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Father Involvement and Father-Child Relationship Quality: An Intergenerational Perspective

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SYNOPSIS

Objective—The present study looks at predictors that may be associated with father-child relationship quality and whether relationship quality appears to be transmitted across generations.

Design—This study includes 2,970 U.S. families who participated in the Fragile Families and Child Well-Being Study. Structural equation modeling was used to assess associations between fathers' relationship with paternal grandfathers (PGF) during their own childhood and when their own children are 1 year old, father involvement at age 1, and child reports of father-child relationship quality at age 9.

Results—PGF involvement with fathers during childhood was positively associated with the father-PGF relationship at child age 1, which in turn was associated with greater father involvement at age 1. More father involvement at age 1 was associated with child reports of better father-child relationships at age 9. The pathways from PGF involvement during fathers' childhood and father-PGF relationships at age 1 to father-child relationship quality at age 9 were fully mediated by father involvement at age 1.

Conclusions—Patterns of father involvement and the quality of father-child relationships tend to be passed down across generations. To ensure active, positive father involvement and its associated benefits for children, parenting interventions should focus promoting positive fathering behaviors to promote positive relationships with children in their own and future generations.

Keywords

Father-child relations; grandparents; father involvement

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Ethical Principles: The authors affirm having followed professional ethical guidelines in preparing this work. These guidelines include obtaining informed consent from human participants, maintaining ethical treatment and respect for the rights of human or animal participants, and ensuring the privacy of participants and their data, such as ensuring that individual participants cannot be identified in reported results or from publicly available original or archival data.

INTRODUCTION

Although fathering has become an area of great interest to scholars, the relationships between fathers and their children are less understood than fathers' involvement with children. Active involvement on the part of the father promotes positive development and outcomes for children (Adamsons & Johnson, 2013; Anderson, Kaplan, & Lancaster, 1999; Gavin et al., 2002; Nettle, 2008; McBride & Rane, 1997); however, little research has been conducted regarding the benefits or predictors of *relationships* between fathers and their children. Such lack of research is due at least partially to the fact that father-child relationships are complex, dynamic, and more contextually sensitive than mother-child relationships. They evolve to meet children's developmental needs as well as the needs and demands of the rest of the family, work obligations, personal beliefs, and often unclear or conflicting societal expectations; therefore, they are quite difficult to model (Palkovitz, 2007). What little research does exist suggests that relationships with fathers affect children's outcomes both in childhood and into adulthood (Adamsons, 2013; Harper & Fine, 2006; Mallers, Charles, Neupert, & Almeida, 2010; Seiffge-Krenke, Overbeek, & Vermulst, 2010). However, few investigations have gone beyond comparing resident and nonresident fathers' relationships with their children (Aquilino, 2006; Fabricius & Luecken, 2007; Jones-Sanpei, Day, & Holmes, 2009) to look at the processes and mechanisms behind such associations. As the literature on father-child relationships continues to grow, it is important to investigate the internal and external factors that contribute to fathers' relationships with their children. This study investigates how the relationship between fathers and their own fathers is associated with relationships between fathers and their own children, as reported by children at 9 years of age.

Father Involvement and Father-Child Relationships

Although father involvement contributes positively to child development, many factors influence the quality and frequency of father involvement (Ahrons & Tanner, 2003; Gavin et al., 2002; Goodsell & Meldrum, 2010; McBride & Rane, 1997; Nettle, 2008). One area of paternal involvement that has received considerable scholarly and policy attention is the father's financial contribution to the child and the mother of the child (Gavin et al., 2002), although meta-analyses have demonstrated that financial provision and contact with children alone are necessary but not sufficient to promote positive child outcomes in and of themselves (Adamsons & Johnson, 2013; Amato & Gilbreth, 1999). Goodsell and Meldrum (2010) found that fathers forming positive, nurturing relationships with their children resulted in children reporting that the nurturing and emotional aspects of the relationship between them and their fathers were significant and meaningful, even aside from the tangible experiences that they shared with their fathers. Fathers also often spend time with their children through active, physical involvement, and these experiences can promote opportunities for emotional connections (Coyl-Shepherd & Newland, 2013; Meyers, 1993). High-quality father involvement during childhood promotes higher employment rates, healthier relationships, and other favorable life qualities for the child well into adulthood (Nettle, 2008).

Due to more frequent availability, residential fathers are typically more easily able to be involved and form positive relationships with their children (Anderson et al., 1999). However, both resident and nonresident fathers vary in the quality of their relationships with their children. Fathers who lack romantic ties to their children's mothers are at particular risk of having poor relationships with their children, due to the numerous obstacles facing such parents (Fox & Blanton, 1995; Nixon, Greene, & Hogan, 2012; Peters & Ehrenberg, 2008), but having a coresident father in and of itself is not always associated with more favorable outcomes for children if such fathers are not involved in positive ways (Gavin et al., 2002). Based on this information, it is clear that children need more than just a father's physical presence for the most optimal outcomes, and even physically absent fathers can establish high-quality relationships with their children.

The availability of research on fathers and their relationships with their children is continually growing, but to date there is very little research on children's perspectives of their relationships with their fathers, especially as reported during childhood. Although there is literature investigating adults' relationships with their fathers, as reported in retrospect (e.g., Allgood, Beckert, & Peterson, 2012; Kalmijn, 2015), retrospective reports are never ideal and such reports contribute in only a limited way to the explanation of how fathers influence and function within the father-child relationship from a child's perspective.

Unique Challenges Facing Unmarried and Nonresident Fathers

With increasing diversity in family structure and the prevalence of non-marital childbearing, it is increasingly common for fathers not to share a residence with their children and not to be married to their children's mothers, creating relational elements unique to these families (Anderson et al., 1999; Combs-Orme & Renkert, 2009; Jethwani, Mincy, & Klempin, 2014; Rhein et al., 1997). Unmarried fathers, and particularly nonresident fathers, are faced with limitations derived from the additional time and financial constraints associated with having a child who resides in a different location (Anderson et al., 1999) or with a mother to whom they have a more tenuous romantic bond, with cohabiting fathers exhibiting lower involvement than married fathers (Landale & Oropesa, 2001). Additional costs can be significant as many unmarried and nonresident fathers are low-income/low-SES (Jethwani et al., 2014). Unmarried/nonresident fathers report resistance to their involvement from the coparenting mother, who often expect fathers to "buy" access to their children via contributions of formal or informal child support, and do not see the involvement of non-contributing fathers in other, non-financial ways, as desirable or beneficial for children. Such resistance also can significantly limit the amount of involvement fathers have with their children, although nonresident fathers with access granted through a legal custody agreement experience more contact with their children than those without such agreements (Combs-Orme & Renkert, 2009; Rhein et al., 1997).

Even apart from the financial constraints and limited access that often affect nonresident fathers, many men feel poorly equipped to build a meaningful, enriching relationship with their children (Jethwani et al., 2014; McBride & Rane, 1997). Many fathers report feeling that they do not know how to support a child in fundamental areas, such as education, for which they express self-blame (Jethwani et al., 2014). The child's mother often reinforces

these feelings of paternal inadequacy. McBride and Rane (1997) reported that only 20% of fathers felt that the coparenting mothers' expectations of them were positive. This negativity, when combined with insufficient resources, limited access to their child, and negative relationships with the coparenting mother discourages fathers from striving for active involvement with their children.

There is not a substantial amount of literature available on unmarried or nonresident fathers regarding their relationships with their children. Data are often produced from small convenience samples or mother reports of nonresidential father activities, which can be problematic, as such samples are by their nature nonrepresentative of the diversity of fathers and fathering behaviors, and mothers often are unaware of what nonresident fathers do with their children when mothers are not physically present (Combs-Orme & Renkert, 2009; Jethwani et al., 2014). There also is little to no research available on unmarried or nonresident fathers and their relationships, past or present, with their own fathers, much less how this relationship influences fathers' current involvement with their own children. Given its focus on unmarried families, the Fragile Families and Child Well-being Study (Reichman, Teitler, Garfinkel, & McLanahan, 2001) is uniquely positioned to answer questions about higher risk and understudied populations, such as unmarried and nonresident fathers.

Father-Grandfather Relationships and Father-Child Relationships

Men's beliefs, efficacy, and ideas about how to foster the father-child relationship are greatly shaped by their own experience and relationships with their parents (Beaton & Doherty, 2007; Bouchard, 2012; Fagan, Palkovitz, Roy, & Farrie, 2009; Floyd & Morman, 1998; Guzzo, 2011). The relationship that a father had with his parents, and specifically with his father, can be a source of motivation regarding the investment a father puts into relationship building with his child (Beaton & Doherty, 2007; Floyd & Morman, 1998). Beaton and Doherty (2007) found that the strongest attitudes towards fathering in a group of expectant fathers were from men who had either very close or very distant relationships with their own fathers. Of this population, the men who did not reside with their own fathers tended to have less favorable attitudes towards elements of fathering (Guzzo, 2011). Men who experienced a close relationship with their father seemed to model this closeness with their own children, whereas men who did not feel close to their fathers made an effort to compensate for this unfulfilling relationship by creating a closer relationship with their own children (Floyd & Morman, 1998). The quality of the father-grandfather relationship in expectant fathers has been seen to predict father attitudes 6 to 12 months postpartum (Beaton & Doherty, 2007). Yet, the reverse is not necessarily true; a father's engagement with his newborn is not necessarily an indicator of the father's relationship with his own father (Bouchard, 2012). Although the strongest fathering attitudes have been found in fathers aspiring to model or compensate for their relationship with their own father, the closeness of the father-child relationship is not always equivalent for these two groups (Floyd & Morman, 1998). Men who had more affectionate relationships with their fathers are better able to communicate affectionately with their children than men who did not experience an affectionate father-child relationship; thus, men whose own fathers modeled affectionate fathering behaviors can more easily form these desired bonds with their own children than men who strive to

compensate for their own negative experience without the benefit of positive behavioral models to emulate (Floyd & Morman, 1998).

In the absence of a positive biological father figure, some fathers find other role models. For example, Guzzo (2011) found that in her sample of over 3,000 fathers, fewer than ½ of the men had lived with their biological father. Of those living with their biological fathers, about 1/3 reported that their fathers were not actively involved in raising them, despite his physical presence, and 20% reported also having another father-figure in their lives. Approximately 1/3 of the sample did not co-reside with their biological fathers, but experienced some other form of father-like relationship, and approximately ¼ neither lived with their biological fathers nor had other father-figures. As such, there is great variability in the degree to which fathers see their biological fathers as viable role models, or had other men in their lives after which to model their own parenting.

The need for more information about how grandfathers influence future generations of father-child relationships is significant. The available information on intergenerational transmission of fathering primarily focuses on involvement prenatally through the first year of the child's life, which may not generalize to later father-child relationships (Bouchard, 2012). The research also has neglected to include studies on nonresidential fathers' involvement as influenced by their own fathers, only covering populations of residential fathers. Furthermore, although there has been informative work presented on children's perspectives about their fathers, the perspectives are derived from adults' retrospective reflections on their relationships with their fathers when they were children (e.g., Ahrons & Tanner, 2003; Kalmijn, 2015). Very little research has been conducted during childhood to investigate predictors of the child's contemporaneous perspectives of father-child relationships.

Social Learning Theory

Social learning theory offers valuable insights about the processes underlying possible intergenerational transmission of parenting behaviors. Bandura (1971) suggested that man is aided in the learning process by three distinct capabilities. First, people are capable of acquiring information through the observation of others. This allows people to gain an understanding of a wide range of behaviors and their consequences. Second, people have the cognitive ability to partly determine how consequences will affect them and how they will make accommodations to future behavior. Last, people can learn to regulate their responses to external stimuli, providing partial control over behavior.

Social learning theory proposes that humans learn behavior through the observation of others and witnessing the consequences (positive or negative) that they experience (Bandura, 1962). Through social learning, people are able to acquire knowledge and understanding at a faster rate by absorbing the experiences of those around them, rather than relying only on their own direct experience. This process begins in the early years of life, allowing people to form many of their daily habits and behaviors based on the ways that they see others perform.

In order for behaviors to become initial responses, an observer must be repeatedly exposed to a modeled behavior, as occurs with children witnessing the repetition of their parents' actions (Bandura, 1962). When parents must respond to a new scenario that they have yet to experience in the role of a parent, they often will retrieve the internal representations that were formed and stored from witnessing their parents responding to similar situations in their own childhood. Bandura (1971) refers to this phenomenon as delayed imitation because the response behavior is a one that has not been reinforced via trial and error and that must be retrieved from memory. Because these reactive behaviors have become cognitively ingrained through long-term, repeated exposure as a child, changing these behaviors often requires exposure to multiple direct negative consequences or other significant motivation (Bandura, 1971).

In light of the foregoing, we tested whether fathers' relationships with their own fathers (paternal grandfathers, hereinafter PGF), either while growing up or at the time their own children were 1 year old, were associated with their involvement with their own children when their children were 1 year old, and subsequently, with their children's reports of father-child relationship quality when children were 9 years old (see Figure 1). It was hypothesized that fathers whose PGF were involved during their childhood would have better relationships with PGF when their own children were 1 year old, and that their children later would report higher quality father-child relationships at age 9. It was further hypothesized that these associations would be mediated by father involvement with their own children at 1 year. It was not known whether residential status would moderate these associations, such that nonresident fathers demonstrated stronger, weaker, or similar patterns of intergenerational transmission of fathering when compared to resident fathers; however, the potential role of residential status was tested.

METHOD

Participants

The present study uses data from the child's birth, child age 1, and child age 9 of the Fragile Families and Child Well-Being Study (FFCWB; Reichman, Teitler, Garfinkel, & McLanahan, 2001). The FFCWB follows a birth cohort of 4,898 families from the time of the child's birth until the child is 9-years-old, obtaining information from mothers, fathers, and from children at age 9. Unmarried families were oversampled (approximately 2/3 unmarried vs. 1/3 married in the sample) due to the primary focus of the project being on "fragile families" where parents were not married at the time of their child's birth, and births were chosen at random from hospitals in 20 U.S. cities with populations over 200,000. Our sample was restricted to 2,970 families where the child completed an interview at age 9 (to report father-child relationship quality) and to 18 of the original 20 cities (2 cities were asked different questions on some variables).

Full descriptive statistics regarding the present sample are presented in Table 1. Generally speaking, fathers had an average age of 27, and approximately 2/3 of the sample had a high school education or less. Half of the sample identified as non-Hispanic Black, with another 1/4 identifying as Hispanic and less than 20% of the sample identifying as non-Hispanic White. Half of the fathers were not in a romantic relationship with their children's mothers

at age 9, and ¼ of the fathers had never lived with their child since the time of the child's birth.

Characteristics of the full sample and the restricted sample used here were compared. Fathers in the restricted sample did not differ from the full sample in terms of their education, their likelihood of cohabiting with the mother at the time of the child's birth, or the sex of their children. Fathers in the restricted sample were more likely to be married to the child's mother at the time of the child's birth, to be White or Black (relative to Hispanic or of Other racial/ethnic heritage), were slightly younger, had slightly more involved PGF during their childhood, and had better relationships with PGF at age 1 (full statistics available from corresponding author). It has been noted elsewhere that higher risk and less involved fathers were less likely to have been interviewed and more likely to have attrited or have missing data (Teitler, Reichman, & Sprachman, 2003). The current sample still demonstrated good variability in the constructs of interest, but limitations to generalizability given the differences in the samples should be noted.

Measures

Demographic characteristics—Fathers' age, race/ethnicity, education, and household income were assessed at the time of the child's birth via variables constructed by the FFCWB research team. Constructed variables were preferable to self-reported variables as there were fewer missing data and responses are considered more accurate due to the use of responses across multiple waves and reporters to construct the variables.

It should be noted that, with regard to race/ethnicity, fathers were asked which category "best describes your race" and a separate question about whether or not they were of Hispanic origin, and later fathers also were asked about their attachment to their "racial/ethnic group." The present literature and anthropological and sociological thinking support the use of the term "ethnicity" exclusively, and elimination of the term "race"; however, in the present manuscript we refer to the "race/ethnicity" of fathers rather than their "ethnicity" due to the phrasing of the questions in the FFCWB study.

Relationship with paternal grandfather—Fathers were asked at the time of the child's birth to report "How involved in raising you was your biological father?" Responses ranged from *Very involved* (1) to *Never knew my father* (4). When children were 1 year old, fathers were asked "How well do you get along with your father now?" Responses ranged from *Very well* (1) to *Not very well* (3). For both variables, responses were recoded so that higher response values represented greater involvement/better relationships.

Father involvement—At age 1, fathers reported on their own involvement with their children via a series of 5 items. Fathers were asked how often during a typical week they participated in activities with their children such as "Play games like "peek-a-boo" or "gotcha" with [child]," "Put [child] to bed," and "Hug or show physical affection to [child];" responses for all items ranged from 0–7 days per week. These five items had a Cronbach's alpha in the present sample of .90, and a measurement model tested in SEM showed good fit to the data ($\chi^2[5] = 69.90, p < .05$; CFI = .99; RMSEA = .066), with all items loading onto the latent factor with values greater than .6.

Father-child relationship quality—At age 9, children were asked to report on the quality of their relationships with their biological fathers. Children responded to five items asking “Does your dad talk over important decisions with you?”, “Does your dad listen to your side of an argument?”, and “How close to you feel to your dad?” Responses could range from 0 (*Never/Not very close*) to 3 (*Always/Extremely close*). Responses were coded such that higher values represented better father-child relationships. Cronbach’s alpha for the current sample was .90, and a measurement model tested in SEM showed good fit to the data, $\chi^2(5) = 93.04$, $p < .05$; CFI = .99; RMSEA = .077, with all items loading onto the latent factor with values greater than .6.

Father resident status—Father resident status over time was used as a moderator and was assessed in two ways (tested in separate models). First, we computed a dummy coded variable that indicated whether fathers were continuously nonresident and never had resided with their child (0), or reported residing with their child at some point during the child’s first 9 years (Birth, age 1, age 3, age 5, or age 9). Second, we calculated three categories representing fathers who were continuously resident at all waves (2), who were resident for at least one time point but not all time points (1), or who were continuously nonresident across all waves (3).

Analyses

Analyses were conducted using structural equation modeling in AMOS 20 and missing data were estimated via FIML. Data primarily were missing if a father was not included in a particular wave of data collection. At Wave 1 (birth), 2,402 fathers were interviewed (81%) and at child age 1 year, 2,207 fathers were interviewed (74%); of the 2,207 fathers interviewed at age 1 year, 151 (5%) had not been interviewed at birth. Only child data were used at age 9, and families were only included in the present study if their children were interviewed at age 9. Despite the somewhat high levels of missing data, we decided to include these participants and estimate missing data rather than lose their inclusion in the study completely due to missingness at one of the three waves, particularly given the high-quality estimates produced using FIML.

A model was estimated that associated fathers’ relationship with the PGF during childhood with his relationship with the PGF at age 1, both PGF variables with fathers’ involvement with their own children at age 1, and all three variables with children’s report of father-child relationship quality at age 9, while controlling for father age, education, race/ethnicity, and household income (see Figure 1). Two sets of multi-group analyses then were conducted in SEM to test whether models predicting father-child relationship quality were equivalent for continuously resident, continuously nonresident, and sometimes resident fathers. Model fit was assessed using chi-square, CFI, and RMSEA values; change in model fit for multi-group analyses was assessed using change in chi-square values.

RESULTS

Initial correlations between demographic variables and father-child relationship quality indicated that father age, education, household income, and race/ethnicity were significantly associated with father-child relationships; as such, these variables were entered into

structural equation models as controls (bivariate correlations available from first author). Initial correlations among variables of interest indicated sufficient associations to warrant further testing of the hypothesized model (see Table 2).

Structural Equation Models

In the model testing associations between controls, father relationships with PGF, father involvement, and father-child relationship quality, multiple associations were significant. First, all demographic variables were associated with father-child relationship quality. Father race/ethnicity was assessed via dummy coded variables (White vs. Black, Hispanic, and Other), and both Black and Hispanic fathers were significantly associated with father-child relationship quality. Children of Black and Hispanic fathers reported lower quality relationships relative to children of White fathers, $\beta = -.11, p < .01$ and $\beta = -.06, p < .01$, respectively; having the Other racial/ethnic background was not associated with father-child relationship quality. Fathers' age, $\beta = .05, p < .05$, education level, $\beta = .08, p < .01$, and household income, $\beta = .06, p < .05$, also were positively associated with father-child relationship quality, such that older, more educated, and higher income fathers had children who reported higher father-child relationship quality at age 9.

Regarding the primary associations of interest, results of the model indicated that, when fathers reported at the time of their children's births that PGF were more involved when the father was growing up, fathers also reported having better relationships with PGF at child age 1, $\beta = .49, p < .001$. The association between PGF involvement during fathers' childhood and father involvement with their own children at age 1 also was significant, $\beta = .06, p < .05$, and fathers who reported better relationships with PGFs at child age 1 also concurrently were more involved with their own children at child age 1, $\beta = .08, p < .01$. When fathers were more involved with their children at age 1, their children reported higher quality relationships with fathers at age 9, $\beta = .24, p < .001$, and father involvement at age 1 fully mediated associations between father-PGF relationships and father-child relationship quality at age 9 (no significant direct associations existed in the model between PGF variables and father-child relationship quality). Thus, the study results support the hypothesis that greater PGF involvement during childhood is associated with higher-quality father-child relationships, and that these associations are mediated by current relationships between fathers and PGF and current father involvement with their own children at age 1. However, the proposed structural model only provided a marginal fit to the data, with $\chi^2(122) = 2528.59, p < .05$; CFI = .88; and RMSEA = .08. Overall, this model explained 11% of the variation in age 9 father-child relationship quality (see Figure 2).

Fathers' resident status was tested as a moderator, first comparing fathers who were continuously nonresident across the 9 years to fathers who were resident at least part of the time (e.g., resident at Birth, but not at age 1, or nonresident at Birth, but resident at age 1 and age 9). The models did not differ by resident status, $\chi^2(7) = 12.4, ns$. Second, we compared continuously resident fathers with continuously nonresident fathers and fathers who were resident during at least one wave of data collection; these models also did not differ by resident status, $\chi^2(12) = 15.87, ns$.

DISCUSSION

The results based on data from the fathers and children of the Fragile Families and Child Well-Being Study support the original hypothesis that a father's relationship with the PGF and more PGF involvement during the father's childhood would lead to higher father-child relationship quality. The current study contributes to the explanation of these relationships by showing that this pathway is fully mediated by the father's involvement during the early years of the child's life. The early involvement of the PGF in father's childhood is related to the relationship quality between the PGF and the father at the birth of the child. Both PGF earlier involvement during the father's childhood and the current quality of the PGF-father relationship when the child is 1 year old predicted the father's level of involvement at age 1 of the child's life, which then was associated with child reports of father-child relationship quality when the child was 9 years old.

The current literature on the influence a PGF might have on the relationship his son has with his own children remains limited; this study supports and extends the available literature. Past studies have found that the relationship quality between a man and his father often predicts the level of involvement between the man and his child (Beaton & Doherty, 2007; Floyd & Morman, 1998). Although some men will make successful efforts to compensate for the negative relationships that they had with their fathers (Beaton & Doherty, 2007), this study reinforces that men who experienced an involved father as a child and have a positive ongoing relationship with their fathers are able to form stronger relationships with their children.

Social learning theory would propose that when a father is interacting with his child, he will naturally retrieve stored memories regarding past interactions with the PGF, which serve as a model for his own parenting behaviors. Therefore, although some fathers may strive to act differently if they perceive the PGF as a poor model, the natural reaction typically is for fathers to enact the same behaviors as the PGF (Floyd & Morman, 1998). For men who experienced positive relationships with their fathers, forming a positive father-child relationship with their own children will be easier, as they can simply reenact positive parenting behaviors performed by their fathers, rather than trying to enact new behaviors that they have never seen modeled. Fathers who did not experience their desired relationship with the PGF instead might reenact the negative behaviors that they witnessed, or might desire to behave differently, but will have more difficulty enacting positive parenting behaviors due to the lack of appropriate behavioral models (Bandura, 1971).

However, alternative explanations also exist. For example, it might be the case that fathers associate positive interactions and emotions with time spent with their own fathers which they wish, in turn, to cultivate and pass on to their own children. Too, work conducted using an Interpersonal Acceptance and Rejection perspective has found that a sense of parental (and specifically paternal) acceptance is panculturally influential to individual well-being, including lower levels of hostility and aggression, higher self-adequacy, greater emotional stability, and a more positive worldview (Rohner & Khaleque, 2010). Having a father who is involved in their upbringing therefore could facilitate fathers being available to and

accepting of their own offspring via its positive effects on fathers' mental health and overall well-being.

This study found that children with an involved father at age 1, perceived a stronger relational bond with their father at age 9, irrespective of father resident status over time. When spending time with their child, fathers often engage in physically active play and encourage children to face challenges (Coyle-Shepherd & Newland, 2013). In the current study, our measure of father involvement included measures of both recreational activities (playing games like peek-a-boo and "gotcha", singing songs and nursery rhymes, playing with toys or blocks) and of more nurturant care (hugging or showing affection, putting the child to bed). As fathers and children engage in such activities throughout the child's development, they are able to build emotional connections. The current study supports moving beyond the common "clicks and ticks" approach to measuring fathering (Hawkins & Palkovitz, 1999) and including more nurturant and emotional forms of involvement as well as less activity-focused constructs such as relationship quality. Even so, the current study still only assesses frequency of involvement in its involvement measure, not quality, and the quality of fathering has shown to be more meaningful than the simple frequency of interactions between fathers and children (Adamsons & Johnson, 2013; Guzzo, 2011).

It is noteworthy that age 1 involvement fully mediated the influence of PGF on father-child relationship quality in the next generation. Behaviors modeled by one generation seem to be reenacted by the next, setting the stage and creating relational trajectories for fathers to follow with their own children. These findings suggest that, if fathers can overcome inadequate or poor relationships with their own fathers to be involved in positive ways with their own children, then perhaps the intergenerational cycle of uninvolved fathering can be halted; however, it also appears that fathers are unlikely or unable to do so without intervention.

Although the father's resident status as a factor in father-child relationship quality has not been thoroughly investigated, past research has found conflicting results (e.g., Anderson, Kaplan, & Lancaster, 1999; Gavin et al., 2002). In the current study, the influence of the PGF on the father-child relationship was not significantly different for resident and nonresident fathers. Given that 1/3 of the current sample was continuously nonresident, 1/2 of the mothers and fathers in our sample were not romantically involved, and 2/3 of the original sample was unmarried at the time of the children's birth, it is likely that the obstacles and practical constraints faced by fathers in such vulnerable populations (e.g. maternal gatekeeping, lack of education/income, geographic distance from children) outweigh the influence of the PGF (a relatively distal influence) on the ability to be involved with their children, whether positively or negatively. The distal nature of PGF influence is further reflected in the fact that our model only predicted 11% of the total variation in father-child relationship quality. Therefore, it seems likely that resident status is more of a direct predictor of father involvement than a moderator of its association with father-child relationship quality. Although it is likely that more proximal barriers to father involvement that have the strongest influence on father-child relationship quality, it is perhaps optimistic to note that nonresident fathers are not particularly disadvantaged in terms of how involved

they are with their children at age 1 depending on their previous or current relationships with PGF, relative to resident fathers.

The current study has some notable limitations. First, only about 3/5 of the original sample had child interview data from age 9, which limits the generalizability of our sample relative to the original FFCWB sample. There also only were single questions retrospectively assessing PGF involvement during the fathers' childhood and the current father-PGF relationship at age 1 (with only 4 and 3 possible response options, respectively). Limited questions and limited variability in response options might have limited our ability to detect real associations between PGF involvement and relationships, although positive associations nonetheless were found. It would be beneficial if intergenerational studies could track PGF-father and then father-child relationships and involvement prospectively, rather than relying on retrospective measures.

Too, the measure of father involvement was only five-items, many focusing on direct involvement in activities such as reading or playing games, and so captured a relatively limited view of the ways in which fathers might be involved with their children. The measure did include items on showing love and affection and putting the child to bed, but greater breadth in forms and means of involvement and more items that tap the quality of behaviors rather than just frequency would be beneficial.

The current conceptualizations of resident status (continuously nonresident vs. at any time resident, and continuously nonresident vs. continuously resident vs. resident at least once) also might not be the best ways of conceptualizing this variable to find moderating effects. It could be that resident status at birth matters most for later involvement or relationships, or resident status at the year involvement or relationship quality were assessed. Future studies should examine such alternative approaches.

Finally, our model explained only 11% of the variation in father-child relationship quality, and the fit of the model was marginal. The marginal fit and limited variance explained suggest what one would expect – that additional variables and mechanisms are influential to father-child relationships by the time children are 9 years old. Likely factors include the ongoing quality of father-child interactions, father marital status (especially to a new partner), the coparenting relationship, father health, child expectations, fathers' employment, fathers' expectations and beliefs about fathering, fathers' other biological and non-biological children, and children's other involved father figures. Including all such predictors and mechanisms was beyond the scope of the current study, but given the number of other possible influences, we find it encouraging that such a distal factor as intergenerational relationships nonetheless explained a notable, if not substantial, portion of the variance in father-child relationship quality.

Despite these limitations, the current study had several strengths. The study draws on a large longitudinal study of fathers and children from both married and unmarried, resident and nonresident family structures. The sample was diverse in terms of both race/ethnicity and the education and income. Such diversity is valuable when attempting to disentangle the variety of influences on fathers and their relationships with their children across differing contexts.

Finally, the use of multiple reporters (fathers for predictor variables, and children for the outcome of interest) minimizes bias introduced by having the same person report on both predictors and outcomes. Future studies could be strengthened even further by obtaining PGF reports of involvement and possibly mother reports of father involvement with children (although in nonresident father families, using mother report can be problematic and introduce its own bias, as mothers are not always accurate reporters of what fathers do when mothers are not present).

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE, APPLICATION, THEORY, AND POLICY

Many implications can be derived from this study. First, there is a great need for fathering intervention programs. Father-focused programs provide opportunities for men to learn positive parenting behaviors that either can reinforce behaviors they already have seen modeled or can serve as alternatives to the behaviors that were modeled for them.

Reinforcing or learning positive parenting behaviors is important, as the current study suggests that parenting behaviors repeat across generations. The skills acquired through parenting services can provide men with the self-efficacy and talents needed for them to break the intergenerational cycle of uninvolved fathering and promote the formation of positive father-child relationships. Effective programs have the potential to teach positive parenting methods to fathers who can then model these behaviors for their own children, setting those children up for success as parents to their own children in the future.

Second, it is important to promote positive father-child relationships throughout the lifespan. The current study indicates that even beyond PGF involvement during childhood, a positive relationship between the PGF and the father when he begins his own parenting journey facilitates more father involvement with his own children early on. When providing family interventions, therefore, the whole family, including grandparents, should be considered for engagement in programs, as these intergenerational relationships continue to be associated with parenting behavior.

Finally, intergenerational effects on parenting need continued investigation. Although this study contributes to the limited literature on intergenerational father-child relationships, the nuanced and complex ways in which the broader family system influences father-child relationships remains largely a mystery. Information is considerably sparse as it pertains to possible intergenerational predictors of father-child relationship quality, beyond the frequency of the father's involvement.

Overall, the current study speaks to the importance of father involvement and father-child relationships, both for the current generation and for future generations of fathers and children. It is our hope that these relationships will continue to be recognized, explored, and supported at both a scholarly and practical level.

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Figure 1.
Proposed Model of Father Involvement and Father-Child Relationships Across Generations

Figure 2.

Model of Father Involvement and Father-Child Relationships Across Generations with Standardized Path Coefficients ($N = 2,970$)

Model fit: $\chi^2(122) = 2528.59, p < .01$; CFI = .88; RMSEA = .08

Note. Nonsignificant paths not shown.

* = $p < .05$. ** = $p < .01$

TABLE 1Descriptive Statistics for Demographic and Key Variables ($N = 2,970$)

Variables	<i>M</i>	(<i>SD</i>)
Father age (years) (birth)	27.56	(7.23)
Father household income (thousands) (birth)	37.84	(34.08)
Paternal grandfather involvement during fathers' childhood (birth)	2.00	(.96)
Father relationship with paternal grandfather (age 1)	1.95	(.87)
Father involvement (age 1)	32.27	(15.68)
Father-child relationship quality (age 9)	7.33	(5.23)
	<i>n</i>	%
Father education (birth)		
Less than high school	892	31.1
High school or equivalent	1107	38.6
Some college	588	20.5
College or higher	279	9.7
Father ethnicity (birth)		
White, non-Hispanic	546	18.5
Black, non-Hispanic	1605	54.4
Hispanic	690	23.4
Other	110	3.7
Mother-father relationship status (age 9)		
Married	809	27.2
Cohabiting	269	9.1
Dating, non-cohabiting	72	2.4
Nonromantic	1659	55.9
Sex of focal child (birth)		
Boy	1546	52.1
Girl	1424	47.9
Father resident status		
Continuously nonresident	737	24.8
Resident at some point	2233	75.2

Note. Some totals do not add to 2,970 due to missing data on that variable.

TABLE 2

Correlations among Model Variables ($N = 2,970$)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Father age										
2. Father education	.33**									
3. White	.17**	.31**								
4. Black	-.08**	-.12**	-.52**							
5. Hispanic	-.07**	-.20**	-.26**	-.60**						
6. Other	.03	.12**	-.09**	-.22**	-.11**					
7. Household income	.25**	.46**	.31**	-.23**	-.08**	.11**				
8. Paternal grandfather involvement during fathers' childhood	-.12**	-.19**	-.13**	.15**	-.04	-.03	-.15**			
9. Paternal grandfather Relationship at age 1	.02	-.10**	-.09**	.13**	-.06**	-.02	-.10**	.48**		
10. Father involvement age 1	.08**	.13**	.12**	-.13**	.03	.02	.11**	-.09**	-.10**	
11. Father-child relationship age 9	.12**	.16**	.14**	-.12**	.00	.02	.15**	-.08**	-.04	.22**

**
 $p < .01$