

**Fatherhood, Couple Commitment &  
Relationships with Co-Residential Children  
in the United States**

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## *Abstract*

Research on men in families has increased dramatically over the past several decades. Once considered breadwinners for families, today's men are expected and encouraged to fully participate in family life and childrearing. While at the same time, demographic changes such as increases in divorce, nonmarital childbearing, and cohabitation have shifted the context of childrearing from co-residence with two, married biological parents, to a variety of family forms. Today's men have new opportunities to "parent" than in the past. Men are now making choices to engage in family life, and often these choices include living with the children of his current partner.

Although some studies have investigated how men opt in and out of fatherhood roles, few, if any, have looked at the impact of commitment on these choices. How a man adapts to the fatherhood role may be directly linked to the level of commitment he attaches to his romantic relationship. This paper advances the knowledge of men in families by examining men's family commitment and how it impacts the time he spends with co-residential children.

Using a nationally representative sample of American men, this paper uses both OLS regression and structural equation modeling to investigate the pathways in which men's commitment to family affects the time he spends with children. Together, these models reveal how men's level of commitment facilitates or impedes their involvement with co-residential children. Robust models and results support the research hypotheses, emphasizing the importance of including a measure of commitment in studies of the family.

Research on men in families has significantly increased over the past several decades. This is due, in part, to the shifting role of men within the family. Once seen as the breadwinner for families, today's men are now expected and encouraged to participate in childrearing and overall family life. Formerly removed from day to day child care, today's "new father" is expected and encouraged to be involved with his child immediately after birth, and continue to nurture and engage with him or her throughout his child's life (Pleck 1987). While some evidence suggests that men, especially younger men, are taking a more active role in their child's life, the question moves to whether these same expectations hold when men are "fathering" someone else's child?

Demographic changes, such as increases in divorce, cohabitation, and nonmarital childbearing, have exposed men to new roles within families. Both divorce and nonmarital childbearing have removed the role of parenting from many men's lives since after union dissolution children are more likely to remain with their biological mother. While at the same time, increases in remarriage and cohabitation have created other opportunities for men to become "fathers." Although men may not live with their own biological child, they are increasingly more likely to co-reside with someone else's child, taking on a different "father" role. Today, one-third of American children will spend at least some part of their childhood in a step-parent household (Fields 2003). Even more children will experience living with their parent's partner, who may or may not become their future step-parent.

Goldscheider and Kaufman (1996) suggest that commitment to family life is a key variable missing in the study of family. How a man adapts to the fatherhood role may be directly linked to the level of commitment he attaches to his relationship with his partner. Men who have a strong commitment to their romantic relationship may also have strong attachments to co-residential children, regardless if they are biological his or not. Therefore, men's involvement in children's lives may be better understood by investigating their connection with their co-residential partner. This paper advances the knowledge of men in families by examining how men opt in and out of family life. By looking at men's commitment to their partner and its impact on the time he spends with co-residential children, I consider the family context as a whole.

Using a nationally representative sample of American men over the age of 18, living with a partner and a child over the age of five, I model several issues relating to men's time with children. The analysis is two-fold. First, using OLS regression, I examine how men's commitment to family affects the time he spends with co-residential children. Second, I use a structural equation model to investigate the structural pathways in which I hypothesize men's commitment to family influences the time he spends with his children. Together, these two models reveal how men's level of commitment, relationship quality with partner, and child and paternal characteristics facilitate or impede men's involvement with co-residential children.

## **Background**

Today's men have many new opportunities to "parent" than in the past. Increases in divorce, remarriage, cohabitation and nonmarital childbearing have created new

environments in which children are being raised. Together, this has created new expectations and opportunities for men as fathers, both inside and outside the home. At the same time, these changes have altered the dynamics of men's relationship with the women whom they co-reside. Men are now making choices to engage in family life and often these choices include living with the children of their current partner.

The last several years have witnessed an increase in research on men's interactions with children. Current research on fatherhood has examined the impact of family structure on the amount of time men spend with co-residential children. Although there are some conflicting findings, the weight of evidence suggests that married biological fathers spend more time with their co-residential children than fathers in other family forms, suggesting the importance of partner commitment. Outside of married unions, Cooksey and Fondell (1996) find that single fathers are significantly more involved in their children's lives and are more likely to engage in activities with them, despite their non-relationship with their mother. Overall, step-fathers are the least likely to be active with co-residential children.

Missing from most studies on co-resident father's time with children is the effect of cohabitation. Marriage and fertility are increasingly becoming uncoupled. About one-quarter of all children born today are born into cohabiting unions (Bumpass, Raley, and Sweet 1995). This begs the question, does marriage make a difference? Are there differences in time spent with children between biological co-resident fathers who are married and those who are cohabiting? Can marriage still be considered a hallmark of family commitment?

Hofferth and Anderson (2003) find that cohabiting biological fathers spend less time with their children than married fathers. As a result, there are major differences in the amount of time spent with a child based on family structure alone. In this case, biology is not enough to dictate paternal time spent with children. Therefore, does commitment to the relationship with the mother affect this time spent with children? Do fathers who see their romantic relationships failing spend less time with their children because they are either: (1) wanting to escape the family home or (2) are mothers acting as gatekeepers, keeping fathers away because of their dissatisfaction with their relationship?

The importance of women and how men view their relationships has been missing from past research on men within the family. Research that has looked at men's relationships and how they translate into time with co-residential children has focused on marital quality rather than commitment. Kalmijn (1999) found that involved fathers have more stable marriages than those fathers who were not involved. Most of this marital stability comes from the wife's happiness in the relationship. However, this measure of happiness is not ideal for understanding commitment. Although the study includes both married and cohabiting couples, and tries to examine the family unit as a whole, it is unable to capture what compels men to stay involved in families.

In his review of the research on fatherhood, Lamb (2002) suggests that there are three dimensions of fatherhood: (1) breadwinning, (2) direct interaction, and (3) relationship between fathers and mothers. In reviewing previous research on fathers, Lamb finds that most studies isolate only one dimension of fatherhood, ignoring the impact of the other two. Examining this triangular relationship between men, women and

children, as well as the interactions between them could provide researchers with a “broader and more inclusive conception of fatherhood [that] might both enrich and change our analysis and understanding” (Lamb p.25). Given this emphasis, this paper links these three dimensions together by evaluating the impact of men’s commitment to their romantic relationships on how men invest in and engage with co-residential children.

This paper fills a void left in the literature on fatherhood and men’s relationships with women. For the most part, literature on fathers within families has focused on the division of household labor and the impact of men’s participation on their child’s well-being. Other research has taken a direct look at how and why men spend time with children. However, much of this research focuses on family structure and men’s demographic characteristics (Yeung, et al. 2001; Hofferth and Anderson 2003). Missing from the literature is the role of women and the father-mother-child relationship as a whole.

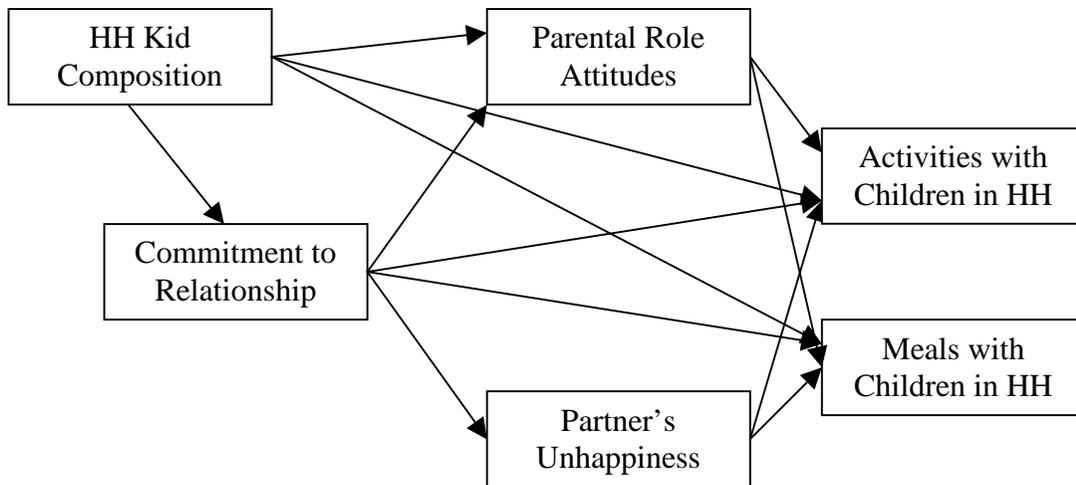
### **Model Specification and Research Hypotheses**

Based on the findings of other family researchers, as well as the analytical framework discussed above by Lamb, this paper investigates one central hypothesis, several sub-hypotheses, as well as their structural pathways. The figure below models the structural relationship between the main dependent and independent variables, as well as the importance of other variables in understanding the overall pathway (Figure 1).

The overarching, general hypothesis is that men who are more committed to their partners and to family life will be more likely to spend time with co-residential children. This is because their overall investment in the child will not be lost after relationship

dissolution since he believes his chances of relationship failure are slim. In other words, men who are more committed are less likely to believe their relationship will end in divorce or separation and therefore will be more likely to invest time and emotional energy into the lives of co-residential children. Men who view their romantic relationships as temporary, in turn being less committed, will be less likely to engage with co-residential children since their return on this investment will be lost after separation.

**Figure 1. Main Model of Men’s Time with Co-Residential Children.\***



\*Other Variables controlled for in OLS regression include: marital status, duration of relationship, proportion of family income provided by father, race, highest education level, and regular work hours.

However, a variety of variables may impact both men’s level of commitment and the time he spends with co-residential children, as well as mediate the relationship between them. One such variable is father’s relationship with their co-residential partner. As pointed out by Lamb, this side of the mother-father-child triad is often missing when investigating men inside of families. Although men today are more fully engaged in family life than in the past, women still perform the load of the household and childcare

work. One such task women predominately perform is scheduling, more specifically of their children's lives. Women, therefore, have the ability to either schedule time for men with their residential children, or schedule him out of it. This idea of "gatekeeping" has been well documented in the literature and has the ability to keep men from being involved in family work (see Allen and Hawkins 1999 for a review).

Although there are many different aspects of gatekeeping, my model focuses on women's unhappiness in their romantic relationships. Mothers who are happy may be more likely to provide access to their children and coordinate activities together as a family. On the other hand, women can keep children out of the reach of men if they are unhappy with their romantic partner, or feel as though his commitment level to her is waning. But this may also have an opposite effect. Women, who find themselves in less than happy, committed relationships, may encourage men to spend time with children, especially if he spends his time with them away from her. Therefore, it may be that this unhappiness variable only affects the time men spend with children outside of the home, making them less likely to spend time together as a whole family (i.e. eating dinner or breakfast together). Overall, it is expected that partner's unhappiness acts as an intervening variable, having a direct effect on men's time spent with children, and making the relationship between commitment and time with children indirect.

Another intervening or mediating variable in the model is parental role attitudes. Men who wish to be free from the responsibility of parenting, on average will spend less time with co-residential children than men who feel differently. Complicating this may be men's commitment to his romantic relationship. Men who are less committed to their relationships may also disengage from the responsibility from parenting, in turn making

them less likely to spend time with co-residential children. In the model, parental attitudes has a direct effect on time spent with children, while also mediating the relationship between commitment and men's time in activities with children.

Although men's family commitment is the driving independent variable in this model, it is not a true exogenous variable. In other words, men's commitment may be influenced by a series of other variables, in this case household composition of children, which in turn can affect the time he invests with co-residential children. Previous research has found that biological status of children in the household matters. Men who live with only their biological children invest more time in these children than men living with children that are not biologically his (Hofferth and Anderson 2003; Marsiglio 1991). Other research has found that having boys in the household increases the time men spend with children (Barnett and Baruch 1987; Cooksey and Fondell 1996; Hofferth and Anderson 2003).

Both of these aspects of household child composition may also influence both the commitment men feel in their relationships as well as the attitudes towards being a parent. Men living with their own biological children, as well as those living with male children, may feel more commitment in their relationships, and in turn, they may spend more time with these children than men living with only stepchildren or girls. In this case, commitment has a direct effect on time with children, while the relationship between household composition and time spent with children is mediated by men's level of commitment. This effect of child composition on men's time with children may also work through men's attitudes regarding their parental role. Men living with their own children or boys may feel more positively about their parenting roles, in turn making

them more likely to spend time with children. Again, the parental attitudes variable intervenes in the direct relationship between household composition and time with children.

Overall, the model is composed of both direct and indirect effects on men's time with co-residential children. While men's commitment level is theoretically the main independent variable in the model, its effect on time with children is mediated by a variety of important variables. In keeping with the analytical framework of Lamb, the addition of both partner's unhappiness in the relationship as well as composition of children in the household in the model allows us to understand the family as a whole, not isolating men's role in the family apart from women or children.

## **Data**

Data come from the first wave of the National Survey of Families and Households. This is a cross-sectional survey that interviewed a national probability sample of 13,017 men and women in the United States 19 years of age or older in 1988. An over-sample was taken of stepfamilies, cohabiting families, minorities, and single-parent families. The data used to address the research hypotheses concentrate on men who were living with a spouse or partner and at least one biological or step-child (including cohabiting partner's children) between the ages of 5 and 18 at the time of the survey (n=1,195). Although it would have been interesting, responses regarding men's time with children as reported by mothers was not available in this dataset. However a disadvantage, using data from women would have made obtaining an accurate account of men's commitment to their relationship extremely difficult and in the end possibly unreliable.

It would also have been advantageous to examine the amount of time fathers spend with their children not living with them, but this research question is beyond the scope of this paper. Also, fathers living with a child under the age of 5 and no children between the ages of 5 and 18 are excluded from the analysis since questions asked regarding these children differ from those asked about older children. It can also be assumed that paternal involvement at this pre-school age would be limited to care giving needs rather than engaging in activities that may promote human capital.

## **Measures**

### *Dependent Variables*

*Father's Time with Co-Residential Children.* This variable is the main dependent variable in the model and is measured by a group of observed variables. The NSFH asks a variety of questions regarding time spent with co-residential children. Two groups of measures were chosen because they evaluate different types of time, quality and quantity. Each of these is measured separately and is included in the model that way.

The first is the number of meals eaten with children in the past week. Respondents were asked to count the number of dinners and breakfasts during the week the respondent ate with at least one of their co-residential children. On average, men were more likely to eat dinner with their children than breakfast. In the past week, men ate breakfast only three mornings with children but ate five dinners with them.

The second group of indicators measures time spent engaging one-on-one in activity with children living in the household. In a self-administered portion of the NSFH, men were asked how often they spent time with any co-residential child, between the ages of 5 and 18, in the following four activities: (a) leisure activities away from home (picnics, movies, sports, etc.), (b) at home working on a project or playing together, (c)

having private talks, and (d) helping with reading or homework. The response choices to these four questions ranged from, (1) never or rarely to (6), almost everyday. Although these four indicators of time are added separately into the model, on the whole they are highly correlated with each other, with a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.72. Men were most likely to engage in projects with children ( $\mu=4.15$ ) and least likely to spend leisure time with them ( $\mu=3.48$ ).

### *Independent Variables*

*Couple Commitment.* As was demonstrated in the literature cited above, a variety of measures affect men's time spent with co-residential children. However, missing from these previous studies is a measure of couple commitment. I have chosen two variables to operationalize couple commitment in the final models. Both of these variables assess how likely a man's believes his relationship will last over time. Men were first asked if, during the past year, he and his partner have ever discussed the idea of separating or divorce. Responses choices included "yes" and "no" and are coded 1 and 0 (respectively) in the data. Men were also asked to rate on a five point scale the chance that he and his wife/partner would eventually separate or divorce. Higher scores indicate a greater likelihood that he will eventually separate or divorce his current partner. These two measures of commitment are first entered into the models separately and then are later combined in the models to increase their predictive power ( $\alpha=0.63$ ).

*Current Marital Status.* Prior research that focuses on men's time with co-residential children has excluded cohabiting couples from analyses. In light of the increase in nonmarital childbearing and cohabitation, these "new" families can no longer be left out when trying to understand men's family choices. The final models include a variable for

marital status, coded 1 for cohabiting and 0 for married. Roughly, six percent of men living with a child between the ages of 5 and 18 in the sample are cohabiting.

In order to fully understand how cohabiting and married men differ in the time they spend with children, duration of relationship is also included. Men who have been in their relationships longer may be more committed to them, regardless if they are married or cohabiting. Therefore, a second set of models includes an interaction between duration and marital status, since they may jointly affect men's time with co-residential children.

*Composition of Children in the Household.* A variety of measures are included in the model to assess the impact of child characteristics on the time men spend with them. The first is biological status. Men living with only their biological children have been shown to spend more time with them (Hofferth and Anderson 2003; Marsiglio 1991). Therefore, the variable "biological children only" (coded 1, all other family types 0) is included in the final models.

Other research has found that having boys in the household increases time men spend with children (Barnett and Baruch 1987; Cooksey and Fondell 1996; Hofferth and Anderson 2003). For this, a variable for "boys only" is entered into the models. The number of children under the age of 18 is included in the final models, as well as whether there is a child under the age of five living in the household. Literature has shown that both of these characteristics affect men's time with children (Marsiglio 1991; Cooksey and Fondell 1996; Hofferth and Anderson 2003; Yeung et al, 2001; Barnett and Baruch 1987). Overall, men spend more time with all children in the household if at least one of

them is under the age of five. Also, men in larger families tend to spend more time with co-residential children than men in smaller families.

Finally, a measure of child disability status is included in the final models. Respondents were asked if anyone living with them requires care or assistance because of a disability or chronic illness. Men who indicated that any child living with them required care or assistance were coded 1, those that did not were coded 0 in the models. Previous research has found that men living with children with disability are less likely to spend time with them in play activities but more time reading or doing homework (Yeung et al 2001).

*Work Status.* Research done by Marsiglio (1991) indicates that work status of men does not significantly affect the time they spent with co-residential children. Therefore, this variable is not included in the models. However, there has been evidence that when a man works can impact their time with children. Included in the models is a variable for stable, normal, work hours. Men who indicated that they work the same hours every week and work between the hours of 7 am and 7 pm are coded 1 in the model, men whose work hours vary per week or who work a non-daytime shift are coded as 0 in the models.

Marsiglio (1991) also found the amount of income women contribute to the family significantly increases the time men spent with children. Therefore, I include in the models a measure of sole male income provider. Men with unemployed partners are coded as 1 in the models, those with partners who work either part or full-time are coded as 1. As stated in the literature, I would expect that men who contribute more to the

family income are less likely to spent time with co-residential children than men who have working partners.

*Partner's Assessment of Relationship Quality.* As other research has shown, women can act as gatekeepers creating boundaries around men and co-residential children. The cause of gate keeping can be defined in many different ways. For the purpose of this paper I am identifying only once cause for gate keeping, unhappiness with current romantic relationship. Women were asked, on the whole, how happy they were in their relationship with their partner. Responses range from very unhappy (1) to very happy (7).

*Parental Role Attitudes.* A man's attitude towards how he views his role as a parent can also influence the time he invests in children. The NSFH asks a variety of questions assessing attitudes, however for this analysis, only one fully operationalizes this latent variable. Respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement to the following statement, using a five point scale, where lower scores represent strong agreement and higher numbers indicate strong disagreement: "I often wish I could be free from the responsibility of being a parent." Overall, most fathers in the sample disagreed with this statement ( $\mu=4.05$ ).

*Men's Demographic Characteristics.* Additional demographic variables are also added to the final models. Race is included in the models as a simple dummy variable (1=Black, 0=Other). Age of father at time of survey is also added to the models as a continuous variable. Finally, men's completed years of education are added to the models as a continuous variable. Table 1 shows ranges, means and percents of all variables found in the final models.

## **Results**

### *OLS Regression Model Results*

On average, father's spent five out of the seven week nights eating dinner with at least one of their co-residential children ( $\mu=5.4$ ). Taking all four at home activities together, men engage with at least one of their co-residential children a little more than several times a month, but less than once a week ( $\mu=3.7$ ). Tables 2 and 3 show the results of the OLS regression models on the frequency of activities and dinners fathers ate with co-residential children in the week prior to the interview. A total of three models were run for each of the dependent variables. Within each dependent variable, one model was run for each of the two commitment variables. The final model (models 3) of each dependent variable includes the combined commitment variable.

The results for father's time spent eating dinner with co-residential children are presented in Table 2. Ignoring the commitment variables, all other variables in the models show similar results. Therefore, I will first discuss each of the commitment variables and their effect on men's time eating dinner then I will look at the effect of the control variables across all models. Model 1 shows that as the likelihood of men's relationship ending in divorce or separation increases, the number of dinners fathers eat with co-residential children declines significantly. The same is true for model 2. Men who have discussed separation with their current partner are less likely to eat evening meals with children than men who never discussed possible union dissolution. For the combined commitment variable, only those men who both talked about separation and believed their likelihood of divorce was high were significantly less likely to eat dinner with children compared to men who never discussed separation and had a low likelihood of dissolution, although all three variables were negative in direction. Together, these

three outcomes lend support to the main hypothesis that men will invest more in children if they are fully committed to the relationship with their partner.

The control variables included in these regressions had similar outcomes across all three models. Interestingly, marital status is not significant in the models. Although cohabiters eat fewer meals with children, they do not significantly differ from married fathers. In some ways, this may be an effect of duration of relationship. We see that the longer men are in a relationship the less likely they are to eat meals. However, when these two variables are combined in the model, there interaction is not significant. What may be driving this duration variable is age of children in the household. Older relationships are likely to have older children, who in turn eat fewer meals with their families, creating a lack of opportunity for men to engage with their children on this level.

More importantly of these relationship characteristics is partner's unhappiness in the relationship. Overall, the more women are unhappy with their partners the fewer meals he eats with co-residential children. Even though the specific pathway can not be teased out using OLS regression, the significant predictability of this variable is essential in that it stresses the importance of the mother-father relationship in understanding why men invest in children. It is impossible from this variable to know whether women are keeping men away from the dinner table because they are unhappy with them or if women are unhappy with men because they do not have time to eat dinner as a family, but it does demonstrate the importance of the mother-father dyad in understanding men's investment in children's lives.

A number of family characteristic variables affect father's time eating dinner with co-residential children. Men living with more children under the age of 18 eat more

dinner than those living with fewer children. Also, consistent with past research, living with only biological children increases the amount of dinners eaten with their children. However, in contrast to previous literature, having only boys in the household does not increase the amount of dinners men eat with their co-residential children. Men living with children under five also eat more dinners with their children than men living with older kids. However, having a child with a limitation disability does not affect whether men eat dinner with co-residential children.

While men's proportion of family income and total education do not significantly affect dinner with co-residential children, there are other characteristics of men that do matter. Non-Hispanic black fathers eat fewer nightly dinners with their children than white or Hispanic fathers. As expected, working regularly scheduled daytime hours also matters. Men who regularly work between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m. are more likely than men with varying schedules or non-day shift workers to eat dinner with their children.

Engaging with children in leisure or play activities requires a little more paternal investment and attachment than sharing a dinner table. Table 3 shows the results of the OLS regression on the summed index of total time men spend in activity with co-residential children. Overall, these models are more statistically robust than the previous models for dinners eaten with co-residential children. Using frequency of time engaging in activities with children, as the dependent variable, increases the adjusted  $R^2$  value to 0.15 (from .07 in the previous models). Again, I will first discuss the effect of the commitment variables on the time engaging with children and then I discuss the effects of the control variables.

As with time spent eating dinner, men who believe that their relationship is likely to end in divorce or separation are less likely to engage in activities like reading and talking with co-residential children. Model 2 shows the effect of the second commitment variable on time with children. Ever discuss separation behaves similarly to its counterpart, but the coefficient size suggests that this variable may be a better predictor of time spent with children than likelihood of divorce. I believe that this strength shows through with the combined variable in model 3. Here men who talked about separating, regardless of their likelihood of divorce, spent less time engaging with co-residential children than men who never discussed divorce and believed they were not likely to separate. Again, these three outcomes support the initial hypothesis that men are more likely to invest in children's lives if they are more fully committed to their romantic relationship.

Unlike the former models, being in a cohabiting relationship does significantly predict time spent in activity<sup>1</sup>. Unexpectedly, cohabiting men spend more, not less, time than married fathers engaging in activities with co-residential children. If it were true that cohabitation is replacing marriage, the commitment level associated with both would be the same; hence men in either of these relationships would spend the same amount of time with co-residential children. This is not the case here, which may suggest that men in cohabiting relationships are investing more in the lives of their co-residential children as a way to show their partner, and perhaps society, that they are truly committed to their relationship, even if they are not currently married. Or it may be that cohabiting dads are more “modern” fathers who want to be more involved in the lives of their children.

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<sup>1</sup> Results are not shown here. Though, influence of this variable can be seen in the interaction between cohabitation and duration.

Again, duration of relationship is significant and negative in the model. Men who have been in their relationships longer spend less time with co-residential children than men in younger relationships. However, this time, the interaction between cohabitation and duration is both significant and positive, suggesting that cohabiting men spend more time engaging with children if they are in longer relationships than if their relationships are younger. This helps shed some insight into the complex cohabitation-commitment relationship. Cohabitation may be seen as less of a commitment if the relationship is shorter, while those who have higher commitment levels will stay in the cohabiting relationship, thus investing more time in activities with co-residential children.

Unlike the model for time spent in eating dinner, partner's unhappiness does not significantly affect whether men engage with co-residential children. This suggests that women may be keeping men away from the dinner table, at the same time keeping him away from her if she is unhappy, and spending more time engaging with children, since he can do these activities apart from her. In some ways it might be expected that her unhappiness may keep her from providing access to the children, but it could also be viewed as a way to keep him away from her.

Number of children living in the household is not significant in this set of models, while having only biological children in the household, living with only male children, and living with children under the age of 5 are. All three of these variables increase the amount of time men spent engaging with co-residential children. These results help clarify the current literature which states that men spent more time if they have boy children in the household. However, this is only true with activities, not time spent eating dinners.

Similar to the first set of models, men spend the same amount of time engaging with children regardless of whether his partner contributes to the total family income. In this model, non-Hispanic black men spend more time engaging in activities with co-residential children than other race/ethnic groups. This finding is opposite than what was seen in the previous models, where non-Hispanic black men were significantly less likely to eat dinner with children. As was expected, men with higher completed educations spend more time engaging with co-residential children than men with lower levels of education, as engagement is direct way to increase their child's human capital. Working normative hours minimally affects the time men spent engaging with children. This suggests that regardless of their work schedule, men find time to spend with children, possibly working opposite hours than their partner so they both spend time with children, but not together.

#### *Structural Equation Model Results*

OLS regression models are useful in the social sciences as they allow us to test the simultaneous effects of independent and control variables on specific dependent variables. However, they are less helpful when trying to determine causal pathways between particular variables. In order to test the theoretically based hypotheses shown in Figure 1, I must use structural equation modeling or path analysis. Overall, structural equation modeling is useful to social scientists because it is capable of testing causal relationships between observed and unobserved variables, as well as identify the role of intervening or mediating variables. One limitation with structural equation modeling is that all variables used in the model must be continuous in nature; therefore a group of control variables used in the OLS regression are missing from the structural equation

model.<sup>2</sup> Although each analytical technique has its limitations, together they provide an interesting and comprehensive evaluation of men's commitment and its affect on time spent with children.

The following are results for the structural equation model discussed above. Because it is an over-identified model, goodness of fit statistics were obtained. Overall, the fit of the model is good. The chi square statistic is relatively small, less than three times the degrees of freedom, and significant ( $\chi^2(33, N=1195)=85.625, p<.000$ ). While at the same time, the Comparative Fit Index (CFI=.988) is greater than 0.95, indicating that the data fit this model reasonably well. A third indicator of fit is the Root Mean Residual (RMR). This also suggests that the model is well fitted as the RMR is approaching zero (RMR=0.0911).

**Figure 2. Results of Men's Time with Co-Residential Children**

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<sup>2</sup> These include: relationship status, duration of current relationship, any children under the age of five in household, any child in house with disability, man providing bulk of family income, race, highest education level, and regular work hours. Some of these variables will be included in future work to enhance this model.

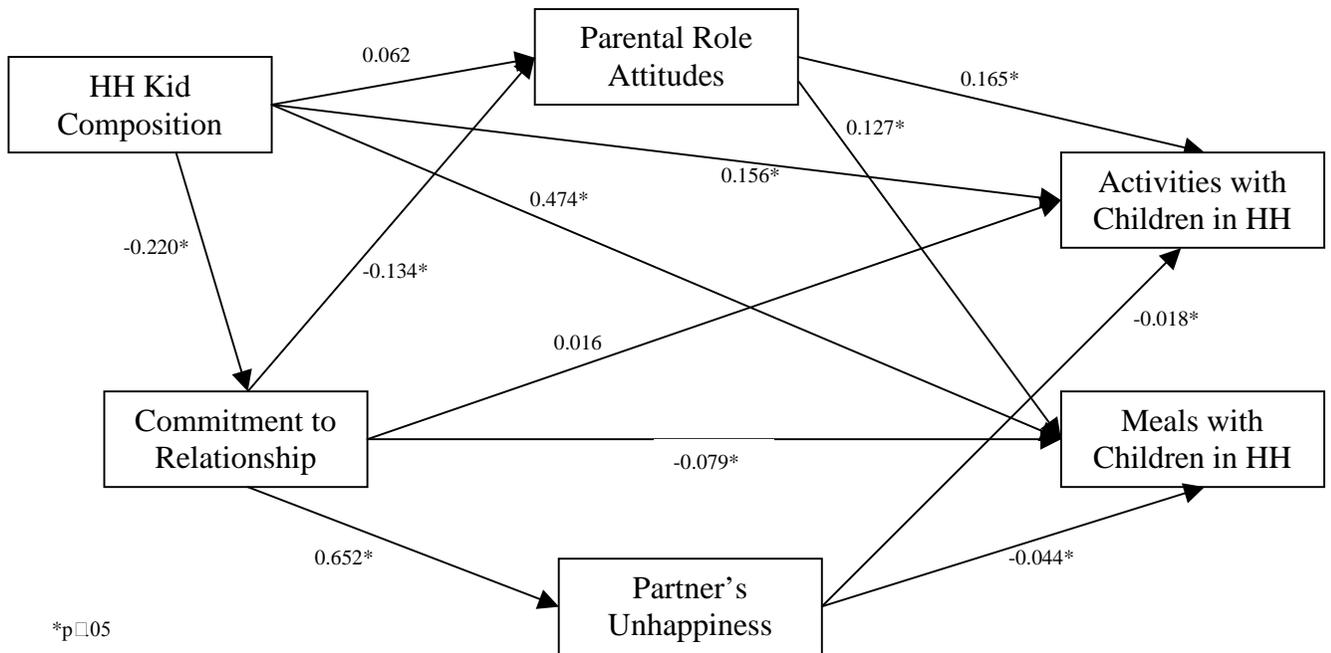


Figure 2 shows the parameter estimates for the model of commitment on men's time with co-residential children. The results shown are taken from the Beta and Gamma estimates, while the full covariance matrix for this model can be found in Appendix A. On the whole, the model is robust, with only two non-significant pathways. Nonetheless, all of the parameters, including those that are not significant, behave in the predicted way.

The overarching research question is how men's commitment affects the time he spends with co-residential children. Remembering that this variable is measured by the likelihood of separation or divorce, the signs of the parameters between this variable and time spent with kids are in the predicted direction. For the most part, the hypothesis is supported. Men who view their romantic relationships as highly volatile are more likely to spend time in activity with co-residential children while at the same time they are less likely to eat meals with them. However, the pathway between commitment and meals is significant while that between commitment and activities is not. This difference in the

direction of the parameters is speculated to be due to partner's unhappiness, but the results for this intervening pathway show otherwise.

The research hypotheses indicate that there may be variables that intervene in this relationship between commitment and men's time with children. In this model, there are two intervening variables, parental role attitudes and partner's unhappiness. Men who believe their relationship is highly likely to end in divorce or separation are also more likely to have less than happy wives. In turn, these less than happy wives have male partner's who spend significantly less time eating meals (-0.044) and engaging in activities (-0.018) with co-residential children. This result supports the gatekeeping hypothesis that women in unhappy relationships may keep children away from their partners by way of possibly scheduling him of the children's lives. However, this unhappiness variable affects both meals and activity similarly making the alternative hypothesis, that the variable only works in keeping men away from meal time and not activity, can not be supported.

A second variable that is hypothesized to intervene between men's commitment and time with children is parental role attitudes. The results support the hypothesized relationship between these three variables. Men who believe their relationship is likely to end in separation or divorce are also less likely to disagree with the statement "I often wish I could be free from the responsibility." In turn, men who agree that they wish they could be free from parenthood are less likely to spend time eating meals or engaging in activity with co-residential children. All of these parameters are significant in the model, lending more support for the research hypotheses.

In the model, there is only one true exogenous variable: household child composition. This latent variable has two observed indicators: (1) number of boys in household, and (2) number of biological children in household. Both of these variables are hypothesized to: (a) decrease men's likelihood of divorce, (b) increase men's wanting-ness of the parent role, and (c) increase the amount of time they spend with children. On the whole, most of these relationships in the model are significant and all are in the predicted direction, further supporting the research hypotheses. Men living with more biological children and boys are less likely to believe their relationship will end in divorce (-0.220). Men living with such children are also more likely to disagree with the statement: "I wish I could be free from the responsibility of parenting" (0.062), but this relationship, although in the predicted direction, is not significant in the model. However, both time with children variables are significantly affected by having boys and biological children in the household. This household child composition variable significantly increases the amount of time men spend eating meals (0.156) and engaging in activity with children (0.474).

## **Conclusion**

Often, social scientists are in the business of finding causal relationships between variables. However, sometimes we face constraints due to the observed variables we collect. Structural equation modeling helps us measure both observed and unobserved variables while at the same time test theoretical causal relationships. This paper has used this structural technique, as well as OLS regression, to model how men's commitment to their romantic relationships translates into the amount of time they spend with co-residential children.

The overall theoretical argument is that men who are more committed in their relationships will invest more time in co-residential children since the return on their investment will not be lost in the long term. Embedded in this theoretical causal relationship are other intervening variables as well, such as parental role attitudes and partner's unhappiness, that may help explain how commitment influences the time men spend with kids. On the whole, the results of both types of models are robust and support many of the research hypotheses, giving insight into how men make choices in family living and how both women and children affect the choices men make.

Although this paper provides useful insight into the mother-child-father triad, it does have its limitations. Measures used in the analyses are not perfect and may be subject to measurement error. There also could be other measures, not available in the data, which could be better suited to measure the latent variables. Also, more work must be completed to ensure the two types of models are as parallel as possible. Further work may also investigate the relationships between the observed variables that measure time spent with children since men may engage in some of these activities more often than others.

In most research done on the family, the idea of commitment is missing altogether. Commitment can be seen as the cornerstone of most relationships, but is very difficult to measure. This paper operationalizes commitment as lower likelihood separation. Men and women who feel as though their relationships will not end in separation and never discuss its possibility can be viewed as having higher levels of commitment. Those with higher levels of commitment will stay in relationships regardless of difficulty, either financial or emotional. It has been hypothesized then that men with higher levels of

commitment will invest more time in co-residential children since their likelihood of dissolution is low. Those men who feel as though their relationships are likely to breakup will spend less time investing in children since by engaging with them would make they have more to lose once the relationship dissolves.

Both of the commitment variables used in the analyses significantly predict men's time spent with children. However the stronger of the two is whether or not fathers ever discussed separating or divorce with their partners. As was stated in the results, it may be that this variable more accurately predicts commitment since it is based on an actually occurring event and has more validity than the variable which measures the likelihood of an event occurring in the future. Overall, interacting the two variables does little to increase its strength in the model and the final models remain as robust as they did in the uncombined models. Therefore, future analyses will include a scale of these two variables.

This paper also explores the role of marital status and commitment and how this translates into the time men spend with children. Although cohabitation is changing, it is often viewed in society as a short-term, less commitment form of a union. However, many couples are staying together longer and are raising families together without a marriage certificate. The results do support this last statement. The interaction effect of cohabitation and duration shows that those in longer cohabiting relationships invest more in the lives of children than men in younger cohabiting relationships. Cohabitation is a very interesting family form and since more children are being raised in such union future research needs to address the issues raised in these analyses.

Looking at the triangular relationship between men, women, and children is often neglected in the literature. This paper has linked these three dimensions together to fully understand why men engage and invest in co-residential children. Although the results are based on a cross-sectional design, they do provide some insight as to how one dimension of a triangle, father-mother, translates into another, father-child. Future work using longitudinal data may investigate how these commitment variables accurately predict future investment in children and actual relationship dissolution. On the whole, this paper fills a void in the growing literature on men in families. Men rarely engage with children apart from women and understanding this relationship provides important insight into the future of American families.

## Appendix A

**Figure 1. Covariance Matrix for Father's Time With Co-Residential Children**

	Dinner	Breakfast	Leisure	Projects	Talks	Hmwork	Unhappy	Attitude	Commit	Bio Kids	Boys
<i>Meals</i>											
Dinner	4.518										
Breakfast	1.315	6.513									
<i>Activities</i>											
Leisure	0.515	0.575	1.355								
Projects	0.921	1.022	1.004	2.687							
Talks	0.617	0.885	0.613	1.239	2.079						
Homework	1.553	1.373	1.008	2.139	1.645	5.645					
<i>Partner's Unhappiness</i>	0.696	0.082	0.048	0.274	0.152	0.451	7.16				
<i>Parental Role Attitudes</i>	0.250	0.181	0.255	0.395	0.312	0.431	0.141	1.237			
<i>Men's Commitment</i>	-0.471	-0.203	-0.013	-0.16	-0.066	-0.233	-1.484	-0.317	2.276		
<i>HH Child Composition</i>											
# of Biological Kids	0.418	0.314	0.076	0.284	0.148	0.368	-0.045	0.076	-0.204	1.466	
# of Boys in HH	0.264	0.359	0.073	0.17	0.164	0.188	-0.003	0.049	-0.092	0.553	0.857

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