The Involvement of Young Men in Fathering: Like Father Like Son?

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Abstract

Drawing upon both quantitative and qualitative data, this study examines the relationship between the contact young men had with their fathers as youth, and their own involvement with children they have fathered. Our analyses are based upon the National Survey of Adolescent Males (1988, 1995) and in-depth interviews with single, low income fathers from a western city. We examine the modeling hypothesis -- that men model the parenting behaviors learned from their fathers, and the compensation hypothesis -- that men can rectify or compensate for the negative parenting behaviors of their fathers. We find support for both hypotheses. Overall we conclude that father involvement in family of origin is predictive of paternity among young adult men and influences their parenting behaviors.

Introduction

Over the last several decades, the involvement of men in child rearing has split along a continuum between "Good Dads" — men who are actively involved in child care, and "Bad Dads" — men who reject parental responsibilities (Furstenberg, 1988). Why some men are actively involved with their children, and others are not, is a critical question given the declining role of men in the family (Goldscheider and Kaufman, 1994). The commitment of men to their sex partners and the children they father has serious consequences for not only women and children, but also for men. Nonmarital births, in particular, have been linked to health risks and poverty among women and children, as well as poverty among nonmarital fathers (Nock, 1998; Da Vanzo and Rahman, 1993; Brown and Eisenberg, 1995).

To further explore the involvement of men in parenting, this study examines the experiences of young men in their roles as fathers. Among men who become fathers, the sexual unions they form, as well as their background experiences influence their early involvement in parenting. To date much of the fathering research has focused largely on married or divorced men, with less attention being given to never married men and how they define their roles as fathers (Marsiglio, 1995; Goldscheider and Waite, 1991; Gerson, 1993).

Models of Fathering

Determinants of father involvement are manifold, but they can be categorized broadly. Doherty (1998) presents an eco-systemic model of fathering, wherein he classifies five interrelated factors that determine father involvement: co-parenting relationship, mother factors, father factors, contextual factors, and child factors. Building on this model, Beaton and colleagues' (2003) study of expectant fathers found that family of origin factors affect a fathers own attitudes towards fathering and his expectations regarding his abilities. An intergenerational

family systems model offers similar conclusions. Values, practices, and beliefs are transmitted from one generation to the next (Beaton, Doherty & Rueter, 2003).

Past studies thus suggest that men are influenced by role models of fathering they have experienced in their own lives. In general, men that have had positive relationships with their own fathers exhibit positive parenting skills; conversely men that have had negative relationships with their fathers display negative parenting skills. This modeling hypothesis predicts that a father's behavior serves as a model for his son, thus increasing the likelihood that the son will identify with and imitate his father's example of parenting (Manion, 1977).

Interestingly, while psychological research supports the prediction that positive fathering produces sons who grow up to be good fathers, there is less evidence supporting a negative modeling hypothesis (that bad fathers produce sons who are also bad fathers). On the contrary, research indicates that the majority of men with negative childhood experiences do not replicate this pattern with their own children (see Floyd & Morman, 2000, for a review of studies).

The phenomenon of "crossing over," whereby men exhibit positive fathering behaviors despite having had negative experiences with their own fathers, is best explained by the compensation hypothesis. This perspective argues that, "men who are dissatisfied with the fathering they received will feel compelled to remake the fathering experience into something more positive for their own sons, thus compensating for a perceived lack of caring, nurturing, or involvement from their own fathers" (Floyd & Morman, 2000:349). The compensation hypothesis only accounts for crossover behavior where men go from "bad" to "good" (in terms of fathering experiences); it does not, however, account for the inverse relationship -- men who had positive experiences with their fathers but exhibit negative parenting behaviors.

Snarey (1993) concludes that fathers in general replicate the positive fathering they received and then try to rework the negative models of fathering they grew-up with. Research by Beaton and colleagues (2003) helps clarify further this relationship between modeling and compensation. In general, fathers seem both to model their positive family of origin experiences and compensate for their negative family of origin experiences. The curvilinear relationship between family of origin closeness and father involvement also holds for perceptions of own fathers' competence. Beaton and colleagues found that expectant fathers who had been either very close or very distant from their parents in childhood had more positive attitudes towards father involvement. Also, expectant fathers who believed their own fathers had been competent were likely to have more positive attitudes towards parenting (Beaton, Doherty & Rueter, 2003).

Daly (1993) argues that the involvement of men in parenting has been negatively influenced by the lack of appropriate paternal role models over time. Examining qualitative interviews, Daly concludes that there is a void of meaningful role models of fathering and that many men do not see their own fathers as good role models. Men who hold their fathers in high regard and consider their own fathers as role models are largely the exception. However, many men feel a need to provide a good role model of fathering for their own children and often try to imitate fathering behaviors from several different mentoring figures (Daley, 1993). Thus, more young men are currently faced with the responsibility of parenting without the benefit of having strong father figures in their own lives. In the absence of strong father figures, current fathers may draw from outside influences like men in their extended family, friends, or even their mothers to find characteristics they consider important to successful fathering.

Marsiglio and Cohan (1997) argue that one of the phases of adult male development involves the need to care for younger generations and transmit values to them. They conclude

that relatively young men often to not have the maturity and resources to respond to fathering in the same way as older, adult fathers. Thus, young men that become fathers without the support of positive father figures in their lives may be doubly disadvantaged in their ability to parent because of their immaturity and a lack of role models.

Additional Factors Influencing Father Involvement

Paternity is influenced in particular by the sexual relationships men form. Bumpass and colleagues (1991) argue that young people continue to form sexual unions at about the same ages they did previously, however, many more are now choosing cohabitation over marriage. Although cohabitation is less stable than marriage, one in six cohabiting couples have a child together during their union. Even more tenuous are dating relationships which account for the majority of nonmarital births (Bumpass, et al., 1991; Ventura, et al., 1995). Entry into both marriage and cohabitation vary by level of education and race. Black men have lower rates of marriage relative to whites which increases the nonmarital birth rate among black women (Lichter, et al., 1992; Ventura, et al., 1995).

Residence with children is an important factor mediating father involvement with children. Past research has found that non-custodial fathers exhibit a weaker attachment to their children than do fathers who reside with their children (Furstenberg, 1988). The likelihood that men reside with their children varies by race. Black children are less likely to live with two biological parents than are non-blacks; however, non-residential black fathers are more likely to remain in contact with their children than are white fathers (Eggebeen, et al., 1990; Mott, 1990). In addition, the employment status and educational attainment of fathers is positively related to the amount of economic support nonresidential fathers give their children, and economic support

is also influenced by the amount of contact that men have with their children (Rangarajan and Gleason, 1998).

The types of sexual unions men form with their partners are also strong predictors of men's involvement in parenting. Studies of young unwed fathers of AFDC children indicate that child support declines as the relationship with the mother of the child becomes more distant (Rangarajan and Gleason, 1998). However, not only do men's relationships with the mothers of their nonresidential children influence their involvement in parenting, but also do their current partnerships. Single men or men currently in cohabiting relationships are less likely to maintain contact with nonresidential children than are currently married men (Cooksey and Craig, 1998).

To examine the relationship between fathering role models and parental involvement among young men, we examine both quantitative and qualitative sources. The quantitative analyses model the effects of father contact in the family of origin, current marital status, and demographic factors on the likelihood of fathering a child based on a national sample of young adult men. In addition, among those that father children, we model the effects of these factors on the likelihood that the respondent lives with his children. The qualitative aspect of the study examines the way in which men define their parenting role relative to the relationship they describe with their own father. Drawing upon in-depth interviews with single, low-income men in an urban area, we outline the processes that motivate men to model or compensate for the parenting examples of their own fathers.

Quantitative Data and Methods

Sample

Data from the National Survey of Adolescent Males, 1988 and 1995 are used to model how contact with father of origin influences the likelihood that respondents have fathered a child,

and if they have, if they reside with their child. In 1988 a nationally representative sample of non-institutionalized adolescent males in the U.S. aged 15 to 19 was surveyed. A follow-up survey was given in 1990/91 and again in 1995. Background information on the family structure of the respondent at age 14 from the 1988 survey is used to predict the likelihood of fathering children by 1995. In 1995 the young men were between the ages of 22 and 26. Detailed information is available on their relationship with their children, both residential and non-residential, including financial support and contact.

Of the 1,880 young men surveyed in 1988, 1377 were surveyed in the 1995 follow-up. Sixty-five young men were dropped from the sample that had never had intercourse with a female. An additional two cases were excluded for missing data on marital status. The quantitative analyses are based on a sample of 1,310 young adult men. Of this sample, 420 reported having fathered a child by 1995.

Model Specifications

Two models are estimated based on the national survey of young adult men. The first models the effects of contact with father of origin, marital status, and other background and demographic factors on the likelihood of fathering a child by 1995. Of those fathering a child, the second model predicts the likelihood of a father residing with all of his children based on family background and current respondent characteristics.

In the first model, the dependent variable is coded one if the respondent reported fathering a child between 1988 and 1995, and zero otherwise. In the second model, the dependent variable is coded one if the respondent indicated that he lived with all of his children at the date of interview (1995), and zero otherwise.

The respondent's relationship with his father of origin is based on questions in the 1988 survey regarding his relationship at age 14. Respondents were asked about whom they were living with at age 14. If their parents were divorced or never married, respondents indicated if their father paid child support and how much contact they had with him at age 14. Based on responses to these questions, the measure is coded into three dummy variables: respondent was living with his father at age 14; respondent had weekly contact with his father and/or his father paid child support if his parents were divorced or never married; and respondent had little or no contact with his father or had no father living at age 14. Weekly contact and/or child support is the reference category. Similar categories were also constructed for respondents with children in 1995 to examine their involvement in parenting.

As an indicator of the socioeconomic status of the respondent's family of origin, his parents' education is measured. This variable measures the years of education of the parent with the most education reported in years. Race and ethnicity is also reported in the 1988 survey and is measured by dummy variables in the following categories: White, Black, Hispanic, and other race. White is the reference category.

Demographic measures of the respondent in 1995 are also used to predict residence with children in 1995. Age of the respondent in 1995 is measured in years and is included as a control in both models. Respondent's education reported in 1995 is measured by three dummy variables: less than high school, high school graduate only, and some college. High school graduate is the reference category. Current marital status as reported in the 1995 survey (also included in both models) is measured by four dummy variables based on the following categories: single, never married; married; separated or divorced; and cohabiting. Single, never married is the reference category.

The dependent variables in both the paternity and residence models are dichotomous thus the models are estimated using logistic regression techniques. The coefficients represent the log odds of fathering a child or residing with children as a function of the independent variables. Odds (exponent of the log odds) are reported in the tables and indicate the odds or likelihood of fathering a child versus not in table 2, and residing with all of their children versus not in table 3 as a function of the independent variables.

Prior to presenting the multivariate results, descriptive statistics are presented in table 1. In addition, a cross tabulation between the parental involvement of the father of origin at age 14 and the parental involvement of the respondent in 1995 with his own children is given in table 2. Finally, the results of the paternity and residence models are presented in tables 3 and 4. For each of these outcomes three nested models are estimated. The first examines only the relationship between contact with father of origin and paternity or residence, the second includes controls for martial status in 1995, and the third includes controls for other demographic factors.

Qualitative Analysis

Sample and Interviewing

Following the quantitative analyses, in-depth interviews with nonmarital, low-income fathers are explored to consider in greater detail how men define and perceive their familial responsibilities, particularly in relationship to the parenting they received from their own fathers growing-up. These interviews focus on single fathers because of the under-representation of disadvantaged single men and under-reporting of nonmarital fathers, particularly from economically disadvantaged backgrounds in national surveys (Lerman, 1993; Bachu, 1996).

The interview sample includes 37 fathers aged 20 to 41. All of the fathers experienced fatherhood outside of marriage and only two were legally married at the time of interview. Half of the fathers were white, 22 percent African American, 11 percent Hispanic, 8 percent Native American and another 8 percent reported being from other or multiple race and ethnic groups. Most of the fathers were employed at the time of interview with 11 percent reporting being unemployed. The education levels of the men varied: 22 percent had less than a high school education, 16 percent reported receiving their GED, 24 percent had a high school diploma, 24 percent had attended some college and 14 percent had completed a bachelor's degree. Thus, almost two-thirds of the fathers reported completing high school or less.

Interview participants were identified by an agency that services children in a low-income area of a western major city. The director of the agency advertised the study to patrons by posting notices in the agency soliciting participation from single fathers. Single fathers indicating interest provided their names and phone numbers to the agency director for contact by the study investigators. Potential subjects were contacted by phone and interviews were held in the agency office, generally after hours. Thus, interviews were conducted in a private and neutral environment.

At the beginning of each interview written consent from each subject to participate in the study was obtained; also the purpose of the study and steps to maintain confidentiality were explained. Interviews were conducted by male interviewers of similar age to the subjects between May of 2002 and April of 2003. Interviews were tape recorded and later transcribed by the interviewer for analysis. Subjects were given an honorarium for their participation.

The interview guide used a flexible format with leading questions. In addition to demographic measures, some questions were also drawn from the National Survey of Adolescent

Males for comparison. Questions regarding the mother of their first child, as well as current partners and later children were asked. Other questions focused on how respondents interpreted and defined their expectations, obligations, and experiences as fathers. The contributions men made to their children, both in terms of child care and financial support were also considered. In addition, questions related to the respondent's relationship with his own father, other role models, and peer influences were explored.

After transcription, the interviews were sorted based on the respondent's relationship to his own father through a process of memoing. Finally, diagramming techniques were used to map out relationships between the respondent and his father, and the respondent's involvement in parenting his own children (Marshall and Rossman, 1995; Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Lofland and Lofland, 1995).

Quantitative Results

Background and descriptive statistics based on the National Survey of Adolescent Males are presented in table 1. The first column gives percentages for the entire sample of young adult males. Overall, 74 percent of the respondents were living with their father at age 14 and just over half were still single by the 1995 interview (56 percent). About one fourth of the young men became fathers by the interview date. Of young men fathering a child by 1995 (column 3), a higher percentage were not living with their father at age 14 (36 percent) and a high percent were minorities (42 percent) compared to the total sample.

(Table 1 about here)

Education levels were also lower among those that had become fathers – both the education level of their parents and the education of the respondent. Among respondents not residing with all of their children (column 4), less than half were living with their own father at

age 14 (45 percent). Half of these fathers were also African American and over one third had not finished high school. Of young fathers not residing with their children, almost thirty percent had weekly contact with their children and paid child support, yet about a third had less than weekly contact and paid no support at all. Eighty-two percent of the fathers residing with their children (column 5) were married, in contrast 55 percent of the fathers not residing with their children were single, never married.

These percentages suggest that young men fathering children and not residing with them are more likely to be from low socioeconomic backgrounds, to have not lived with their fathers at age 14, and to be single and less educated than other young men their age. About 35 percent of those fathering children did not reside with them, whereas just over half were married and residing with children (54 percent). The remaining 11 percent were living with children and cohabiting with their partner. Overall, one fourth of the young men sampled became parents by the 1995 interview and of these fathers, 65 percent were living with all of their children.

Cross tabulations between the respondent's relationship with his father at age 14 and his relationship with his own children, shown in table 2, indicate that of the total fathering children in 1995, about half modeled positive fathering (residence with children), another one fourth compensated for negative fathering (more involved than their fathers had been), and another fourth either modeled negative fathering or were less involved with their own children than their fathers had been growing-up.

(Table 2 about here)

To explore these relationships further, we turn to the multivariate analyses. Table 3 presents the odds of fathering a child by 1995 versus not for the sample of young adult men. Model 1 in table 3 indicates the relationship between the respondent's contact with his father at

age 14 and the likelihood of paternity by 1995. Young men that were living with their fathers at age 14 were 33 percent less likely to have fathered a child by 1995 than those that had weekly contact and/or child support from their father. In contrast, those young men that had little or no contact with their father at age 14 were almost two times more likely to have fathered a child by 1995 as those with some father contact. Model 2 shows these same effects after controlling for marital status in 1995. The relationship with their father is an even stronger predictor of paternity after controlling for marital status. Those living with their father at age 14 were almost 50 percent less likely to have fathered a child compared to those with some contact with their father. Those with little or no contact were 2.5 times more likely to have fathered a child.

(Table 3 about here)

Marital status is a strong predictor of paternity by the 1995 interview. Those men ever married were much more likely to have fathered a child compared to single, never married men. The final column in table 3 includes controls for parental education, age, and race and ethnicity. Higher parental education reduced the likelihood the respondent fathered a child by 1995. Black men were almost seven times more likely to have become fathers and Hispanic men over two times more likely compared to white men. The effect of living with their father at age 14 is no longer significant after controlling for demographic and socioeconomic factors, but having little or no father contact continues to double the likelihood of paternity relative to some contact. These findings suggest that the less contact the respondent had with his own father as a teen, the more likely he was to be a father as a young adult.

Of those fathering children by 1995, table 4 indicates the likelihood that they were residing with all of their children at the interview date. Model 1 gives the relationship between contact with their father at age 14 and the likelihood of residing with their children. Those that

lived with their father at age 14 were about 3.5 times more likely to reside with all of their children than those with only some contact with their father. This finding supports the modeling hypothesis. However, this effect is reduced once marital status is controlled for. Overall residence with children is heavily dependent upon the respondent's marital status. Obviously currently married and cohabiting men are more likely to be living with their children than single men. Model 3 also indicates that respondent's with less than a high school education were about 80 percent less likely to be living with their children compared to more educated men.

(Table 4 about here)

The quantitative analyses suggest that young men from non-intact, low socioeconomic, minority families are more likely to have fathered children as young adults relative to those from intact, high socioeconomic families. In addition, young fathers that are single and fathers that have not completed high school are less likely to be living with their children. Thus, family background appears to be predictive of paternity, whereas the respondent's current circumstances are particularly predictive of his residence status with his children. It is likely that young men draw upon parental relationships they had as a youth to shape their fathering behavior, but do so within the context of their current circumstances.

As argued by Marsiglio and Cohan (1997), we expect that young men with limited resources and poor fathering role models are particularly disadvantaged in developing positive parenting behaviors. Understanding of what motivates these men to model their father's parenting or to compensate for poor fathering requires in-depth interviews. Focusing on interviews with 37 single, low income fathers, we explore the ways in which these men define their fathering role relative to the role modeling they received from their biological father.

Qualitative Interviews

Categories of Fathering

Interview information regarding the respondent's relationship with his own father during childhood was used to group the respondent's into four categories: (1) respondents that had little or no contact with their father at all, (2) respondents that had a negative relationship with their father (generally resulting in abuse), (3) respondents with an ambiguous relationship – generally not getting along with their father during childhood or adolescence, but later as an adult, expressing respect for him, and (4) respondents describing a positive relationship with their father, generally in a two-parent family. We look at these categories of fathers separately.

Positive Father Experience

Nine of the respondents interviewed indicated that they had a positive relationship with their father growing-up. Typically, they described being close to their father as a youth and indicated that they continue to be so as adults. Most of these respondents were raised in intact families. Those not raised in a home with both parents were raised by parents with joint custody. When asked about positive role models growing-up, most named their own fathers as the primary father figure in their lives. Mothers and other close family members such as uncles, grandfathers, and brothers were also named. When asked where they had learned how to be a father, several said that they had learned from watching both their father and mother. Thus, these men had fathers that not only modeled positive parenting behaviors, but also positive marital interaction.

Of the men describing a positive relationship with their father, all were either living with their children or had shared custody with the children's mother. Men that shared custody with their children's mother tended to have at least a cordial relationship with her. They noted that an

open and communicative relationship with the children's mother was an important part of their ability to father. One respondent expressed it this way:

> Emily is happy, and that's the bottom line on everything, so as long as Emily is happy we both… that's why we don't argue. Easy winner. We just have to say whether or not Emily is happy…. The mom respects my opinion, so we just discuss what is in the best interest of Emily.

By and large, these fathers modeled their own fathers' behaviors. They expressed a desire to be there for their children and provide for them financially and emotionally, much like their own fathers had. They were involved in the physical caretaking of their children and made efforts to provide substantial financial support. In the few cases where the father was not living nearby his child, he still indicated a desire to be a good parent. One father whose daughter was living in another state with her mother remarked that he wanted his daughter to have a close relationship with her mother, but also to feel like she could tell him anything.

Although these men reported a positive relationship with their fathers during their childhood and youth, many still expressed a desire to be even closer to their children than their fathers had been to them. In some cases this type of compensation involved having a better relationship with the mother of their children. These fathers seemed extremely concerned about protecting their children from the harmful effects of a poor relationship with their child's mother. In particular, those who were not living with the child's mother wanted to make sure that their child still had adequate time with both parents.

Compensating behaviors were also apparent in parenting skills. Several fathers indicated a desire to improve their anger management skills if these were skills their own fathers lacked. Having said this, most of the men were realistic about their own fathering abilities and the challenges that they and their fathers faced. They understood the pressures of work and the

financial difficulties that often prevented their fathers from being home as much as they would have liked, and they related their own concerns about these stresses.

No Father Experience

Five of the respondents had very little or no contact with their fathers generally because of divorce or death. Most were raised by their mothers, although some were in foster care or state custody much of their youth. The men in this group talked about not having a father in their lives. Some named a close relative, usually a stepfather or grandfather, as their father figure. Others typically looked to teachers, coaches, or celebrities and athletes for role models. Most tried to compensate by having some involvement with their own children. One respondent was quite aware of his own compensating tendencies as he tried to make up for the lack of contact he had with his father growing-up. He described it this way:

> I think the majority of the people either follow in the footsteps or do the exact opposite and try and overcompensate maybe and try to totally be there. I think I try to do that, I think I want to try to always be there for [my son] whenever... the little things bug you about not having a father around you... the little things at school or whatever.... I try to always be there for those situations, especially the little, everyday things. When I was growing up that was what bugged me the most, was the little tiny things that people wouldn't think about every day. I think that's what really eats at you.

Although they expressed a desire to be good fathers, many of these men did not seem confident in their fathering abilities. They wanted to be a good parent, but often were hesitant about how to parent positively. One father explained, "I also don't trust my judgment all of the time because I had no role models so I don't know if what I'm saying is right." Another respondent indicated that he felt:

> A lot of unworthiness. I don't think I'm cool enough a lot of the time. The reality is that I'm a father. I wish I had someone like a grandpa to go to. I wish I had a father figure that I could get guidance from. I don't have that. [The hardest part is] doing it alone and not being equipped. Not having a support system or other sources to draw from.

In some cases, men expressed concern about how to discipline constructively and control their anger, since many of the disciplinary experiences they had as a child were negative.

Overall, these men wanted a positive relationship with their children, but seemed unsure about how to be a good parent given that had little or no role modeling from their biological father. Instead they had to look elsewhere for role models.

Negative Father Experience

Eight of the respondents indicated they had a negative experience with their father while growing-up. Typically, they described their father as abusive, an alcoholic, or emotionally distant. In most cases, the men grew-up in homes where their parents were separated or divorced and most were raised by a single mother. In some cases they lived in homes with a stepfather or their mother's cohabiting partner. When asked about their role models growing-up, most named a celebrity actor or athlete. Others mentioned another male family member, such as a stepfather, grandfather, uncle or brother. In some cases they named their own father, but the response was in terms of paternity, not because they had an emotional bond or connection with him.

These respondents in general had less contact with their children than the other fathers, and were more likely to have fathered children with multiple partners. Some were living with their children, others had joint custody with the children's mother, and others had no contact with their children at all. Those that fathered children with multiple partners often had little or no contact with some of their children, while living with others. In some of the no contact situations, the respondent had given up his parental rights, whereas in others he was denied contact by a previous partner.

In most cases these respondents were more concerned about their relationship with their children, than the relationship with their children's mother. These men described their desire to

compensate for the poor relationship they had with their own father. They expressed a concern to not repeat their father's negative behavior. One respondent indicated that "everything my dad did, I don't want to do to my kid." Another father said, "I don't use any physical or verbal [discipline] that might hurt them. I'm just there for my kids."

These fathers had to look elsewhere for positive role models. One young man, whose father had been an alcoholic, named a friend of his as his role model. When asked why he felt his friend was a good role model, he responded, "Because he doesn't drink. He's not like my father, I think. That's why I think he's a good father." This particular respondent remarked several times how he had been affected negatively by his father's alcohol abuse and how he did not want his children to experience the same. About his fathers drinking, he said, "I just seen my dad. He was the worst person when he was like that and I don't want to be so my kids don't want to come around me, they just want to stay in their rooms and avoid dad. I don't want that. "

In addition to looking to others for role models, respondents indicated that they often had to learn on their own how to be a father. Many remarked that they learned parenting skills by trial and error. One father explained, "I kind of took some from my dad; some from just... experiencing just being there, being a dad and trying to know what you're doing. Trying to figure out what you're doing."

Overall these fathers tended to compensate for their own fathers' shortcomings in their relationships with their children, or at least expressed a desire to do so. Barriers to correcting their own shortcomings included a lack of understanding how to discipline constructively, and strained relationships with the mothers of their children that inhibited contact with their children. Thus in general, those that had negative experiences with their fathers as children desired to not repeat the negative behaviors of their fathers.

Ambivalent Father Experience

The largest category of respondents typically had some relationship with their father, but it was strained for various reasons. Many of these men were raised by a single mother or a mother and stepfather. Others raised in homes with their biological father expressed resentment towards their father because of emotional distance. The majority of these fathers did not live with their children, but had joint custody with their mother.

Most of these respondents exhibited some degree of respect for their father, despite not always agreeing with him as a parent. They seemed to feel some sort of filial bond towards him by virtue of the fact that he was their biological father. The respondents' attitudes towards their fathers were generally respectful, but carried some disappointment or anger. Many remarked that after becoming fathers themselves, they understood their own fathers better. Their strained relationship with their father often improved over time as they matured.

Because of differences of opinion, many of these men expressed a desire to both model their father in some ways and yet raise their children differently in other ways. In terms of modeling their fathers, one respondent remarked that "the way I raise my son is the way [my parents] taught me." Others indicated a desire to do better than their father as a parent. One young father stated, "my parents weren't that loving and so I figured, 'Hey, I don't need to be like that.' And I won't be."

In an effort to compensate, these men often took qualities from not only their biological father, but also from other men they interacted with. One young described several different models of fathering:

> Probably part of it [came] from my father himself as far as the working goes and providing for your family. Structuring my life from my mom. Caring compassion from my friend's father. Going out and having a good time and being kind of carefree, spend time with your child and doing things from my other friend's father.

In addition, they also relied on instinct or trial and error to develop parenting skills. As one respondent explained, "I just basically learned from myself. I don't have my dad there to teach me – he needs help himself."

Finally, these fathers in general were less concerned about their relationship with the mother of their children in trying to parent. They recognized the importance of their children having contact with both parents, but focused more on avoiding conflict in front of their children than reducing conflict with the children's mother in general. As one young man explained:

> We decided when we split up we're like you know, I told her... you can hate me forever and I can hate you forever but don't ever tell [our son] that. He doesn't need to hear that. Because I grew up that way... hearing my mom trash my dad and my dad trash my mom and it just kind of messed with my head. I don't want to do that to him.

Overall, these men were likely to both model some qualities of their father, and compensate for others. In general, they respected their father, but saw him as emotionally or physically detached. These men looked to other role models in an effort to be more involved in their children's lives.

Discussion

Drawing from both the quantitative survey results and the qualitative interviews, we find that in general, fathers both model the positive and compensate for the negative parenting they received in their family of origin. Particularly drawing upon the qualitative interviews, we also concur with Beaton and colleagues (2003) that fathers who had been either very close or very distant from their fathers in childhood have more positive attitudes towards parenting. Men that had very positive experiences with their biological father during childhood were the most likely to model their father's parenting. On the opposite side of the curve, those men that had little or no contact with their father also had positive attitudes towards parenting, but were more unsure

about their ability to do so. In contrast, men that had an ambivalent or negative experience with their biological father were more apprehensive about parenting. They were particularly fearful of perpetuating the abuse they received as a child.

Almost half of the young fathers in the national survey lived with their father at age 14, and were living with their own children at the interview date. These men were essentially modeling the parenting behaviors of their fathers. This supports the findings of Beaton and colleagues (2003), that expectant fathers who viewed their own fathers as competent were likely to have positive attitudes towards parenting. The experiences of these men support the modeling hypothesis (Manion, 1977). The vast majority of the young fathers in this modeling category (88 percent) were married to their partner. Thus, not only were these young men generally modeling the parenting behavior of their fathers, but also the marital behavior of their fathers.

Although our in-depth interviews were with single fathers generally, most of the men indicating a positive relationship with their biological father were living with their children or had joint custody at the time of interview. These men were very positive about their role as fathers and looked often to their biological fathers for role models. They generally were not only concerned about positive parenting, but also about having a positive, communicative relationship with the mother of their children. These men sought to build and improve upon the example from their fathers.

About one fourth of the fathers in the national survey were not living with their father at age 14, but were either living with their own children or had more contact than modeled by their biological father. These men support the compensating hypothesis (Floyd & Morman, 2000). About half of these men (51 percent) were married to their partner and about 16 percent were

single, never married men. Most of these men had little of no contact with their biological father at age 14, yet most were living with their children at the interview date.

The in-depth interviews with single, low-income fathers that had little or no contact with their biological father as a child generally indicated a positive attitude towards parenting. These men expressed a desire to be there for their children, but also noted that they lacked fathering role models. To compensate for the lack of role modeling in their lives, they turned to other men (stepfathers, coaches, friends, etc.), or their mothers for parenting examples. This finding supports the conclusions drawn by Daley (1993) that men will look to extended kin and other networks for role models.

The remaining one fourth of fathers in the national survey either modeled the negative behavior of their biological father, or was less involved with their children than their own father had been in their lives. Only 12 percent of these fathers were married, whereas 58 percent were single, never married fathers. This group includes not only those that followed the negative patterns of their fathers, but also those that digressed from the positive modeling they had received as a youth. The national survey, however, only defines positive modeling in terms of residence and child support. The in-depth interviews provide greater insight regarding the possible quality of these relationships.

Based upon the in-depth interviews, several of the men said they had a negative relationship with their biological father or were very ambivalent about their relationship with him. In some of these cases, their father had been present, but abusive or an alcoholic. These men generally focused on the negative behaviors modeled by their fathers and desired to not continue those behaviors with their own children. Their biggest concern was not repeating this

abusive or emotionally lacking relationship in parenting their own children. These men wanted to have a positive relationship with their children, but were often unsure how.

Overall, these findings suggest that many young men lack positive role models in their lives. In general, most desire to be good fathers and seek to either model or compensate for the relationship they had with their biological father. However, the overall positive parenting desire expressed by the fathers in our in-depth interviews is likely due in part to the selection bias of the sample. The fathers with children at the agency opting to be interviewed were likely more involved with their children than some of the single fathers captured in the national survey. Further research is needed to better understand the motivations and needs of young fathers – particularly single fathers from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

But based on our findings, we conclude that young men need greater support and assistance to be good fathers – particularly those parenting outside of marriage. Young men need socioeconomic resources so that they are better able to marry and live with their children. They need support and training in positive discipline and anger management so that they do not repeat the abusive behaviors they experienced as children. In addition, they need skills not only in parenting, but also in building more positive relationships with the mother's of their children. Greater support and commitment is needed by educators and family policy makers to provide men the tools and role models needed to successfully parent.

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Table 1. Background and Demographic Characteristics of Young Men by Paternity and Residence with Children (Percentages)

Characteristics	Total Sample	Fathered Children		Reside with Children	
		No	Yes	No	Yes
Relationship to Father at age 14					
Lived with father	74.3	77.9	63.6	45.1	73.4
Weekly contact or child support	14.2	13.4	16.5	25.2	11.8
< weekly contact or no father	11.5	8.6	20.0	29.7	14.8
Parent's education					
Mean	13.11	13.48	12.01	11.75	12.15
(Stddev)	(3.02)	(3.00)	(2.79)	(2.58)	(2.89)
Race and ethnicity					
White	72.7	77.5	58.4	36.0	70.4
Black	14.9	11.4	25.3	50.8	11.6
Hispanic	9.2	7.9	12.9	9.5	14.8
Other Race	3.2	3.1	3.4	3.8	3.2
Age (1995)					
Mean	23.80	23.67	24.18	23.93	24.31
(Stddev)	(1.40)	(1.41)	(1.32)	(1.33)	(1.30)
Respondent's Education (1995)					
Less than high school	11.3	6.7	24.8	34.8	19.4
High school graduate only	28.0	23.3	41.8	40.7	42.4
Some college	60.6	69.9	33.3	24.2	38.2
Marital Status (1995)					
Single never married	55.8	67.9	20.1	55.2	1.3
Married	26.5	15.8	58.1	13.0	82.2
Separated or divorced	3.1	2.0	6.5	17.9	0.4
Cohabiting	14.6	14.3	15.3	13.8	16.1
Contact with own children (1995)					
Reside with all children			65.2	--	100.0
Reside with some children			6.0	17.3	
Weekly contact and child support			9.9	28.6	
Weekly contact or child support			7.0	20.2	
< weekly contact & no child sup.			11.8	33.9	
[N]	[1310]	[890]	[420]	[207]	[213]

Source: National Survey of Adolescent Males, 1988, 1995
Note: Sample statistics are weighted to approximate population parameters; N's reported are unweighted

Table 2. Cross Tabulation between Relationship with Young Man's Father at Age 14 and His Relationship with His Children in 1995 (Percent of Total)

Relationship with father at age 14	Relationship with Own Children 1995: Live with children	Weekly contact &/or child support	< Weekly contact, no child support	Total
Lived with father	158 (47.9%)	32 (9.7%)	20 (6.1%)	210 (63.6%)
Weekly contact &/or child support	25 (7.6%)	19 (5.8%)	10 (3.0%)	54 (16.4%)
< Weekly contact/no child sup./no father	32 (9.7%)	25 (7.6%)	9 (2.7%)	66 (20.0%)
Total	215 (65.2%)	76 (23.0%)	39 (11.8%)	330 (100.0%)

Source: National Survey of Adolescent Males, 1988, 1995

Notes: Sample percents are weighted to approximate population parameters; cell counts reported are also weighted.

Pearson Chi-Square $p < .001$; unweighted N = 420.

Table 3. The Likelihood of Young Man Being a Father by Relationship to Own Father, Current Marital Status, and Demographic Factors

Characteristics	Model (1) Odds	Model (2) Odds	Model (3) Odds
Relationship to father age 14			
Lived with father	.67*	.54**	.66
Some contact with father (reference)	1.00	1.00	1.00
No contact or no father	1.89**	2.58***	2.07**
Current marital status (1995)			
Married		15.10***	24.95***
Cohabiting		3.22***	4.36***
Separated or divorced		13.10***	17.36***
Single never married (reference)		1.00	1.00
Parent's education (in years)			.867***
Age in 1995			1.09
Race and ethnicity			
White (reference)			1.00
Black			6.65***
Hispanic			2.22**
Other race			1.19
- 2 log likelihood	1440.09	1139.81	1019.93
Model chi-square (df)	33.14 (2)	333.42 (5)	453.30 (11)
Cox & Snell R square	.025	.226	.294
[N]	[1310]	[1310]	[1310]

Source: National Survey of Adolescent Males, 1988, 1995

Note: Sample statistics are weighted to approximate population parameters; N's reported are unweighted

* p<.05 ** p<.01 *** p < .001

Table 4. The Likelihood of Young Father Residing with His Children by Relationship to Own Father, Current Marital Status, and Demographic Factors

Characteristics	Model (1) Odds	Model (2) Odds	Model (3) Odds
Relationship to father age 14			
Lived with father	3.48***	2.31	1.23
Some contact with father (reference)	1.00	1.00	1.00
No contact or no father	1.07	.51	.37
Current marital status (1995)			
Married		249.40***	332.67***
Cohabiting		67.09***	88.34***
Separated or divorced		.59	.44
Single never married (reference)		1.00	1.00
Respondent's education (1995)			
Less than high school			.19**
High school graduate			1.00
Some college			.58
Age in 1995			.90
Race and ethnicity			
White (reference)			1.00
Black			.39
Hispanic			.69
Other race			.30
- 2 log likelihood	401.05	186.44	167.98
Model chi-square (df)	25.68 (2)	240.29 (5)	258.75 (11)
Cox & Snell R square	.075	.517	.543
[N]	[420]	[420]	[420]

Source: National Survey of Adolescent Males, 1988, 1995

Note: Sample statistics are weighted to approximate population parameters; N's reported are unweighted

* p<.05 ** p<.01 *** p < .001