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Mothers' Partnership Instability and Coparenting among Fragile Families

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Abstract

Objectives—The rise in nonmarital childbearing has raised concerns about coparenting among unmarried parents with increasingly complicated relationship trajectories. We address this issue by examining associations between mothers' partnership transitions and coparenting and the moderating role of maternal race/ethnicity and child gender.

Methods—Data from the Fragile Families Study and ordinary least squares regression techniques are used to examine whether mothers' partnership transitions are related to coparenting. Lagged and fixed effects models are employed to test the robustness of the findings to selection.

Results—Coresidential and nonresidential, dating transitions are negatively associated with coparenting, but the association is stronger for coresidential transitions than for dating transitions. Coresidential transitions are stronger predictors of coparenting for White parents than for Black parents and for parents of sons than for parents of daughters.

Conclusions—Policies aimed at strengthening families should emphasize relationship stability, regardless of the type of union, to promote high quality coparenting among at-risk populations.

The rise in nonmarital childbearing and multipartner fertility has raised concerns about parental communication and cooperation, or "coparenting," among unmarried parents with increasingly complicated relationship trajectories. The degree to which unmarried parents cooperate to raise their child is especially salient given that 41% of all births were to unmarried couples in 2008, an increase from 6% in 1960 (Martin et al. 2011). These *fragile families*, defined as couples who were unmarried at the birth of a common child, are often

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Carey Cooper shall share all data and coding for replication purposes.

young, economically disadvantaged, and highly unstable with respect to post-birth partnerships (McLanahan and Beck 2010). Indeed, approximately 50% of unmarried couples split by their child's third birthday, with more than half of these mothers subsequently beginning a new romantic partnership during the same time period (Osborne and McLanahan 2007).

Despite advances in research on parental divorce and remarriage, less is known about the consequences of partnership transitions (i.e., those involving cohabiting and dating) for parenting among unmarried couples who share children. The present study attempts to address the gap in the literature by drawing on national, longitudinal data to examine (a) whether mothers' partnership transitions across the first five years of a child's life are associated with coparenting at child age 5, (b) whether associations are similar for coresidential and dating transitions, and (c) whether associations are moderated by maternal race/ethnicity or child gender.

This study contributes to existing research in several ways. First, we extend the growing body of literature on the effects of mothers' partnership transitions on family processes (e.g., Beck et al. 2010; Kamp Dush, Kotila, and Schoppe-Sullivan 2011). Understanding the potential impact of partnership instability on coparenting is important because coparenting is strongly associated with father involvement (Carlson, McLanahan and Brooks-Gunn 2008), positive parent-child relationships (Morrill et al. 2010) and child adjustment (Cabrera et al. 2012). Second, few studies have examined dating transitions—entrances and exits from nonresidential romantic relationships—as part of mothers' partnership instability. Understanding the implications of these transitions for coparenting is important because unmarried mothers are more likely to experience nonresidential transitions than coresidential transitions (Osborne and McLanahan 2007). Third, scholars argue that unobserved characteristics or processes may account for partnership instability effects, but the role of selection is often ignored. In this study, mothers who experience multiple partnership transitions likely differ from those in stable relationships in ways that are unobserved, and these differences may underlie coparenting conflict. To address selection, we include child, maternal, paternal, and relationship covariates and assess the robustness of our findings using lagged and fixed effects models. Finally, because rates of nonmarital childbearing and nonresident fathering vary by race/ethnicity (Martin et al. 2011), with each having implications for partnership instability, we examine whether maternal race/ethnicity moderates the association between mothers' partnership transitions and coparenting. Additionally, because fathers may be more involved with sons than with daughters (Harris and Morgan 1991; Marsiglio 1991), we examine the moderating role of child gender.

Background

Theories of family behavior are largely born out of general systems theory—an interdisciplinary framework that posits that organized systems of behavior (e.g., families) cannot be understood independent of the system as a whole (Whitchurch and Constantine 1993). Family systems theory is an extension of general systems theory that addresses the dynamic role of dyadic (e.g., mother-father) and triadic (mother-father-child) relationships within family systems in individual- and family-level outcomes (Minuchin 1974).

Coparenting, or the coordination of parents' efforts to rear a common child, can be measured at a triadic, a dyadic or an individual level (e.g., a mother's report of her partner's coparenting efforts; Van Egeren and Hawkins 2004). Although part of the family system more generally, coparenting is conceptually distinct from parent-child relations and parents' romantic relationships (Feinberg 2003).

Not surprisingly, successful coparenting is related to positive parenting and child adjustment (Hohmann-Marriott 2011; Karreman et al. 2008), while coparenting conflict predicts parent negativity, poor parenting (Feinberg, Kan, and Hetherington 2007) and disruptive child behavior (e.g., socio-emotional problems and antisocial behavior; Feinberg et al. 2007). This research primarily emphasizes trends among middle-class, intact families. Yet, coparental relationships exist outside of—and are not held to—legal and contractual bonds characterized by married couples with children (Van Egeren and Hawkins 2004). Gaining a better understanding of how coparenting operates within diverse family systems is an important objective, especially because socioeconomic and cultural factors influence parental norms and beliefs (Belsky 1984).

High-quality coparenting relationships are expected to be especially important to the involvement of nonresident fathers. Cooperative parenting among nonresident fathers is positively associated with responsive fathering and father-child contact and closeness (Carlson et al. 2008). Moreover, positive coparenting appears to play a critical role in the engagement of nonresident fathers most at risk for low involvement—those who have ended romantic relationships with their child's mother (Bronte-Tinkew et al. 2008; Fagan and Palkovitz 2011). Thus, identifying key predictors of coparenting among fragile families can inform efforts to promote positive parenting and child development within this family context. In the present study, we focus on the influence of partnership instability, a key characteristic of fragile families.

Partnership Instability and Coparenting

When parental unions dissolve, the family system as a whole is disrupted and coparenting is necessarily reformulated (Emery and Dillion 1994). Parents who no longer coreside face new challenges in coordinating parenting decisions across households (Maccoby, Depner, and Mnookin 1990), which may include new romantic partnerships. While divorce and remarriage have traditionally characterized interruptions to family systems, the substantial rise in nonmarital childbearing (Martin et al. 2011) and the associated partnership instability (Beck et al. 2010) further complicates interrupted families, including in regard to coparenting.

Although 80% of unmarried couples are romantically involved when their child is born, the majority will break up within five years (McLanahan and Beck 2010). Moreover, about half of unmarried mothers experience three or more partnership changes before their child's fifth birthday (Cooper et al. 2011) with implications for family processes, including parent-child and couple relationships. In particular, higher levels of partnership instability are associated with higher levels of punitive punishment and lower levels of responsiveness among mothers of young children (Beck et al. 2010; Osborne and McLanahan 2007). Partnership

changes also reduce the quality of a mother's relationship with the biological father (Cooper et al. 2009).

This research gives rise to questions regarding how well parents can effectively coparent amidst instability in their romantic relationships. Indeed, when unions between two cohabiting parents dissolve, the likelihood of coparenting decreases (Waller 2012) and fathers perceive less coparental supportiveness from the mother (Bronte-Tinkew et al. 2008). Biological fathers also appear to find cooperative parenting difficult when mothers move in with a new partner (Kamp Dush et al. 2011). If fathers' parenting role is unclear following a break up (Guzzo 2009), fathers may disengage from their former partner and child. This may be especially true if the mother enters a relationship with a new partner who assumes a fathering role, or if the biological father re-partners and has ties to a new child. Mothers' "gatekeeping" (Allen and Hawkins 1999) may also explain reduced coparenting efforts if relationship changes, especially multiple changes, create conflict between ex-partners, and mothers subsequently limit father involvement.

In addition to coresidential transitions, unmarried parents experience high levels of instability with nonresident, dating partners (Beck et al. 2010). The effects of mothers' dating relationships are not well understood, but there is evidence to suggest that mothers who undergo multiple dating transitions use harsher disciplinary practices and their children exhibit more behavioral problems compared to mothers in stable relationships (Beck et al. 2010; Cooper et al. 2011). Instability in mothers' dating relationships may also affect coparenting if they lead to distrust in biological fathers (Hill 2007) or if mothers struggle to balance the demands of ending and beginning dating relationships with the coordination of parenting responsibilities.

Potential Moderating Factors

Parents' race or ethnicity may moderate relations between partnership instability and coparenting given that romantic partnership status and levels of father involvement have been found to vary by race/ethnicity among nonresident fathers (Cabrera et al. 2008). Nonmarital childbearing is common across all races/ethnicities, but it is most prevalent among Black families (Hummer and Hamilton 2010). Given that fragile families are more common among this racial/ethnic group and that Black nonresident fathers are more involved with their children than other fathers (King 1994), instability may have a smaller effect on Black fathers' coparenting. Additionally, if extended families play a more prominent role in child rearing in racial/ethnic minority communities than in White communities (McLoyd et al. 2000), then the negative effects of instability may be weaker if grandparents serve a protective function in these families.

The association between mothers' partnership instability and coparenting may also operate differently for parents of sons versus daughters. Child gender has been posited to influence parent involvement and to some extent coparenting, although empirical evidence is largely mixed (Stright and Bales 2003). For example, because fathers are more likely to perceive themselves as role models for their sons than for their daughters (Rossi and Rossi 1990), they may be more inclined to remain actively involved in the coparenting of sons. Indeed, nonresident fathers have been shown to perceive their coparenting as more supportive when

the child is male (Bronte-Tinkew and Horowitz 2010). To the extent that fathers are more involved with boys (Harris and Morgan 1991; Marsiglio 1991; but see Carlson et al. 2008), partnership instability may have a weaker effect on the coparenting of a son. In contrast, there is evidence linking interparental distress and poor coparenting among parents of sons but not daughters (McHale 1995). To the extent that coparenting is more conflictual among parents of sons, then partnership instability may have a weaker effect on the coparenting of a daughter. The lack of a clear pattern with regard to coparenting as a function of child's gender warrants further investigation.

Method

Data and Sample

The Fragile Families Study is a longitudinal, birth cohort survey that follows 4,898 children, including 3,711 born to unmarried parents and 1,187 born to married parents. Baseline interviews were conducted between 1998 and 2000 in 20 U.S. cities with populations of 200,000 or more. Mothers and fathers were interviewed shortly after the birth of their child in the hospital (Wave 1) and in follow-up phone interviews when the child was one (Wave 2), three (Wave 3), and five (Wave 4) years old. Response rates were 88% for unmarried mothers and 75% for unmarried fathers at Wave 1. Eighty-five percent of mothers were retained in the study by Wave 4, and 88% of fathers were interviewed at least once.

Our analysis used data from Waves 1 through 4 of the Fragile Families Study. To maximize the use of available information and minimize bias, we used the Multiple Imputation procedure in SAS to impute missing data for the original Fragile Families sample. Because imputing data that are not missing at random can produce biased estimates of coefficients and standard errors (Allison 2001), we took a conservative approach by imputing independent variables only. After excluding mothers who were married at the birth of the focal child (1,187 mothers), we excluded cases in which coparenting data were missing at Wave 4, unless cases met one criterion. Fathers were assigned a coparenting score of zero if mothers reported that the father did not currently have contact with the child and if coparenting data were available in Waves 2 and 3. When coparenting scores were not available in prior waves, cases were excluded from analyses (an additional 1,062 cases). Finally, following prior Fragile Families research, we excluded mothers who did not live with their child at least half-time at each wave (an additional 81 cases), resulting in an analytic sample of 2,568 mothers.

Measures

Coparenting—In the Fragile Families Study, mothers reported coparenting efforts at Waves 2, 3, and 4 if the biological father currently had contact with the focal child, as reported by the mother. Mothers indicated how true (0 = *never or rarely true*, 1 = *sometimes true*, 2 = *always true*) they found the following six statements about the focal child's biological father: (1) "When father is with child, he acts like the father you want for your child," (2) "You can trust father to take good care of child," (3) "He respects the schedules and rules you make for child," (4) "He supports you in the way you want to raise child," (5) "You and father talk about problems that come up with raising child," and (6) "You can

count on father for help when you need someone to look after child for a few hours.” Our primary analyses focused on coparenting at Wave 4. Responses were summed and ranged from 0 to 12 in the final measure. A factor analysis confirmed that the items loaded on a single factor ($\alpha = .88$). Descriptive statistics for coparenting and all other study variables are presented in Table 1.

Partnership transitions—To examine coresidential transitions during the first five years following the focal child’s birth, we summed the number of times mothers transitioned in and out of coresidential relationships with cohabiting or marital partners between Waves 1 and 4. At each wave, mothers reported whether they were involved in a romantic relationship, whether they were living with a partner, and whether, if applicable, the current partner was the same partner identified in the previous wave. Based on this information, a coresidential exit or entrance between two waves was coded as one coresidential transition, whereas experiencing both (in either order) between two waves was coded as two transitions. At Wave 4, mothers were also asked how many romantic relationships lasting at least one month they had experienced since the last interview and whether they lived with any of these partners. Responses to these questions allowed us to determine whether mothers were involved in relationships between Waves 3 and 4 that could not be identified with reports of current status. Because mothers were not asked about their between-wave relationships in earlier years, we likely undercounted coresidential transitions between Waves 1 and 3.

Dating transitions were counted similarly but were limited to transitions among romantic partners that did not involve coresidence. Although few transitions were added as a result, we followed the measurement strategy in prior Fragile Families research (Beck et al. 2010; Osborne and McLanahan 2007) by coding mothers who reported a pregnancy between two interviews as having entered and exited a dating relationship if they reported not having a partner at either time point. Also in line with prior research, we did not count changes from cohabitation to marriage with the same partner as a partnership transition.

Controls—Maternal controls included residential status at Wave 1, age in years at Wave 1, race/ethnicity, immigrant status, education, poverty level, residential moves between Waves 1 and 4, nonjoint births (whether she had children by another partner prior to the focal child’s birth), prior partnership instability, and substance abuse. Because a measure of mothers’ mental health was not available until Wave 2 and because it is endogenous to partnership instability (Meadows et al. 2008), we controlled for the grandmothers’ mental health to help account for mothers’ predisposition to mental health problems. Child controls included parity, gender, and low birth weight. Paternal controls were education, substance abuse, incarceration, prenatal involvement, nonjoint births, and subsequent coresidential relationships. Relationship controls were baseline measures of mothers’ and fathers’ relationship quality and conflict.

Analytic Techniques

Ordinary least squares (OLS) regression techniques were employed to address each of our research questions. We began by regressing coparenting at child age 5 on coresidential and

dating transitions between birth and age 5, before and after adding the controls. This provided estimates of the association between partnership instability and coparenting and allowed us to test for differences by transition type. We then added interactions between each transition type and each race/ethnicity category (excluding White) and between each transition type and child gender (excluding female). These models allowed us to examine whether mothers' race/ethnicity or child gender moderated associations between partnership transitions and coparenting. Finally, because partnership instability may have picked up the effect of a third (omitted) variable that affected both partnership instability and coparenting, we conducted two additional sets of analyses. First we estimated lagged dependent variable models that included measures of coparenting at Wave 2. The lagged models controlled for unmeasured variables that were associated with coparenting at child age 1. Second, we estimated fixed effects models that examined the association between changes in partnership instability and changes in coparenting. These models were based on within-couple changes in partnership instability and coparenting, controlling for unmeasured characteristics of the parents that do not change over time.

Results

We begin by discussing the number of transitions mothers experienced between birth and child age 5 by transition type. Whereas 37% of mothers reported no coresidential transitions, and 44% reported no dating transitions, only 22% reported neither type. Approximately 53% of the sample experienced one or two coresidential transitions, and 32% experienced one or two dating transitions. Almost 10% of the sample experienced three or more coresidential transitions, and 25% experienced three or more dating transitions. Despite substantial partnership instability, average levels of coparenting ($M = 8.18$) suggested that cooperative parenting was occurring some, if not much, of the time. Mothers of boys and of girls reported similar levels of partnership instability, but mothers of boys reported significantly lower levels of coparenting than mothers of girls (see Table 2). Black mothers reported significantly higher levels of coresidential instability than Hispanic mothers and higher levels of dating instability than both Hispanic and White mothers. Coparenting scores were significantly higher for Hispanics than for Blacks or Whites.

The first goal of the study examined the extent to which mothers' partnership instability over the first five years following a nonmarital birth was associated with coparenting at child age 5 (see Table 3). In Model 1, each coresidential transition uniquely reduced coparenting by .91, whereas each dating transition uniquely reduced coparenting by .78. These estimates were robust to the inclusion of relationship status at birth (Model 2), maternal and child controls (Model 3), and paternal and relationship controls (Model 4). In the final model, each coresidential transition was associated with a .79 decrease in coparenting, which represents 20% of a standard deviation in coparenting. Each dating transition was associated with a .63 decrease in coparenting, which represents 16% of a standard deviation in coparenting.

The second goal of the study was to examine whether mothers' coresidential and dating transitions had similar associations with coparenting. Although both coresidential and dating transitions were significant predictors of coparenting, a Wald test indicated that coresidential

transitions had a more pronounced impact on coparenting than did dating transitions, net of the controls [$F(1, 2537) = 4.96, p = .03$]. Our third goal examined whether maternal race/ethnicity and child gender moderated the association between partnership instability and coparenting (see Table 4). In Model 2, we found a significant interaction between Black race/ethnicity and coresidential transitions. Each coresidential transition was associated with a .57 decrease in the coparenting of Black fathers, relative to a 1.01 decrease for White fathers. We also found a significant interaction between child gender and coresidential transitions. Each coresidential transition decreased coparenting by 1.27 for boys relative to a decrease of 1.01 for girls. The association between dating transitions and coparenting did not vary by race/ethnicity or gender.

We tested the robustness of our models to selection by estimating a series of lagged and fixed effects models. With regard to the lagged models, we found that both coresidential transitions ($b = -.71, p < .001$) and dating transitions ($b = -.54, p < .001$) negatively predicted coparenting after including coparenting at child age 1 and the full set of controls. With regard to the fixed effects models, we found that changes in coresidential transitions ($b = -.43, p < .001$) and dating transitions ($b = -.33, p < .001$) were significantly associated with decreases in coparenting. Taken together, these more conservative tests of how partnership changes affected coparenting changes suggest that our OLS results were robust to concerns of selection bias.

Discussion

This paper addresses three primary research goals. First, we examine whether mothers' partnership transitions over the first five years following a nonmarital birth are associated with coparenting. Consistent with prior research on partnership instability (Beck et al. 2010), we find that both coresidential and dating transitions are negatively associated with coparenting and, importantly, the observed associations are robust to unobserved characteristics that may confound these relationships. These findings suggest that when a mother experiences multiple partnership changes, regardless of whether these changes occur within the context of cohabitation, the coparenting relationship with the focal child's father suffers. Our findings underscore the importance of accounting for mothers' dating transitions both theoretically and empirically to avoid underestimating the links between partnership instability and the well-being of parents and children, especially among fragile families.

Second, we examine the potential differences by transition type and find that transitions involving coresidential partners may have a stronger, negative impact on coparenting than those involving nonresident partners. Fathers may be more aware of or concerned about changes in mothers' coresidential partnerships (e.g., their children's exposure to men living in the same household) which may strain couples' ability to effectively work together to care for their children. Expectations for biological fathers' parenting role may also be unclear following coresidential changes (Guzzo 2009), especially if a new, cohabiting partner assumes a fathering role. Additionally, mothers may experience more stress in response to coresidential transitions, which could bias their perceptions of coparenting efforts.

Third, we examine whether associations between partnership transitions and coparenting vary by maternal race/ethnicity and the gender of the focal child. Our results suggest that coresidential transitions have a stronger negative effect on the coparenting perceptions of White mothers compared to Black mothers. These findings are consistent with prior research suggesting that Black families are less vulnerable to the effects of partnership instability than White families (Fomby and Cherlin 2007), perhaps because extended families play a greater role in the rearing of Black children. More research is needed to understand whether and how partnership instability differentially affects families from various racial/ethnic backgrounds. Our findings also suggest that the effects of partnership instability on coparenting may vary according to the child's gender. Although coresidential transitions significantly reduce coparenting among couples with both sons and daughters, the effect is stronger for boys than for girls. These findings are in line with evidence that relationship instability may be more detrimental for boys (Cavanagh, Crissey, and Raley 2008; Cooper et al. 2011) and may be of particular importance given the growing gender gap in education. Current rates of high school attrition are lower and college attendance and graduation are higher for girls than for boys (DiPrete and Buchman 2013). Moreover, the concurrent growth in the academic gender gap and increase in mothers' partnership instability suggest that the trends may be related (Cooper et al. 2011).

Our study is not without limitations. In trying to capture a broader range of partnership entrances or exits accounted for in prior research, including between wave partnerships, our measure of partnership instability is limited because it treats all transitions as qualitatively equal. It is reasonable to expect that some transitions matter more than others; for example, transitions into or out of a relationship with a biological father may have a different impact on coparenting than do transitions with a non-biological father. Additionally, although frequent transitions are likely related to increased complexity in families, transitions are not always negative or unwanted (Booth and Amato 2001). Future research is needed to better understand the implications of different types of transitions, in addition to the frequency of transitions.

Additionally, our measure of coparenting does not capture mothers' coparenting efforts. To address this concern, we examined fathers' reports of mothers' coparenting at Wave 4. The results suggest that maternal partnership instability had similar effects on fathers' and mothers' perceptions of the others' coparenting, with one exception: the interaction between partnership instability and child gender was not significant in models with mothers' coparenting. This is not surprising given that the effects of partnership instability on mothers' coparenting efforts by child gender would be expected to differ less for mothers than for fathers. An additional concern is the reliance on maternal reports. Mothers' perceptions of paternal involvement are more reliable than fathers' perceptions of their own involvement (McBride et al. 2005), but shared method variance could have accounted for some of the strength of relations. To the extent that mothers who experience high levels of partnership instability underreport coparenting efforts, associations between partnership instability and coparenting may be exaggerated.

Finally, couples comprised of fathers who had no contact with the focal child in two or three follow-up waves were excluded from the analytic sample. These couples differed in

important ways from those in our sample (e.g., maternal education and paternal incarceration). To examine whether our results were biased, we conducted analyses in which we retained these fathers and assigned them a coparenting score of zero. The results were consistent with those presented here.

Despite these limitations, our results contribute to a broader understanding of processes undergirding successful coparenting among diverse family structures and populations. Coparenting has been found to be predictive of supportive parenting practices and children's adjustment across developmental domains (e.g., Karreman et al. 2008), but this research has primarily focused on middle-class, intact families. Identifying the circumstances in which coparenting operates best is important, given that the coparenting relationship is distinct from other aspects of parental interactions and perhaps a stronger predictor of developmental outcomes for children (Feinberg 2003).

An additional next step in this research involves investigating *why* partnership instability influences coparenting. As discussed, partnership instability is stressful and coparenting across households is challenging especially in the presence of new romantic partnerships (Kamp Dush et al. 2011). Moreover, there is evidence to suggest that biological fathers may perceive less coparenting support (Bronte-Tinkew et al. 2008) or mixed messages from mothers about their new parenting role (Guzzo 2009). An alternative explanation is that unmeasured variables may lead to both partnership instability and to coparenting. The present study minimized this possibility by including a rich set of controls and by conducting robustness checks, but omitted variable bias may still exist.

Our findings contain a number of implications for research on mothers' partnership instability. First, our results add to growing evidence that instability in dating relationships is important for families, suggesting that future research should move beyond a focus on marital and cohabiting unions. Second, given the negative consequences of partnership instability reported here and elsewhere, more research is needed to identify factors that reduce partnership instability, especially among fragile families. Third, more attention should be given to child gender differences in the effects of partnership instability. If young boys are more vulnerable to partnership transitions than girls, then they may be at greater risk for academic and socio-emotional problems, which reduce boys' school readiness and potentially contribute to the gender gap in educational attainment (Cooper et al. 2011). Finally, this study has implications for policy aimed at strengthening families (Dion 2005). Of particular importance, our findings highlight the significance of relationship stability, regardless of the type of union, for promoting high quality coparenting among at-risk populations.

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Table 1Descriptive Statistics ($N = 2,568$)

	M / %	SD
Coparenting at Wave 4	8.18	3.99
Coparenting at Wave 3	8.76	3.48
Mothers' partnership transitions		
Coresidential transitions	1.04	1.04
Dating transitions	1.27	2.03
Maternal controls		
Age at baseline	23.76	5.43
Black (%)	56.54	
Hispanic (%)	27.06	
Other race/ethnicity (%)	2.49	
White (%)	13.91	
Immigration status (%)	11.73	
Less than high school (%)	37.62	
High school graduate (%)	35.12	
College experience (%)	27.26	
Poor at baseline (%)	42.13	
Almost poor at baseline (%)	28.31	
Non-poor at baseline (%)	29.56	
Residential moves	2.13	1.94
History of substance abuse (%)	4.95	
Family history of psychological problems (%)	38.40	
Nonjoint birth (%)	41.28	
Prior partnership instability	1.89	2.13
Living alone at baseline (%)	48.05	
Child controls		
Gender (% male)	52.06	
First born (%)	39.72	
Low birth weight (%)	11.25	
Paternal Controls		
Nonjoint birth (%)	44.28	
Ever had a social coresidential partner (%)	5.80	
Less than high school (%)	37.81	
High school graduate (%)	37.38	
College experience (%)	24.81	
Ever been in jail (%)	34.92	
History of substance abuse (%)	9.85	
Prenatal involvement (mother reported)	1.71	.62
Prenatal involvement (father reported)	2.51	.75
Relationship controls		

	M / %	SD
Conflict	2.72	2.37
Quality	8.39	1.66

Source: Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study.

Table 2

Differences in Mothers' Partnership Transitions and Coparenting by Child Gender and Maternal Race/Ethnicity

	Coresidential Transitions	Dating Transitions	Coparenting Transitions
Child male (<i>n</i> = 1,337)	1.05 ^a (1.05)	1.51 ^a (1.84)	7.98 ^a (4.06)
Child female (<i>n</i> = 1,231)	1.04 ^a (1.03)	1.42 ^a (1.79)	8.40 ^b (3.91)
Black (<i>n</i> = 1,452)	1.15 ^c (1.02)	1.75 ^c (1.80)	7.95 ^d (3.99)
Hispanic (<i>n</i> = 695)	.85 ^d (1.03)	1.06 ^d (1.56)	8.86 ^c (3.84)
White (<i>n</i> = 357)	1.02 ^{cd} (1.12)	1.10 ^d (1.61)	7.69 ^d (4.16)

Note: Means with standard deviations in parentheses. Means with different superscripts between males and females were significantly different at $\alpha = .05$, as determined by a two-sample *t*-test. Means with different superscripts among the race/ethnicity categories were significantly different at $\alpha = .05$, as determined by Duncan's Multiple Range Test.

Table 3Partial Results of OLS Models Predicting Coparenting at Wave 4 ($N = 2,568$)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Partnership transitions				
Coresidential transitions	-.91***	-.87***	-.84***	-.79*** ^a
Dating transitions	-.78***	-.74***	-.73***	-.63*** ^a
Maternal and child controls				
Age at baseline			.01	.02
Black			.85***	.94***
Hispanic			.78**	.87***
Other race/ethnicity			1.50**	1.38**
Immigration status			.14	.04
High school graduate			-.15	-.20
College experience			.02	-.30
Residential moves			-.04	-.01
Family history of psychological problems			-.26	-.12
Nonjoint birth			.16	.14
Prior partnership instability			-.01	.01
Living alone at Wave 1		-.62***	-.66***	.14
Child male			-.30*	-.31*
Child low birth weight			-.55*	-.49*
Child first born			-.11	-.27
Paternal and relationship controls				
Nonjoint birth				-.60***
Social coresidential partner				-1.40***
High school graduate				.23
College experience				.36
Ever been in jail				-.54***
History of substance abuse				-.09
Prenatal involvement (mother reported)				-.47***
Prenatal involvement (father reported)				.21
Relationship conflict				-.10**
Relationship quality				.28***

Note: Unstandardized coefficients presented. Models include the full set of controls.

^aThe difference between coresidential and dating transitions is statistically significant at $p < .05$.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

*** $p < .001$.

Table 4

Partial Results of OLS Models Predicting Coparenting at Wave 4 by Partnership Transitions and Interactions with Race/Ethnicity and Child Gender ($N = 2,568$)

	Model 1	Model 2
Coresidential transitions	-.91***	-1.01***
Dating transitions	-.78***	-.77***
Black		.33
Hispanic		.45
Black $\times$ coresidential		.44*
Hispanic $\times$ coresidential		.39
Black $\times$ dating		.15
Hispanic $\times$ dating		.01
Male		.01
Male $\times$ coresidential		-.26*
Male $\times$ dating		-.05

Note: Unstandardized coefficients presented. The reference group for race is White. Models include Other race/ethnicity and the full set of controls.

*
 $p < .05$.

**
 $p < .01$.

 $p < .001$.