resides in the home with her/his father following divorce is predictive of the ways in which that individual will characterize her/his relationship with the father. This may be particularly true for instrumental functions such as involvement in schoolwork, discipline, and protection—functions that often cannot be feasibly be carried out from outside the household.

Two other findings from the present analysis also warrant discussion. First, family income emerged as a strong and significant predictor of all four fathering indices. This finding is consistent with the argument that we have advanced elsewhere (Schwartz & Finley, 2005) that social and economic wherewithal helps divorced fathers to remain involved with their children. Fathers whose children resided with them at some point following the divorce also tended to be higher income and to be more

highly educated than did strictly nonresident fathers. Fathers with adequate financial resources may be better equipped to engage in lengthy custody battles and to work within the family court system to ensure that the father-child relationship is maintained and, if possible, enhanced. Second, Black participants reported significantly less nurturant fathering and expressive father involvement, but not less instrumental and mentoring/advising father involvement, than did participants from other ethnic backgrounds. This finding is consistent with Hofferth (2003), who found that African American fathers tend to be controlling but not overly warm in their interactions with their children.

Limitations

The present results should be considered in light of several important limitations. First, it must be acknowledged that the Father Involvement Scale does not specify whether participants should rate their relationships with their fathers before, during, or after the divorce. As a result, some participants may have provided “overall” ratings of their fathers referring to their entire childhood and adolescence, others may have provided ratings of postdivorce father involvement, and still others may have rated their fathers’ involvement prior to the divorce. Although the present results are consistent with what would be expected, and although our research program focuses on the overall “residue” characteristic of the father-child relationship, it is also possible that different results would have emerged had we separately assessed father involvement before, during, and after the divorce.

Second, the ethnic diversity of the present sample is simultaneously a limitation and an advantage. As a limitation, the overrepresentation of nonwhites (77%) in the present sample may limit generalizability. Previous research has identified ethnic differences in both resident (Toth & Xu, 1999) and nonresident (King, Harris, & Heard, 2004) fathering. In the present sample of young adults from divorced families, Black participants tended to report lower levels of nurturant fathering and expressive involvement than did individuals from other ethnic groups. Although this result is consistent with findings from intact families reported by Hofferth (2003), it is not known whether a similar finding would have emerged with a more nationally representative sample.

Third, the present analysis was an exploratory investigation using an existing dataset in which a number of important variables were not available. These unassessed variables include family-contextual processes such as mother-father cohesion and conflict, as well as parental

relocation. We also did not assess whether participants' parents had joint legal custody. Further, for the 79 participants who resided with their fathers at some point following the divorce, we did not inquire about the processes that precipitated the participant's entry into or departure from the father's home. Thus, although the present study has explored the role of timing of the divorce and of postdivorce residence with the father on young adults' characterizations of the father-child relationship, it remains for further research to clarify the extent to which family-contextual processes and other related variables may also have contributed to the findings obtained here.

Policy Implications

Despite these limitations, the present results may have several implications for divorce policy. First, these results extend those of Fabricius and Hall (2000), who found that participants who had resided exclusively with their mothers as children reported that they would have wanted more time with their fathers while growing up. Given that the number of years residing with the father following divorce was positively predictive of all four fathering indices, it is possible that promoting both joint legal custody and equitable joint physical custody may help to offset the decreases in father-child relationship quality that often follow divorce. Such reforms may better serve the self-identified best interests of children of divorce (Finley, 2002).

Second, there is evidence that the qualitative nature of the dissolution is related to post-divorce fathering. For example, Dudley (1991) found that divorced fathers who are uninvolved with their children most often cited conflicts with their former wives, including adversarial court proceedings, as the primary reason for their lack of involvement. Other studies have found that adversarial relationships between divorcing mothers and fathers are associated with decreased father-child involvement and relationship quality (e.g., Ahrons & Miller, 1993). Therefore, reducing the adversarial nature of the divorce process and helping parents to address their conflicts after the divorce may help to maintain the father-child relationship following divorce. Finally, perhaps the most important conclusion that may be drawn from these analyses is that enhancing and protecting the postdivorce father-child relationship may help to maintain many of the benefits and advantages (both for fathers and for children) that accompany positive father involvement in children's lives.

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