

This article documents the changes in men's experience of living with children. Data are drawn from seven Current Population Surveys to address four questions: What changes are evident across birth cohorts of men in the likelihood of living with children? What cohort differences are observed in the experience of living with many children or with preschool age children? How does the timing of living with children change across cohorts? To what extent do the observed patterns vary by race and level of education? Men's experience of living with children declines precipitously across cohorts. More recent cohorts are less likely to be characterized by the experience of large numbers of children. Living with children is increasingly concentrated in middle age. Finally, there are stark differences among men by race and level of education in the experience of living with children.

The Changing Course of Fatherhood

Men's Experiences With Children in Demographic Perspective

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Against a backdrop of changing gender role expectations, a transformed world of work, and a sharp rise in single-parent families, attention to fathers has skyrocketed in recent years. Both the popular press and the scholarly community have focused a great deal of attention on the nature of fatherhood and its importance to children. Because of this attention, we now have a new appreciation for the critical social, psychological, and economic roles that men play in the lives of their children (Hawkins & Dollahite, 1997; Marsiglio, 1995).

Although important, this focus on what men do for children has led to a comparative neglect of broader questions of fathers and fatherhood. For example, we know comparatively little about what this role means for men. A comprehensive search of the scholarly literature revealed only a modest number of studies that explicitly focused on the consequences of fatherhood for men (cf. Coltrane, 1995; Cowan & Cowan, 1992; Heath & Heath, 1991; Munch, McPherson, & Smith-Lovin, 1997; Parke, 1995; Russell & Radin, 1983; Snarey, 1993; Zarit & Eggebeen, 1995). This is in

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contrast to the literally hundreds of studies on the consequences of fathers and fathering for children. In addition, only recently have scholars begun to place emerging contemporary ideas and emerging behavior of fathers in a larger historical context (Blankenhorn, 1995; Griswold, 1993; LaRossa, 1997; Pleck & Pleck, 1997). Finally, with a few exceptions, we have not attended very well to documenting the broad social demographic course of changes in fatherhood (cf. Eggebeen & Uhlenberg, 1985).

The purpose of this article is to address this last shortcoming by documenting the social demographic changes in one component of fatherhood: men's experience of living with children. This is accomplished by making use of data drawn from seven comparable Current Population Surveys from 1965 to 1995. These data cover a historical period marked by significant social changes in the American family and will allow us to observe how these changes have played out in the lives of men. These data do not allow for a comprehensive examination of fatherhood. We cannot determine from these household-based data the extent of nonresident fatherhood among men. Neither can we assess the nature of the relationship between men and their co-resident children, that is, the extent to which men are engaged and involved with their children. Nevertheless, there is something to be learned from a more narrow focus on the changing patterns of co-residence.

This is not to say that men who are nonresident fathers are unimportant. Recent work on fatherhood has drawn attention to the growing phenomenon of nonresident fathers and a renewed sensitivity to the extent to which these parents can possibly have an influence on children (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999; King, 1994; Mott, 1990; Seltzer, 1991). Neither is it the case that the narrow focus of this analysis implies that men who are nonresident fathers have little or no meaningful relationship with their children; evidence is accumulating that many men do (Braver et al., 1993; King & Heard, 1999). Rather, the focus of this article is on co-residence partially because there is little known about the changes over time in men's experience with residential fatherhood and because co-residence represents a special kind of setting for fatherhood simply because it affords greater opportunities for men to be engaged with their children. Indeed, from the perspective of children, there is a substantial literature demonstrating that co-residence with fathers is associated with a broad array of indicators of well-being (cf. Furstenberg, 1995; Simons, 1996). For these reasons a focus on the changes in the likelihood of men living with children provides a critical, if not central, piece of the puzzle of the changing nature of fatherhood in America.

Four broad questions will structure this article:

1. What changes are evident across birth cohorts of men in the likelihood of living with children?
2. What cohort differences are observed in the experience of living with many children, or with very young children?
3. How does the timing of living with children change across cohorts?
4. To what extent do the observed patterns vary by race and education?

BACKGROUND

When discussing the roots of the transformation of fatherhood over the past 50 years, historians, social scientists, and others typically point to two culprits: the transformation of the economy and the changes in cultural ideas about gender. Work and family roles remain largely incompatible in modern America. However, as the proportion of married mothers with children under the age of 6 in the labor force grew from 18.6% in 1960 to nearly 63% by 1996 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1997), a larger and larger proportion of fathers were confronted with the opportunity and/or necessity of assuming more parenting responsibility (Lamb, Pleck, Charnov, & Levine, 1987; Pleck, 1997).

Closely allied with this trend has been the challenge to traditional gender roles brought about by the modern women's movement and elaborated on by the new fathers' movement. No longer is parenting widely considered the exclusive prerogative of mothers. Men as fathers has been a front and center theme for several recent social movements, ranging from Promise Keepers on the right to The Fatherhood Project in the middle to The Million Man March on the left (Hewlett & West, 1998; Levine & Pitt, 1995). Scholars have been scrambling to get to the head of the parade. A flood of books, articles, and conferences have documented the unique and important role that fathers can or should play in the lives of their children (cf. Booth & Crouter, 1998; Hawkins & Dollahite, 1997; Lamb, 1987; Marsiglio, 1995; Parke, 1981, 1995). Given these social changes, it is argued, it is not surprising that we have a "new fatherhood" on the cultural and, to a lesser extent, on the behavioral landscape.

These ideas, of course, are aimed at understanding the changes in the meaning of fatherhood and changes in the actual activity of fathers. Often ignored or downplayed is an essential first step in understanding contemporary American fathers: What changes have actually taken place in men's experience with assuming the role of father. We cannot hope to understand contemporary fatherhood divorced from social and demographic context.

We begin by briefly reviewing demographic changes that are likely to have consequences for fatherhood. Most pertinent are the post-World War II era trends in fertility and nuptiality. The social change that is most often is discussed is, of course, the rise in divorce. Between 1965 and 1975, the annual divorce rate nearly doubled from 2.5 to 4.8 per 1,000 population (Cherlin, 1992). Since the mid-1970s, divorce rates have remained at a high but stable level (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1997). Divorce is significant for understanding the fathering experience of men because it so often leads to a severing of ties with children. Until recently, physical custody of children following divorce was overwhelmingly with the child's mother. A number of studies show that, with some exceptions, nonresident fathers tend to have low levels of involvement with their children (Furstenberg & Cherlin, 1991; Seltzer & Bianchi, 1988). In short, as many analysts have pointed out, the rise in divorce has contributed to the erosion of the opportunity to engage in fathering behavior, at least among some men.

Divorce, although a powerful agent in the changing landscape of fatherhood, is not the only dimension of nuptiality that is important. Historically, marriage is the gateway to parenthood. However, since the mid-1960s, it would appear that marriage is in retreat. Entry into marriage has changed significantly since the 1940s. Median age at first marriage for men has increased from 22.4 in 1964 to 25.9 by 1990 (U.S. National Center for Health Statistics, 1995a). There is also some hint that we may be moving away from marriage being a virtually universal experience of adulthood; that is, a growing proportion of men forgo marriage. This is not because men are forgoing intimate unions. There is mounting evidence, at least among young adults, that cohabitation is displacing marriage as the union type of choice (Bumpass, Sweet, & Cherlin, 1991). To be sure, there are some hints that childbearing in cohabiting unions is increasing (Bumpass & Raley, 1995), but marriage remains the primary setting for most men's entry into fatherhood. The implication, then, of the retreat from marriage is that fewer men are participating in fatherhood because fewer men are at risk of becoming fathers.

The changing face of fertility in the postwar era has often overlooked consequences for men's fathering experiences. From the historically low rates of the depression years, childbearing rose dramatically starting in the late 1940s before beginning to fall though the 1960s. The average number of children per woman peaked at 3.65 in 1960 (U.S. National Center for Health Statistics, 1995b). This rise in fertility was marked by a decline in childlessness and an increase in the tempo of childbearing (Rindfuss, Morgan, & Swicegood, 1988). The implications for the lives of men were

far-reaching. Compared to earlier cohorts, a higher proportion of men entering adulthood in the immediate postwar years became fathers. They also became fathers at earlier ages. Just as far-reaching, however, are the implications of the subsequent "baby bust" of the late 1960s to mid-1970s. During this time period, the average number of children born per woman declined to 1.74 by 1976. Rates climbed slightly in the late 1980s but have remained essentially stable since 1990 at just below 2.1 (U.S. National Center for Health Statistics, 1995b).

Fertility patterns are also marked by changes in the timing of childbearing. The proportion of White women age 25 who were childless increased from 36% in 1950 to 55% in 1980 (Rindfuss et al., 1988). By inference, the average age at which men first become fathers probably increased as well. But this is not the whole story. Continuous declines in high parity births have meant a shortening of the span of childbearing across successive cohorts of women, lowering the average age at last birth. This suggests that for men, fatherhood at older ages has become increasingly rare. Estimates of the age distribution of parents from the perspective of children show a precipitous decline in children with older fathers (Eggebeen & Uhlenberg, 1989).

The timing and number of children are not the only dimensions of childbearing that are undergoing significant alterations. One of the most profound changes has been the rise in nonmarital childbearing. In the early 1960s, less than 1 in 4 Black children and 1 in 20 White children were born out of wedlock (Smith, Morgan, & Koropecj-Cox, 1996). By the mid-1990s, more than one quarter of White and 70% of Black children were born to unmarried mothers (U.S. National Center for Health Statistics, 1997). Although research is scanty, indications are that men who father children outside of wedlock are even less likely to be involved in the lives of these children than divorced fathers (Rangarajan & Gleason, 1998; Seltzer, 1991). As the proportion of children born out of wedlock continues to rise, we can anticipate a growing disjuncture between biological paternity and social fatherhood.

In summary, how we think about fathers and what fathers do is currently undergoing significant change. Social and behavioral scientists quite rightly point to social changes in the economy and culture as part of the explanation for these changes. Much research attention has focused on what men are doing or what the consequences of these activities might be for families, women, and children. Often overlooked, however, is the demographic context of these social changes. The form and structure of men's experience with fatherhood are likely to have changed considerably, given the massive changes in fertility and nuptiality in the postwar

era. Yet, the consequences of these changes for men's experience of living with children remain unappreciated. Based on the above review, I anticipate that successive cohorts of men will be characterized by differences in the universality, frequency, and timing of co-residence with children.

By universality, I mean that relative to older cohorts, younger cohorts will be less characterized by men living with children. Given the fertility regimes of the early postwar era, living with children was a ubiquitous part of adulthood for men of the earliest cohorts under examination here. With the baby bust of the early 1970s, however, I expect to see identifiable declines in this universal experience. The most recent cohorts should show significantly lower proportions of men at each age who live with children.

I also anticipate a decline in the frequency of fatherhood across cohorts. Often overlooked in the barrage of studies, which are often narrowly focused on a particular father-child relationship, is that fatherhood can be a quite different experience depending on the composition of the set of children being fathered. An obvious but widely overlooked consequence of the changing fertility regimes is that men's opportunity to be a father to many children at the same time has probably diminished over time. I will document the extent to which fathers living with three or more children has changed across cohorts. A closely related dimension is the extent to which fathers are living with preschool age children. The premise is that caring for children under the age of 6, like caring for many children, makes unique time and behavioral demands on parents. The extent to which men's exposure to preschoolers has declined across cohorts can be seen as partial evidence of the changing frequency of fatherhood.

Finally, I expect to find an increasing concentration of fatherhood in middle age. Changes in the timing and number of children have shortened the span of child rearing for women. I suspect that the span of child rearing for men has become even more truncated, given that their access to children is also mediated by divorce and nonmarital childbearing. Men's experience of living with children, then, is expected to be increasingly limited to middle age, largely disappearing in the younger and older years.

These changes are not likely to be uniform across subpopulations. Of particular interest are differences by race and education. These characteristics are important to take into account because American family life is markedly different depending on whether we are speaking about Whites or African Americans, about families headed by college-educated adults or adults who are high school dropouts. Race differences in family behavior imply that men's experience of living with children will vary depending on whether we are examining White or Black men (unfortunately, data limitations prevent a comprehensive examination of Hispanic-origin,

Asian American, or other racial-ethnic subgroups). There is ample evidence that African American adults have significantly higher rates of never marrying, cohabitation, and marital breakup than Whites. Furthermore, these differences have grown over the past few decades (Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan, 1995). These trends, in combination with higher rates of nonmarital childbearing among Blacks (Smith et al., 1996), suggest that we should see even stronger evidence of a decline in universality and frequency of living with children among Black men. Moderating these trends, however, is the greater likelihood of African American fathers than White fathers to head single-parent families (Eggebeen, Snyder, & Manning, 1996).

Differences in schooling have a number of implications for the young adult life course, as well as for the socioeconomic status of adults and families. Continuing education beyond high school is strongly associated with delayed fertility among women (Rindfuss et al., 1988) and, by implication, for men as well. In addition, the amount of formal education of the adults in a family is a potent predictor of a family's economic well-being, which is strongly implicated in marital stability (Cherlin, 1992). These considerations lead me to anticipate stark differences in the timing and universality of fathering within cohorts by education of men. Men with 4 years or more of schooling beyond high school are less likely to be living with children in their young adult years than men who are high school dropouts. Given that higher education is associated with lower risks of divorce, I expect to find that, compared to men who are high school dropouts, college-educated men will be more likely to be living with children in middle age.

METHOD AND DATA

Data for this article are drawn from the 1965, 1970, 1975, 1980, 1985, 1990, and 1995 Current Population Surveys (CPSs). The CPS is a nationally representative survey of the residential noninstitutionalized population, which has been conducted monthly for more than 50 years. It is the primary source of the official government statistics on employment and unemployment. The data come from the March round, also known as the Annual Demographic File, which contains demographic and labor force information relevant for this project. Data from the 1965 through 1985 CPS files were obtained from the Uniform March Files (Mare & Winship, 1989). These files are uniform in the sense that a consistent structure was

created across all the files and one set of documentation was developed. Analysis is limited to males ages 20 to 64 at the time of the survey.

These data present several advantages for documenting the changing experience of men living with their own children. First, the CPS files are representative. The sampling universe is the civilian noninstitutional population of the United States living in housing units and male members of the armed forces living in civilian housing units on a military base or in a household not on a military base. These files are large. For each year, anywhere from 50,000 to 60,000 households were interviewed. Analysis files of males ages 20 to 64 range in size from a low of 18,537 in 1965 to a high of 48,637 in 1985. Because of the uniform way that questions are structured, the data are comparable over this time span. Finally, because the files cover 30 years, it is possible to observe both inter- and intracohort changes over time.

There are some disadvantages with these data, however. Already discussed is that these data, with their focus on co-residence, underestimate men's broad experience in the role of father. However, even restricting the analysis to co-resident fatherhood poses some challenges. First, the quest for comparability forces some sacrifice in precision. The exact relationship between adult males and all the co-resident children cannot be determined for some of the early CPS files. As a consequence, I am left with choosing between defining fatherhood as just the experience of men living with "own" children (children related to the man by birth, marriage, or adoption) or defining fatherhood as men living in a household that contains any other person age 18 or younger.

The implications of these two definitions of fatherhood are highlighted in Table 1. This table displays the percentage point differences between the estimates of men living with all children and men living with just their own children, by age and year. In effect, these numbers are estimates of the proportion of men living with children whom they are not related to by blood, marriage, or adoption. There are large differences for the youngest age group. This probably reflects the greater likelihood of young males to be living at home with younger siblings. Beyond the youngest age group, however, we see clear evidence of the growing complexity of men's experience of living with children. For example, for men ages 25 to 29, the proportion living with non-own children grew from 6% in 1965 to 12% by 1995, a 100% increase. Similar increases are evident for men up to middle age. Undoubtedly, this growing complexity in living arrangements over time is driven by the aforementioned rises in divorce, nonmarital child-bearing, remarriage, and cohabitation. What this means is that choosing to

TABLE 1
Proportion of Men Living With Children They Are
Not Related to by Blood, Marriage, or Adoption

Age	1965	1970	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995
20 to 24	26.5	28.8	26.5	27.2	24.7	26.2	26.3
25 to 29	6.2	6.0	6.4	7.2	7.8	12.7	12.1
30 to 34	3.9	3.2	3.4	4.0	5.8	9.6	8.2
35 to 39	2.8	2.5	2.7	2.9	3.5	8.2	6.5
40 to 44	3.1	2.0	2.7	2.7	3.4	8.4	5.1
45 to 49	2.9	3.3	3.1	3.3	3.3	7.5	4.5
50 to 54	4.3	3.8	3.2	4.1	4.2	7.5	5.9
55 to 59	5.2	4.6	4.1	4.1	4.9	6.4	6.8
60 to 64	5.0	4.8	4.6	4.2	3.9	6.5	5.6
N	18,537	35,137	33,090	48,637	44,517	43,960	41,315

SOURCE: 1965 to 1995 Current Population Surveys.

NOTE: Percentages are weighted. *N*s are unweighted.

focus exclusively on men's experience living with their own children runs the risk of increasingly underestimating men's experiences living with any children. On the other hand, focusing on living with any child means we grow less confident over time in the assumption that co-residence implies a fatherlike relationship between men and children.

Given these considerations, I will be using the narrow definition of identifying just those men as fathers who are living with their own children. This conservative approach means that we can be certain that the men we identify as fathers are, by legal and/or biological definitions, fathers of at least one household member under the age of 18. For ease of presentation, I will be using the terminology of *fathers*, *fatherhood*, and *fathering* interchangeably with *living with own children*, recognizing full well that there is significant but not complete overlap in these concepts (e.g., not all men living with own children are acting as fathers; some men not living with their children are acting as fathers).

A third disadvantage of these data is that I cannot track individuals across cohorts, making the analysis of correlates of change a somewhat crude enterprise. I am limited to documenting intercohort changes for relatively fixed characteristics such as race and education. These cross-sectional cohorts also prevent us from estimating the lifetime prevalence of fatherhood, something that requires true longitudinal data.

Finally, these data involve the noninstitutionalized population of males. From 1965 to 1994, however, the number of males in prisons increased nearly fivefold from 203,703 to 956,691 (Bureau of Justice Statistics,

TABLE 2
Proportion of Men Living With Their Own Child by Age

Age	1965	1970	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995
20 to 24	27.8	22.9	18.2	14.3	11.1	8.4	9.2
25 to 29	64.1	58.3	48.4	40.1	34.7	28.4	27.7
30 to 34	75.5	77.4	70.7	60.3	54.0	46.3	47.6
35 to 39	76.9	80.7	76.1	72.9	67.6	57.5	56.6
40 to 44	73.4	76.3	73.8	70.0	62.5	55.5	56.4
45 to 49	61.7	59.0	58.3	55.5	45.5	39.3	44.0
50 to 54	39.6	42.1	38.0	35.5	28.0	21.4	23.9
55 to 59	22.3	22.4	20.2	17.5	13.7	9.9	10.6
60 to 64	11.4	9.6	8.8	5.9	5.1	3.8	3.9
<i>N</i>	18,537	35,137	33,090	48,637	44,517	43,960	41,315

SOURCE: 1965 to 1995 Current Population Surveys.
NOTE: Percentages are weighted. *Ns* are unweighted.

1995), with the disproportionate share of the increase among Black inmates, who showed a 217% increase from 1980 to 1993 (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1995). Because the likelihood of being in prison is much higher for young Black males, the race comparisons must be viewed with some suspicion. Nevertheless, these data offer the best opportunity to document the changing demography of fatherhood in the post-World War II era.

RESULTS

Table 2 contains the proportion of men who live with their own child by age and CPS year. Several trends are evident. First, there was a substantial decline in the likelihood of experiencing fatherhood (via living with their own child) for men at every age. The declines were widespread; every age group showed moderate to large changes over this 30-year span. However, the largest declines were among the youngest and the oldest. The proportion of men ages 20 to 24 living with children declined nearly two thirds (66%) between 1965 and 1995. This age group was followed closely by fathers ages 25 to 29, which declined more than 57%. Older men also showed marked declines in the likelihood of living with children. The number of men ages 55 to 59 who were fathers fell from 22% in 1965 to 11% in 1995, a 52% drop. In contrast, the declines for middle-aged men were more modest. The proportion of fathers ages 35 to 39 fell about 26%, from nearly 77% in 1965 to 57% in 1995. For the most part, it appears that the changes happened mainly between 1970 and 1990. In short, we went

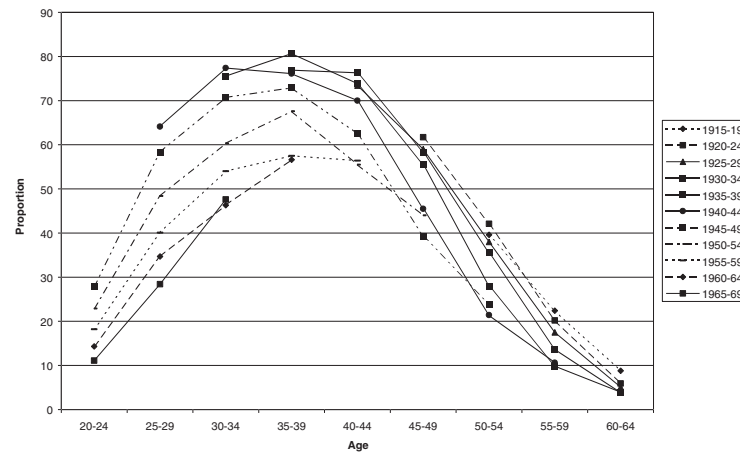


Figure 1: Cohort Differences in Men Living With Children

from a time in the mid-1960s when a slight majority (53%) of adult men lived with their own children to the 1990s, when only a little more than a third (35%) of men were in this state.

These cross-sectional data are helpful for uncovering the most recent changes. They are less useful for identifying the life course patterns of changes for men. To get a rough approximation of how men of different cohorts might look, I arranged the data from Table 2 into birth cohorts. Figure 1 displays data for 11 cohorts. Unfortunately, censoring leaves us with incomplete cohorts: the oldest (1915-1919) and the youngest (1965-1969) only have three data points whereas the middle cohorts (1940-1944 and 1945-1949) have data on seven of the eight possible age points. Nevertheless, we can get some sense from this graph of the significance of the social changes in men's lives.

Fatherhood has moved from being a universal experience of adulthood to being merely a common experience. More than 8 out of 10 men in the 1930 through 1940 birth cohorts have the experience of living with children, usually by age 35. Since then, fatherhood steadily has changed so that the typical pattern of the most recent cohorts is that fatherhood does not become the experience of the majority until middle age.

These data also show trends consistent with the idea that fatherhood is becoming more concentrated in midlife. Incomplete data prevent a confident assessment, but there is clear indication among the oldest cohorts of declines in the proportion of older men living with children. The youngest

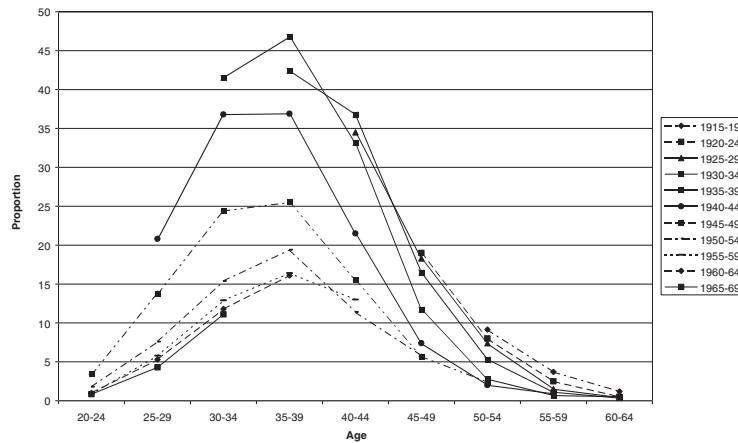


Figure 2: Proportion of Men Living With Three or More Children

cohorts also show marked decline across cohorts in the experience of fatherhood through early adulthood.

Figures 2 and 3 address the issue of changes in the frequency of fatherhood across cohorts. We observe substantial declines in the proportion of men living with three or more children from the 1930 to 1934 through the 1945 to 1949 cohorts. However, there appears to be little change among the most recent cohorts (1955-1959 through 1965-1969 birth cohorts). Nearly half of the 1935 to 1939 cohort lived with three or more children by their late 30s. In contrast, only 16% of the 1960 to 1964 birth cohort experienced this kind of fatherhood at these ages.

We observe equally large changes in men’s experience with small children (Figure 3). Fathering preschool children has clearly become less common across cohorts. More than 60% of the 1935 to 1939 birth cohort were living with young children in their early 30s. By the time the 1965 to 1969 cohort aged into their 30s, less than 35% of men were fathers of small children. There also appear to be shifts in the timing of this experience. The peak time for fathering preschoolers for the 1940 to 1944 through 1950 to 1954 cohorts were at ages 25 to 29. However, the most common time for the most recent cohorts apparently has become the early 30s.

Figures 4 and 5 show the cohort differences in men living with children separately for Blacks and Whites. The patterns evident in Figure 4 for Whites are virtually indistinguishable from those for all men displayed in Figure 1. However, Black men show lower proportions than Whites of men living with their own children in middle age, although there is evi-

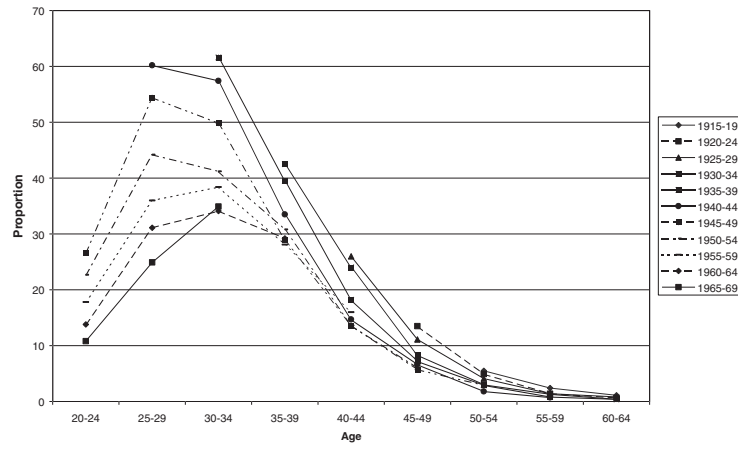


Figure 3: Proportion of Men Living With Children Less Than 6 Years of Age

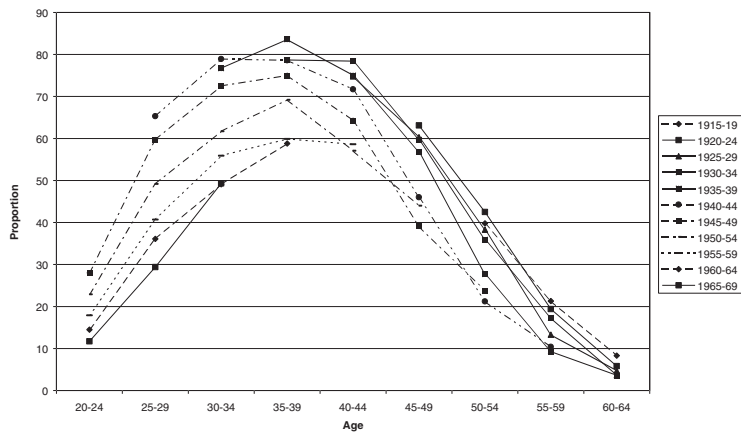


Figure 4: Cohort Differences in White Men Living With Children

dence here also of a retreat from fatherhood among young men across the most recent cohorts. Interestingly, older Black men (those age 55 and older) are slightly more likely than older White men to be living with their own children.

To what extent might these race differences be reflecting social class variations? To test for this, I explicitly compared Black and White men of the 1960 to 1964 birth cohort twice; first, for all Whites and Blacks regardless of their level of education, then just for Whites and Blacks who were

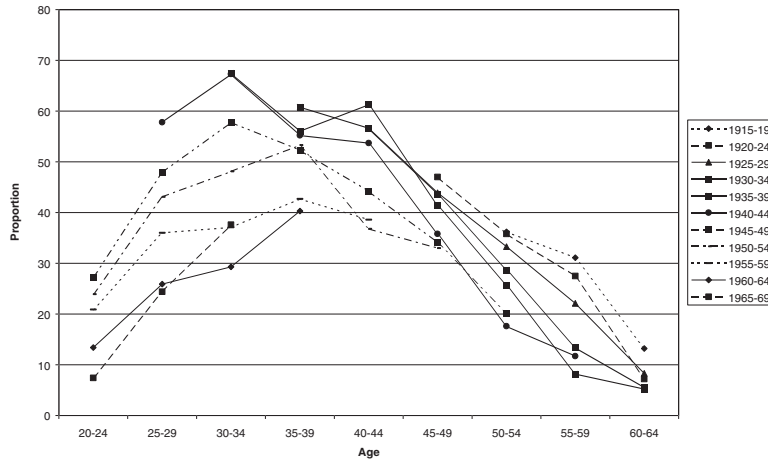


Figure 5: Cohort Differences in Black Men Living With Children

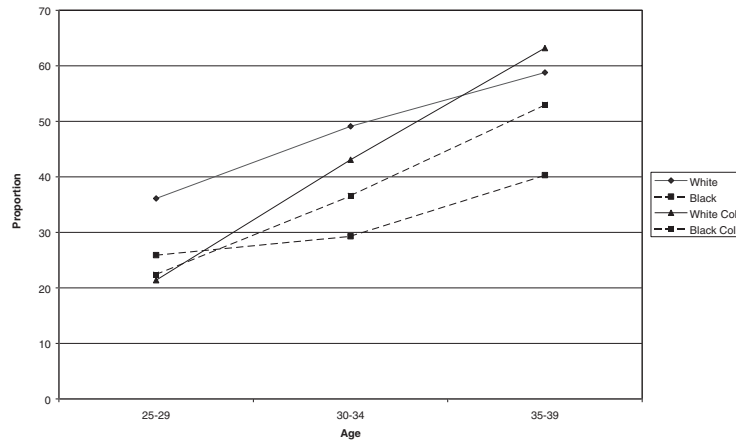


Figure 6: 1960 to 1964 Birth Cohort: Race and Education Differences

college graduates (see Figure 6). We see that Black college graduates are somewhat similar to White college graduates in their patterns of fatherhood but hardly similar enough to conclude that the observed race differences are largely a function of socioeconomic status differences between Blacks and Whites.

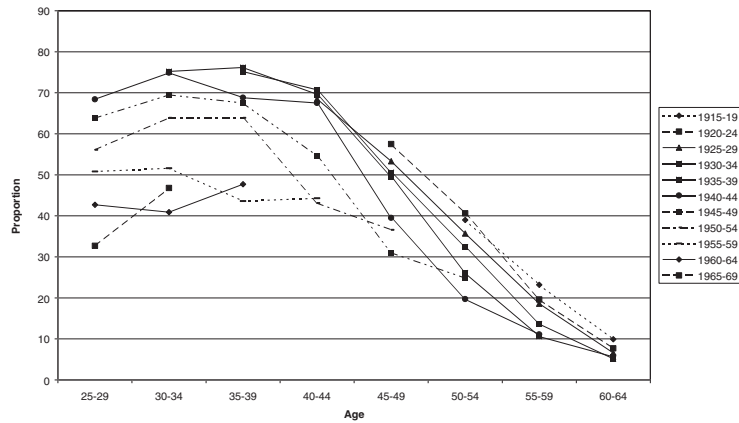


Figure 7: Cohort Differences in Men Living With Their Own Children: Men With Less Than a High School Degree

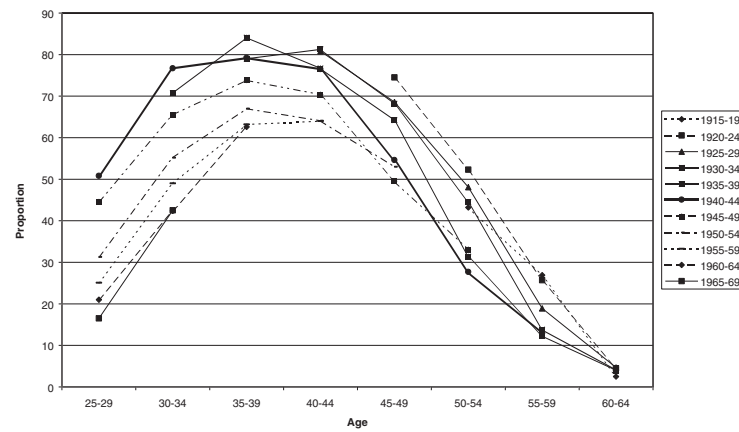


Figure 8: Cohort Differences in Men Living With Their Own Children: Men With at Least a College Degree

Finally, we can see in Figures 7 and 8 the cohort differences by education. It is clear from these data that schooling has major implications for the timing of fatherhood in the lives of men. Even for the most recent cohort (1965-1969), the contrasts are stark: For men who are high school dropouts, nearly 32% are living with children by the ages of 25 to 29, compared to only 17% of men with college degrees. The overall patterns of de-

cline across cohorts are pervasive across education groups, although highly educated men appear to account for the bulk of the change, showing marked declines among the young and old. This is not surprising. Social changes in values about remaining childless, delaying childbearing, and having only one child are most likely to take root among the highly educated. To the degree these orientations toward the timing and number of children to father are anchored in behavior, we would expect disproportionately stronger trends among the highly educated.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Fathers are a hot topic among family scholars today, and well they should be. Their behavior is implicated in some of the most significant ongoing social changes in family life. Changing female labor force behavior, divorce, marriage, and nonmarital childbearing provoke questions about what men are doing and what their fathering means for children. Despite the importance of focusing directly on fathers and children, it remains essential to place fatherhood in context. Although historians have started to do this (see Griswold, 1993; LaRossa, 1997), we know little of the demography of fatherhood. Without the “big picture” that a historical and demographic context provides, we are less able to understand the significance of our more focused research.

This article begins the task of providing a demographic portrait of men’s experience with fatherhood as defined by living with their own children by focusing on cohort changes in the past 30 years. Even this relatively brief interval, with all its shortcomings of imprecise measurement of fatherhood and incomplete cohorts, shows that men’s experience living with their own children is quite different today than was the case for men entering adulthood in the shadow of World War II.

Based on the changes in fertility patterns of the past several decades, we anticipated that fatherhood for recent cohorts would be not be as ubiquitous a feature of adulthood for men as was the case for earlier cohorts. This is exactly what we observed. Because these data are cross-sectional and not the cumulative experience of men over time, we cannot say with certainty that fatherhood is disappearing from the lives of a growing proportion of men. However, it is clear from these data that for men at any given age, living with their own children is a diminishing feature of adulthood, a topic I will return to below.

We also predicted that fatherhood would diminish in frequency. Clearly, the most recent cohorts are significantly less likely to be marked

by fathers with three or more children or by fathers with preschool age children. The fact that men's experience with fatherhood is structured by the pace and timing of childbearing is largely unappreciated. This is unfortunate. Living with three or more children, as nearly 40% the 1930 to 1934 and 1935 to 1939 birth cohorts did in middle age, but less than 16% of the 1965 to 1969 birth cohort did at the same age, is undoubtedly a very different context for doing fatherhood. It may very well be that our new fatherhood, characterized by a growing proportion of men who have an intense emotional connection to their children and higher levels of involvement in their lives (Pleck, 1997), might largely be reflecting the growing proportion of men with only one or two children. Having one or two children, of course, makes it much easier to be intensively involved in children's lives than having four or five children.

We anticipated that changes in the timing of childbearing and the patterns of custody evident in the aftermath of divorce would lead to more recent cohorts being characterized by a concentration of fatherhood in middle age. The evidence for this, although not as strong as for the former predictions, nonetheless indicates that this is probably the case. Fatherhood, at least men living with children, has largely disappeared from young adulthood and (probably) late middle age, especially for the highly educated. Perhaps the cultural and behavior changes in fathering are more understandable in the context of a growing proportion of men taking on fatherhood at midlife, a period of life more likely to be characterized by the resources and time to devote to intensive fathering.

Finally, we found that these changes differ by race. Black men's experience with fatherhood is more variable than that of White men, but it also shows a decline across cohorts that does not appear to be explained by changes in education. The observed cohort changes are more diverse, less uniform than those of Whites, in part, no doubt, because of Black men's greater likelihood of being nonresident fathers, higher rates of cohabitation, and greater tendency to live in multigenerational households.

What might these trends mean for children? There are two possibilities. On one hand, as fewer and fewer men become fathers and those that do spend a smaller proportion of their adult life course living with children than was the case among men in earlier cohorts, we might expect an overall declining commitment on the part of men to child-centric social, political, and economic issues. As a result, children, as a group, increasingly may become disadvantaged relative to other groups (e.g., the poor, the elderly, the disabled) in the competition for public goods and services as the number of stakeholders in their welfare declines. On the other hand, however, as fatherhood becomes increasingly selective, we might anticipate a

deepening commitment to engaged fathering among those men who choose this role. Thus, it is conceivable that today, more children than ever are exposed to engaged and involved fathers; at the same time, however, children as a group are becoming less important to men.

These trends are also worthy of attention because there is growing evidence that children affect men's well-being. To be sure, most of our attention on fatherhood has been on what men do for children, but some research does focus on the consequences of fatherhood for men. For the most part, the empirical work, which is focused on normatively timed fatherhood, finds that these experiences are positive for men's lives (Eggebeen & Knoester, 2001; Pleck, 1997). There is some evidence that participation in fathering behaviors may increase life satisfaction and self-esteem and buffer stress (Barnett, Marshall, & Pleck, 1992; Gove & Mongione, 1983; Russell & Radin, 1983). Fatherhood provides men with opportunities to be engaged in their communities (Eggebeen & Knoester, 2001; Snarey, 1993). Men who are fathers have higher church attendance rates (Chaves, 1991; Eggebeen & Knoester, 2001; Ploch & Hastings, 1998; Stolzenberg, Blair-Loy, & Waite, 1995). Fathers are more connected to their families (Eggebeen & Hogan, 1990; Eggebeen & Knoester, 2001). Finally, men who are fathers approach their work lives differently, showing greater attachment to their jobs or careers (Eggebeen & Knoester, 2001; Snarey, 1993).

These favorable consequences of fatherhood become salient in the light of the demographic changes documented in this article. What are the social consequences of fatherhood becoming less common across cohorts of men? If fatherhood is an important mechanism for promoting psychological health, family and social integration, and work productivity among men, perhaps the decline of fatherhood, if severe, might pose a threat. To be sure, the empirical evidence for the effects of fatherhood on men remains sketchy, at best. Most work is correlational in nature; little attempt has been made to examine mechanisms, and the practice of fathering as opposed to role occupancy has been largely ignored (cf. Snarey, 1993, and Eggebeen & Knoester, 2001, for exceptions to these criticisms). Also, by and large, there has been little attempt to address the social class and race differences that structure fathering. Until we have more confidence that fatherhood does influence men, we cannot say with any certainty that the above-described demographic changes are ominous. Nevertheless, it is ironic that, at the very time that the changes in the practice of fatherhood are being praised, fatherhood is becoming a less common activity among all men.

In summary, I have presented evidence that the place of fatherhood in the lives of men has undergone stark alterations, at least at the population level. The challenge, of course, is to move beyond the broad strokes of change painted by these descriptive analyses to address questions they provoke: questions about the meaning and importance of fatherhood for men and the implications for society of these social changes in the life courses of men in aggregate.

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