

FATHER ABSENCE AND ITS EFFECT ON YOUNG ADULTS' CHOICES OF
COHABITATION, MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE

by

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Abstract

Fathers, once deemed as “forgotten contributors to child development” (Lamb, 1975, p. 246), may provide more than just a breadwinning role for their children. More studies have examined the effects of a father’s absence and involvement on his children, specifically among adolescents’ early sexual activity. The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of father absence on young adults’ choices of cohabitation, marriage and divorce. The data for this analysis came from *The February-March 2007 Social Trends Survey* by the Pew Research Center, a nationally representative sample in the United States. This analysis selected 802 young adult respondents (18-40 year olds). Results support previous research that the two, key factors leading to father absence are children whose parents never married or whose parents divorced. Father absence was associated with children’s future cohabitation rates for the whole sample, but not when examined individually by gender, race or ethnicity. Higher marriage rates were associated with father-present homes among men and in the overall sample, but not for women or according to race or ethnicity. No associations were found between father absence and children’s future divorce rates. Tracking young adults’ rates of marriage and divorce according to father absence and cohabitation (tables 4.4 through 4.9) found that young adults who had the combination of a father-present and did not cohabit had the lowest divorce rates. Future research should investigate the disparity in father-present homes between those who did and did not cohabit, father and child religiosity, and father involvement. Implications for family life education were also presented.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

In the past, our society has traditionally thought of fathers as the financial providers or breadwinners for their families (Cooksey & Fondell, 1996). Studies have been conducted to examine how families are affected when a father is not living in the same household. Some have even called this “father absence.” It appears that father absence has a direct correlation to the occurrence of economic hardships on the families where the father is absent. These negative effects (economic hardships) have been shown to influence different aspects of a child’s wellbeing, including: nutrition, physical health, emotional health, school grades, school drop-out rates, and behavioral problems (Marsiglio, Amato, Day, & Lamb, 2000). Marsiglio and his associates (2000) also conclude “...that fathers’ earnings are positively and independently associated with offspring outcomes [educational attainment and psychological well-being] in two-parent families” (p. 1182).

In 1975, one researcher noted that men may provide more than just a breadwinning role for their children. He stated that men had often been considered the “forgotten contributors to child development” and that the “father-child relationship deserves more explicit attention than it has been accorded in the past” (Lamb, 1975, p. 246). One year later, in 1976, several researchers similarly recognized that “studies of fathering are needed to provide insight into the kinds of interactions generally unavailable to children in homes without participating males” (Rendina & Dickerscheid, 1976, p. 373).

The fatherhood research that began in the 1970's and 1980's has continued to grow in both number and complexity throughout the 1990's and continuing to the current time (Marsiglio et al., 2000). During the fifteen years prior to 2003, researchers found that "more than 700 articles on fathers have been cited each year" (Lewis & Lamb, 2003, p. 211). This additional research has led researchers to a consensus that fathers do impact to the normal and abnormal outcomes in their children's lives (Cooksey & Fondell, 1996; Silverstein & Auerbach, 1999).

During the 1990's, one notable sociologist shared his perspective that "the most urgent domestic challenge facing the United States at the close of the twentieth century is the re-creation of fatherhood as a vital social role for men" (Blankenhorn, 1995, p. 222). Blankenhorn and several other researchers suggest that quite a few of our social problems are directly attributable to the absence of fathers' involvement in the lives of their children (Silverstein & Auerbach, 1999). The results of a 1999 poll on Fathering in America conducted by The National Center for Fathering concur with what Blankenhorn was describing. In this national poll, 72.2% of the participants agreed that "the physical absence of the father from the home is the most significant family problem facing America" (The National Center for Fathering, 1999, p. 1).

Blankenhorn, upon documenting the importance of fathers in their children's lives, references four ways that children benefit from their father's involvement: "First, it provides them with a father's physical protection. Second, it provides them with a father's money and other material resources. Third...it provides them with what might be termed paternal cultural transmission... Fourth...the day-to-day nurturing—feeding

them, playing with them, telling them a story—that they want and need from both their parents” (Blankenhorn, 1995, p. 25).

It should be noted that there has been some debate about how the fatherhood research should be viewed. Silverstein and Auerbach (1999) argue that Blankenhorn and other “neoconservative social scientists have replaced the earlier ‘essentializing’ of mothers with a claim about the essential importance of fathers” (p. 397). Although they admit that fathers are contributors to the development of their children, they do not believe that a father or mother is essential. They conclude that multiple family structures can lead to positive outcomes in children instead of the traditional heterosexual nuclear family. They grant that more than one adult would more likely lead to more positive outcomes in children, but “children need at least one responsible, caretaking adult who has a positive emotional connection to them and with whom they have a consistent relationship” (Silverstein & Auerbach, 1999, p. 397-398).

Somewhere in the middle of the two perspectives discussed above is one that emphasizes the importance of the unique contributions that both mothers and fathers play in their children’s development. The research and the plethora of studies that have been conducted on maternal attachment and the rearing of children have been pivotal in the understanding of child development while a father’s involvement has been less-well documented and, at times, effectively ignored. This paper will focus on the impact of fathers on their children’s development even though less is certain about the consequential effects of their involvement. In an effort to show how father involvement should be framed in the education of children, Levine and his associates stated that “...in calling for greater male involvement we’re not suggesting that women aren’t doing or

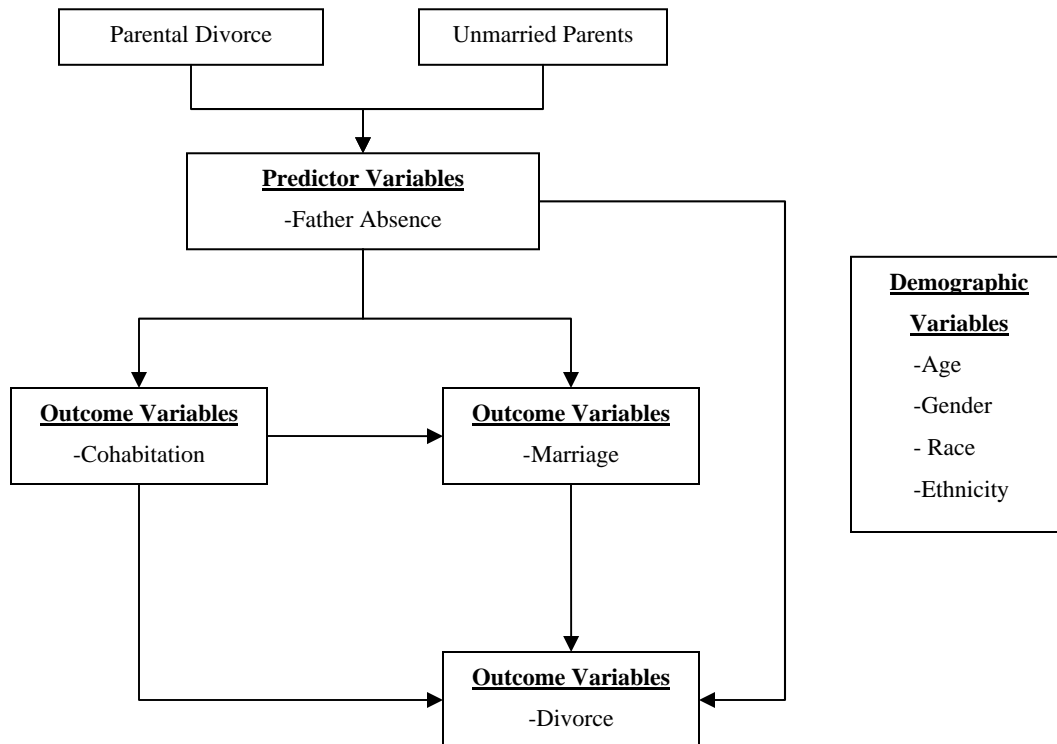
can't do a good job. But in the long run, we believe its healthier for our society—and for women—to encourage both men and women to be involved with the care and education of young children” (Levine, Murphy, & Wilson, 1998, p. 10).

Due to the differences in these perspectives about family structure and the impact of father involvement on children, more research is needed to explore the father-child relationship. The purpose of this research study was to see if father absence influences the eventual adult family structure and affiliated next generational romantic relationships. In particular, this study will look at how a father's absence influences his young adults' (ages 18-40 years old) choices about, and disposition toward, cohabitation, marriage and divorce.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this literature review is to look at how father involvement and father absence affect young adult children's beliefs and choices regarding sexual activity, cohabitation, marriage and divorce. The following conceptual model has been developed to illustrate the different variables that will be researched.



Father Absence

It is difficult to understand what is meant by father absence from the literature due to the different ways that the term is used. Many researchers use this term to signify a family in which no biological father was living in the same household during the rearing

of children. Other researchers have used this term to include different types of emotional father absence even if a father is living in the same home with his children.

In this research study, “father absence” will be used to define a family in which the father does not live in the same household. There are many different reasons why there may be father absence: out-of-wedlock birth, death of the father, divorce or separation of parents. Mackey and Immerman (2007) state that there are two types of father absence: father-preclusion and father-abrasion. Father-preclusion would include out-of-wedlock births because they may prevent fathers from being involved in their children’s lives. Father-abrasion would most likely result from divorce or separation of parents (Mackey & Immerman, 2007).

This study will use the term “relationship with father” to signify the quality of the direct interaction that a child has with his/her father. This will allow for a differentiation of the types of father presences that children have in their lives. For some children, they may not have a relationship with their father because he was not present in the home from very early age. For other children, this term will be used to gauge the quality of their relationship with their father, regardless of whether he was living in their same household or not.

Father Absence and the Parent’s Relationship at the Child’s Birth

There was a steady increase in out-of-wedlock births from the 1960’s to the 1990’s (Shafer, 2006), although it slowed in the late 1990’s (Sawhill, 2006). One author has even shown how the growth of out-of-wedlock births was the key factor in the increasing the child poverty rate (15-20%) between 1970 and 1996 (Sawhill, 2006). Several researchers estimate that one-third of all births in the U.S. are to unmarried

mothers (Carlson et al., 2004; Kreider, 2008), while others attribute more than half of all births to single mothers and one-in-five to cohabitating parents (Kennedy & Bumpass, 2008). Significantly higher levels of education and income can be found in married parents, when compared to cohabitating parents (Osborne, Manning, & Smock, 2007).

Research has found that the key factor for “the stability of children’s early family life course” (Osborne et al., 2007, p. 1363) was whether or not their two biological parents were married at the child’s birth. Children who are born to cohabitating parents (versus married parents) are at five times the risk of having their parents separate (Osborne et al., 2007). It has also been found that having a two-parent family structure appears to afford children with more resources. Those resources have been found to provide a smoother transition into adulthood. (Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1998).

In a two-county survey, data from the British Household Panel Survey and the National Survey of Families and Household in the United States were used to examine the strongest predictors of father absence (Clarke, Cooksey, & Verropoulou, 1998). Fathers were interviewed five years after an initial interview to assess what factors might lead them to live apart from their children. Results show that the strongest predictor of father absence is the relationship between the parents at the time of a child’s birth. Children born within cohabitation are at three times the risk of father absence than those children born into marriage in the United States, and six times the risk of father absence for equivalent children in Great Britain. When children are born outside of a co-residential relationship (marriage or cohabitation) they are at four times the risk of having an absent father in the United States and six times the risk in Great Britain (Clarke et al., 1998, p. 225). The authors noted that “fathers are far less likely to live apart from

children born within marriage, but only one quarter of fathers were still living with children born in a cohabitation union in both countries” (Clarke et al., 1998, p. 226).

Fathers’ Relationships with their Children

In order to begin to discover the fathers’ role in the development of their children, we must first look at their earliest interactions with them. Attachment theory will be used to describe the relationships between fathers and their children. Attachment has been described as “the strong, affectional tie we have with special people in our lives that lead us to feel pleasure when we interact with them and to be comforted by their nearness during times of stress” (Berk, 2003, p. 417). Theorists such as Freud, Bowlby, and Ainsworth have all suggested that the emotional tie (attachment) established with parents, especially mothers, is needed for infants to build secure relationships later in life (Berk, 2003). This has been the topic of several decades of research, beginning with research on mother-infant attachment and culminating in comparisons between mother-infant and father-infant attachment.

Measurement of Attachment

The Strange Situation. Much of the research on attachment is based on Mary Ainsworth’s research in which she developed a method to assess the quality of attachment in infants and toddlers. This technique, called the Strange Situation, allows children an opportunity to explore unfamiliar settings while using a parental figure as a secure base. It has been most frequently used for children between the ages of one and two years old (Berk, 2003). In the Strange Situation, attachment is categorized into four different areas: secure attachment, avoidant attachment, resistant attachment, and disorganized attachment.

The Adult Attachment Interview. The Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) was developed to measure “social transmission of attachment patterns across generations” (Steele, Steele, & Fonagy, 1996, p. 541). This interview invites parents to assess their own upbringing through a series of questions about the attachment they had with their parents. The AAI has been particularly helpful in providing data for researchers to compare against the attachment scores produced by the Strange Situation (Steele et al., 1996).

The Attachment Q-Sort. Berk (2003) describes the Attachment Q-Sort (AQS) as a more efficient way to measure attachment in children ages one to five years old. The AQS uses a set of ninety cards that the parent is asked to sort into nine piles of ten cards each. At the beginning of the process, the parent is then asked to recombine the ninety cards into three specific piles. The first pile is to only have cards with statements that tend to describe their child correctly, the second pile should only contain cards that are neither similar nor unlike their child, and the last pile contains cards that are most unlike their child (Caldera, 2004). After this sorting process, the parent divides the cards, as instructed, into even more subcategories that allow an attachment score to be computed for the child ranging from securely to insecurely attached (Berk, 2003). Researchers have noted that the AQS is a good “home-based compliment to the Strange Situation” (Pederson, Moran, Sitko, & Campbell, 1990, p. 1975) that gets back to Ainsworth’s original focus of observing mother-infant attachment in their natural environment.

Father-infant Attachment

The results from mother-infant attachment studies have provided a basis for the research on father-infant attachment. Most of the research found utilized the same

methods to measure mother-infant and father-infant attachment in their respective studies.

Lamb has been one of the pioneers of father-infant attachment research. As early as 1977, he found that “infants are attached to both parents as early as 7 months of age. The data demonstrates quite clearly that the infants are attached to both parents but not to the visitor” (Lamb, 1977, p. 174). Even though Lamb found that an infant developed an attachment to his/her parents and not to the visitor, there was no differentiation between the attachment to the father or to the mother.

There have been mixed findings on the relationship between mother-infant and father-infant attachment. In one meta-analysis of eleven studies by Fox and his colleagues, they found that “mothers and fathers respond similarly to their infant and, perhaps, share similar views regarding caregiving” (Fox, Kimmerly, & Schafer, 1991, p. 222). Berk, in her review of the literature, found that “when an anxious, unhappy 1-year-old is permitted to choose between the mother and the father as a source of comfort and security, the infant usually chooses the mother. But this preference declines over the second year of life” (Berk, 2003, p. 425). Other researchers have concluded that fathers do induce their infants to form attachments, but to a lesser degree than mothers (van IJzendoorn & De Wolff, 1997). Steele and his colleagues found that “results are consistently somewhat weaker for fathers and their infants as compared to mothers and their infants” (Steele et al., 1996, p. 552).

The Impact of Sensitivity on Attachment. Ainsworth stated that change in maternal sensitivity would result in changes in the security of the mother-infant attachment (Pederson et al., 1990). Since her findings, there have been researchers who have sought

to qualify the strength of sensitivity and its role in attachment formation. One such study found “robust empirical endorsement” (Pederson et al., 1990, p. 1980) that maternal sensitivity was in fact a precursor to the development of a secure attachment. Similar studies have shown that mothers who valued attachment showed greater levels of sensitivity during their infants’ first year (Grossmann et al., 2002).

Due to significant findings on maternal sensitivity and its effect in infant attachment, paternal sensitivity has been evaluated for its role in infant attachment as well. Much of the research has led to similar findings that “fathers, on the whole, did not look as sensitive nor as available to their children as did mothers” (Lovas, 2005, p. 346). Lovas, in her study on sensitivity, offered this possible explanation for the lack of observable paternal sensitivity:

The fact that fathers in the current sample did not look as emotionally available as mothers is not a reason to despair; however, it is a reason to more carefully evaluate how fathers do in fact interact with their children in these very intimate contexts and, as we contemplate early gender development, to consider how fathers’ behavior with young children affects children’s sense of themselves as they learn to relate to others (Lovas, 2005, p. 347).

Fathers and the Use of Play with Their Children

If it is true that fathers do play a different role in the development of children, then research should be able to show us how their role differs from that of mothers. Lamb, in 1977, found that “fathers were more likely to hold the babies simply to play with them, while the mothers were far more likely to hold them for caretaking purposes” (Lamb, 1977, p. 176). Rendina and Dickerscheid (1976) found that fathers spent far more

time socializing with their children (10.2% of the time) and affective proximal attention (9.2% of the time) to their infants than caretaking activities (3.8% of the time) (Rendina & Dickerscheid, 1976).

Lamb's research (1977) also showed that children's responses to play with their fathers were more positive than they were with their mothers. This idea was replicated by Clarke-Stewart who found that although there were not any differences in the frequency of play between mothers and father, children in fact "rated significantly more responsive to play initiated by father than play initiated by mother" (Clarke-Stewart, 1978, p. 472). Also of note in Clarke-Stewart's study (1978) was that mothers chose activities, with their fifteen-month-old children, that were nonsocial and intellectual, and fathers chose activities that were social and physical.

The Difference between Father-child and Mother-child Interactions

Lamb speculated that "perhaps, then, fathers are not simply occasional mother substitutes, as most have assumed, for they interact with their infant in a unique and qualitatively different manner...it is plausible to argue that infants develop different expectations and learn different behavior patterns from each parent" (Lamb, 1977, p. 179).

In a study that measured emotion regulation in infants, they found that "styles of emotion regulation were significantly associated with attachment quality with fathers, this was not true for attachment quality with mothers" (Diener, Mengelsdorf, McHale, & Frosch, 2002, p. 171). This study leads us to speculate that if fathers engage their infants in intense, rough and tumble play, then this provides infants with opportunities to regulate their emotions after the play. As mentioned earlier, mothers tend to engage in

activities that are nonsocial and intellectual that may not give infants an opportunity to practice the regulation of their emotions (Clarke-Stewart, 1978).

Problems with the Measures Used to Assess Father-infant Attachment

Now that we have established the findings that fathers and mothers may develop different types of relationships with their children, this paper will briefly mention some problems with the measures used to assess father-infant attachment. Several researchers have questioned the measures that are used to assess father-infant attachment. Grossmann and his associates (2002) argued that studies that use the Strange Situation to measure infant-father attachment have often sought to find parallels to maternal sensitivity or tender loving care found in mothers. It is obvious that researchers are now looking for different variables in the father-infant relationship, but maybe they need to look at different measures to assess it. Consider the following observation by Steele:

It is possible that both the Adult Attachment Interview and Strange Situation assessments are more sensitive to the characteristics of females. The Strange Situation was developed and validated on mothers and their infants, while the Adult Attachment Interview asks principally about thoughts and feelings concerning relationships, which may be seen as a topic more familiar to women. Indeed, attachment relationships may be a domain of emotional development in which mothers' influence is primary, at least in the first 2 years of life" (Steele et al., 1996, p. 552).

Grossmann and his associates (2002) explored a different measure for assessing father-infant attachment. In this sixteen year longitudinal study, father-toddler play sensitivity was measured by the Sensitive and Challenging Interactive Play Scale (SCIP).

The SCIP was developed with “Ainsworth’s concept of sensitivity, cooperation (non-interference), and acceptance” (Grossmann et al., 2002, p. 316). In this study, ten year olds who scored a current secure attachment were “securely attached to their mothers in infancy and, as toddlers, had experienced fathers who were more sensitive and gently challenging during play” (Grossmann et al., 2002, p. 322).

Another finding in this study was that “infant-father quality of attachment in the SSP (Strange Situation) predicted the child’s attachment representation at age 6 but not at ages 10 and 16. In contrast, infant-mother quality of attachment but not maternal play sensitivity predicted the child’s attachment representation at ages 6 and 10” (Grossmann et al., 2002, p. 322).

Lastly, Grossmann and his associates (2002) suggest a new paradigm shift as to the way we view child attachment with mothers and fathers. They suggest that mothers may act as the secure home base described by Ainsworth. The fathers, on the other hand, may be seen “as an attachment figure (that) might be (able) to provide security through sensitive and challenging support as a companion when the child’s exploratory system is aroused, thereby complementing the secure-base-role of the mother as an attachment figure” (Grossmann et al., 2002, p. 311).

Father Absence and Relationship with Father

We have already looked into the differences that fathers and mothers contribute to the development of their children. We have found that fathers do have a unique role to play in the lives of their children. Now we will look at the factors that regulate the extent to which fathers become involved with their children. This regulation of involvement is

more restrictive when fathers do not live in the same household as the mothers and their children.

Trends in Father Involvement

As father involvement is analyzed using data compiled between the years 1965-1998, the trends show that father involvement is increasing over time. It is also clear that fathers with a college degree tend to be more involved with their children than those without one, with the highest level of father involvement occurring when a father is both college-educated and married (Bianchi, 2000; McLanahan, 2004).

There are several factors that have influenced fathers' involvement with their children. One author has even noted that both birth control and legalized abortion have led to a decrease in a father's willingness to assume responsibility for his children (McLanahan, 2004). Father involvement has been found to be most effective when the father was living in the same household as a resident father (Carlson, 2006).

Parental Divorce: Effect on Children

In a review of the research on divorce's impact on children, Amato (1994) concludes that children who experience parental divorce (compared to children from intact, two-parent families) had "lower academic achievement, more behavioral problems, poorer psychological adjustment, more negative self-concepts, more social difficulties, and more problematic relationships with both mothers and fathers" (Amato, 1994, p. 145). It has also been found that the parents' marital quality has an effect on the parent-child relationship (Amato & Booth, 1996).

Parental divorce is something that may result in a life-changing event for the children going through it. In the twenty-five year longitudinal study on the effects of

divorce on children, it was reported that mothers, fathers and children continued to feel the effects of the divorce ten to fifteen years later (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1996).

One of the key factors for children to cope with their parents' divorce appears to be the amount of support they receive from their parents before and after the divorce. One study of young-adults from divorced families found that those who had described themselves as having a secure attachment were those who received support from their parents after the divorce, and whose parents were respectful to each other after the divorce. Those who identified themselves as having an insecure attachment were those who had parents who provided very little support, and whose parents had many disagreements before and after the divorce (Mahl, 2001).

Another factor in coping with a parent's divorce, among young adults, appears to be the father's presence during childhood and the current quality of the father-child relationship. Quality relationships with fathers after divorce have been found to result in "lower levels of anger or sense of loss in the past, but also to a more integrative perception of the divorce and lower sense of current loss" (Shulman, Scharf, Lumer, & Maurer, 2001, p. 4).

Parental Divorce's Effect on Fathers' Relationships with their Children

Parental divorce seems to have a particular effect on fathers' relationships with their children. One study found fathers' affection toward their children was negatively affected after the divorce whereas the mothers' affection toward their children was not (Amato & Booth, 1996).

In an Australian study about parent-child relations following divorce, children were examined three times over the course of a ten year period. Divorced fathers were

perceived by their children, at all three time-periods, to be less caring when compared to currently married fathers (Dunlop, Burns, & Bermingham, 2001).

Another study found that children whose parents divorced were twice as likely as children from intact families to have poorer relationships with both their mothers and fathers (Zill, Morrison, & Coiro, 1993). Fathers' relationships with their children seem to be especially vulnerable following divorce. This study found that 65% of young adults whose parents divorced had poor relationships with their fathers compared to 30% of those with poor relationships with their mothers (Zill et al., 1993). Another study found that the father-daughter relationship was affected by divorce (Clark & Kanoy, 1998). Those daughters from divorced families had lower levels of intimacy with their fathers than those from married families (Clark & Kanoy, 1998).

This may be in part because very few (15% in one particular study) fathers end up with full custody of their children (Amato & Booth, 1996). Fathers may have a harder time maintaining their close relationships with their children from a distance after events such as divorce.

The Influence of Mothers on Father Involvement

Several researchers have used the term “gatekeepers” to describe women who “overtly or covertly, exclud(e) fathers from participating in child care because of fear of loss of power or threat to personal identity” (De Luccie, 1995, p. 116). One study has identified three different reasons for gatekeeping: safety reasons, extended father absence and poor relationships (Claessens, 2007). Claessens (2007) notes that those mothers who engage in gatekeeping for safety reasons are often justified because they do not want their children to be in any type of danger. In contrast, gatekeeping that occurs as a result of

extended father absence or poor relationships tends to be more complicated. Many of the fathers who do not visit their children on a regular basis frequently say that the mother of their child is not allowing them to be as involved as they would like to be (Claessens, 2007).

Several trends have been determined concerning the way women influence father involvement. First, Palkovitz found that, during interactions between fathers, mothers, and their infants, the “mothers’ concept of the fathers’ role emerged as the single best predictor of fathers’ involvement” (Palkovitz, 1984, p. 1057). When the interaction was just between the father and the infant, the fathers’ concept of his role became more predictive of his involvement. Second, De Luccie (1995) found that mothers who believed father involvement to be important, and who were satisfied with their marriage, were those mothers who were more satisfied with the prevailing levels of father involvement. Overall, this study found that “fathers who are more frequently involved with their children have younger aged children and are married to women who believe paternal involvement is important and are satisfied with their husband’s involvement in child care” (De Luccie, 1995).

In yet another study that assessed the impact of maternal gatekeeping on father involvement, Fagan & Barnett found that “mothers play a significant role in deciding how much time fathers spend with their children” and that “mothers who rated fathers as being competent parents engaged in less gatekeeping behavior toward the men” (Fagan & Barnett, 2003, pp. 1033, 1036). It is also interesting to note that even a mother’s belief about a father’s role even has an influence on the father’s own beliefs relating to his involvement with and overall parenting of his children (McBride et al., 2005). As the

research has shown, women can play a very powerful role in encouraging fathers to be involved in the lives of their children (Palkovitz, 1984).

Daughters Distrust of Men

Distrust of men has been found to negatively impact pro-marriage attitudes in unmarried women (Edin, 2000; Shafer, 2006). One study found that women's distrust of men decreased the likelihood of her forming a union of marriage or cohabitation (Carlson, McLanahan, & England, 2004). These findings might lead us to wonder if father absence (preclusion or abrasion) may lead to developing a distrust of men. There are several possible explanations as to why a distrust of men develops. One reason would be that it is learned by the daughter by watching her mother interact with her father, and possibly other men. Several researchers have proposed that the mothers of father-absent girls teach their daughters to distrust men (Coley, 2002; Edin, 2000).

The theme of distrust of men was explored in a qualitative study of 302, primarily low-income, African-American single mothers (Coley, 2002). Only 16% of the women were married and 68% had been married at least one time. These women were asked what they taught their daughters about men. Coley (2002) found that "nearly all of the mothers report negative or at best neutral messages. Only a handful of mothers (6%) reported passing down positive and hopeful constructions of men and relationships" (p.102). Another important finding in this study was the complete absence of marriage mentioned by these mothers. Only 9% of the mothers mentioned marriage or a stable, positive relationship when they were asked, "What is the most important thing you hope (daughter) does in her life?" (Coley, 2002, pp. 103-104). It indeed appears that mothers influence the attitudes of their daughters concerning both men and marriage.

Young Men's Relationship with Father and Self-esteem

It is possible that boys and girls may react differently to both father absence and negative things that mothers may say about men. In a small sample of 80 men, they were asked questions to see if their relationship with their father in childhood and adolescence impacted their self-esteem as an adult. It was concluded that “the type of relationship these men had with their fathers during childhood was related to self-esteem in adulthood” (Dick & Bronson, 2005, p. 580). The men with higher self-esteem had fathers who were involved in their school and family activities, as well as participating in household chores. These men also saw their fathers as more willing to express their emotions and more available to talk with them.

These sons, like the daughters who learn to distrust men, certainly will not leave their homes unaffected by their mothers' often negative perceptions of men in her life. Could it be that instead of developing a distrust of men, young boys may develop a lower self-esteem because they are men? These young men may begin to think that they will not make good fathers or husbands because of the things that their mothers told them about men. One study of African American adolescents (Mandara, 2005) found that in father-absent homes, the mothers tend to rely more on their daughters than their sons. This researcher found that those daughters from father-absent homes became more masculine girls, whereas the sons became less masculine due to the lack of a father figure in their lives. It could be speculated that those sons were less masculine not only because they did not have a father-present in the home, but because they did not want to be like their father.

Fathers and their Children's Early Sexual Activity and Pregnancy

Early Sexual Activity

In 1991 Belsky and his associates provided a framework that suggested girls from a stressful environment (father-absent homes) were more likely to experience an early sexual maturation (early onset of puberty/menstruation, early sexual activity) (Belsky, Steinberg, & Draper, 1991). These risk factors, the authors argue, could result in the “tendency to engage in short-term romantic relationships, insecure attachment romantic style, and high fertility and reproductive output” (Maestripieri, Roney, DeBias, Durante, & Spaepen, 2004, p. 565). There have been several studies that validate the absent father framework, but there has been some debate that early sexual activity is due to the stress from family turbulence, defined as many significant changes in the family members and circumstances, in single-parent families (Wu, 2001). It also appears that early sexual development in single-parent families is usually associated with girls, but not boys (Belsky et al., 2007; Davis & Friel, 2001). It is further interesting to note that those women who only lived with single fathers after separation showed similar risk factors as those women who lived with a single mother (Quinlan, 2003, pp. 385-386). This finding implies that it may not be that the father alone is the moderating factor, but that it's the stabilizing influence of growing up in a two-parent family that may have the greatest affect.

Father Absence and Early Sexual Activity

Several studies have shown that young adolescents, primarily women, raised in single-parent families are 1.5 times more likely to engage in pre-marital sexual behavior than those adolescents from two-parent families (Davis & Friel, 2001; Flewelling, 1990).

Although most studies show that adolescent girls from single-parent families are at a higher risk for early sexual behavior, studies have not been as conclusive as to the effect that growing up in a parent-stepparent family has on early sexual behavior. One study found that girls from these families, as well as cohabitating families, do not show any significant differences concerning early sexual activity than single-parent families (Davis & Friel, 2001), while other studies show that parent-stepparent families put adolescents at a similar risk of early sexual activity (Flewelling, 1990). There have even been findings that show that girls “living with a stepfather from birth through 5 years had the strongest effect on the age at first sex and first pregnancy” (Quinlan, 2003, p. 385).

In a convenience sample of 321 highly-educated German women (ages 18-60), they found that the most significant factor to an early menarche (first menstruation period) was father absence (Hoier, 2003, p. 217). They also found that deeply significant events in childhood were also an indicator of early menarche. This study leads us to believe that both father absence and stressful events contribute to early menarche. The reason why the age of menarche is important is because it has been consistently linked with the age of first intercourse, first petting, and the onset of the first romantic relationship (Hoier, 2003).

Timing of Father Absence

It also appears that the timing of the father absence may be an important factor. In a national probability survey of 10,847 women (aged 15-44) from the 1973 to 1995 data of the National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG), the study looked at the timing of father absence on early sexual activity and marital stability. When women’s parents separated early in their lives (0-6 years), they were at two times the risk of early

menarche, four times the risk of early sexual intercourse, two and a half times the risk of early pregnancy in comparison to women from two-parent families (Quinlan, 2003, p. 382). When parents were separated at an early age, Quinlan (2003) also found that those children grew up to have a shorter duration of their first marriage.

Family Turbulence or Father Absence

As mentioned before, one of the major arguments against the influence of father absence on early sexual behavior is that there are other family factors that influence adolescent girls. Wu (2001) calls these factors family turbulence, which are significant changes within the family structure and circumstances in single-parent families. Wu does concede that adolescent girls from non-intact homes have higher rates of early sexual behavior (although not significant in his study); he, instead, argues that as the overt sexual activity of the single parent rises so does the sexual activity of the adolescent (Wu, 2001). He also notes that the mother's age at first birth and the mother's education are negatively associated with the early timing of the adolescent's first sexual intercourse (Wu, 2001, p. 692).

In an effort to test for the influence of family turbulence factors and the timing of father absence, a group of researchers compared longitudinal data from both U.S. and New Zealand samples (Ellis et al., 2003). In this study, they looked at early child conduct problems and familial and ecological stress variables as possible confounding variables. After controlling for these possible confounding variables, the authors found that "early father-absent girls continued to have the highest rates of both early sexual activity and adolescent pregnancy, followed by late father-absent girls, followed by father-present girls" (Ellis et al., 2003, p. 813). This is consistent with previous research mentioned that

found that early father absence was associated with increased and early sexual behavior (Quinlan, 2003). What was even more interesting about their results was that “none of the measures of familial and ecological stress predicted either early sexual activity or adolescent pregnancy after controlling for timing of father absence and early conduct problems” (Ellis et al., 2003, p. 817).

Father Involvement and Early Sexual Activity

Several studies have looked beyond the father absence and family turbulence theories to see if the family process affects girl’s early sexual development. In a multi-site, longitudinal study, girls were followed from kindergarten until seventh grade (ages 5 through 12-13) (Ellis, McFadyen-Ketchum, Dodge, Pettit, & Bates, 1999). The results found that father presence before kindergarten predicted a later pubertal onset in the seventh grade girls. Some of the significant things that predicted the later pubertal onset were “more time spent by father in child care, greater supportiveness in the parental dyad, more father-daughter affection” (Ellis et al., 1999, p. 387). From these results, it appears that the effect on pubertal onset is not only father absence or presence, but how involved the father is in his daughter’s life. This means that it would be possible to have resident fathers who are not involved in their daughter’s life, which might still lead to early sexual activity. Another recent longitudinal study confirmed the findings that the family process is important in the pubertal timing in girls, but not boys (Belsky et al., 2007). They found that early impactful rearing experiences involving either parent were predictors of early pubertal onset. The more negative experiences were found to be more influential than the positive ones.

One of the other findings of this research was that the mother's age of menarche was a better predictor of early pubertal onset in her daughters (Belsky et al., 2007). This finding is interesting in that it shows that the effects of early sexual development are intergenerational, and may be passed on from mother to daughter. It appears that the decision to raise a child without a father, or for a mother or father to cause emotionally traumatic interactions with their children, may not only affect the child itself but also the child's children. Even though other studies found that father absence, presence, or involvement does not appear to be significant in their son's early sexual development, one cross-sectional study of adolescent boys found some evidence that teen parenting among men seems to be intergenerational (Forste & Jarvis, 2007). They found that a young man was more likely to become a teen parent if his mother had given birth as a teen. Another factor that was associated with reducing his likelihood of becoming a teen father was living with his father during his teenage years. The experience of father presence (living with their father) was also found to influence the young man's future actions as a father. "Young fathers that lived with their biological father as a teen were 2.8 times more likely to reside with their children" (Forste & Jarvis, 2007, p. 104).

It appears that both the father's presence/absence in the home and his relationship with the children (father involvement) play an important role in the adolescent's choices of early sexual activity and pregnancy. Not only does father absence and non-involvement tend to lead toward early sexual activity and pregnancy, but conversely, several researchers have found that "father presence was a major protective factor against early sexual outcomes, even if other risk factors were present" (Ellis et al., 2003, p. 818).

Father Absence, Romantic Relationships and Marriage

It appears that father absence (both father-abrasion and father-preclusion) may contribute to the poor quality of the child's eventual romantic relationships. One study, that assessed the influence of family history and marital quality on marital stability, found that significantly higher chances of divorce were reported in adult children of divorce (father-abrasion) and children who grew up without a father (father-preclusion), than those adults from two-parent families (Webster, Orbuch, & House, 1995). Adult children of divorce have different propensities in their marital interactions that tend to escalate conflict and reduce potentially mitigating communication. Those adults who grew up without a father exhibited similar traits as to those whose parents were divorced, while those adults who had lost a parent to death exhibited similar traits as to those from intact families (Webster et al., 1995).

Using a national sample of 9,643 nineteen and older adults, Wolfinger (2000) analyzed data from the National Survey of Families and Children to see if children who had experienced early parental relationship (family structure) transitions would experience similar transitions in their family structure as an adult. He found that "people often repeat the patterns of relationship behavior they learned while growing up and thus provide more evidence that people's childhood experiences can shape their adult lives" (Wolfinger, 2000, p. 1078). He concluded that the parental divorce, not the absence of a male role model, seemed to lead to a higher divorce rate among individuals from divorced families.

Yet another study found that the emotional security experienced within young adults' romantic attachments was adversely affected by the occurrence of parental

divorce while they were still children (Summers, Forehand, Armistead, & Tannenbaum, 1998). In contrast, they discovered that the positive “impact of fathers, through their relationships with their adolescents, extends across developmental periods and continues to be important in their children’s young adults years” (Summers et al., 1998, p. 332).

In another study of young adults from intact, single-divorce and multiple-divorce families their expectations about marriage were examined (Boyer-Pennington, Pennington, & Spink, 2001). Those young adults who came from intact families were found to have a more positive outlook about the quality of their future marriages. The participants of all three groups voiced their expectation that the fellow participants from the intact families group would be less likely to get divorced than those from the other two groups. From this study, it appears that young-adults from single-divorce and multiple-divorce families are all still as likely to enter marriage as those young-adults from intact families, even though they might have lower expectations about the quality of their future marriages (Boyer-Pennington et al., 2001). Another representative national study of 2,592 adults found that “adult children of divorce are more likely to marry early, have a history of divorce and remarriage, and to currently be in an unhappy relationship” (Ross & Mirowsky, 1999, p. 1042).

The timing of the parental divorce in a child’s life also seems to be significant. When divorce or separation occurs during a child’s adolescence, those children tend to leave home earlier and are more likely to enter relationships with less support and stability (Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1998; Summers et al., 1998). Summers and his fellow researchers (1998) state that the impact of the parental divorce during a child’s

adolescence might be significantly harsher because adolescence is the stage where a child's romantic relationships begin.

Relationship with Father and Romantic Relationships

Several studies have shown how a young adult's relationship with his/her father might affect future romantic relationships. In 1990, Collins and Read conducted research to see if there was a relationship between the attachment of a partner and the attachment of a parent within undergraduate dating couples. They found a connection between the students' opposite-sex parent and their romantic relationships. Women who saw their fathers as being affectionate and approachable were found to date men who were also able to form a close, comfortable relationship with others. Those women who saw their fathers as being cold, distant or inconsistent were not likely to be dating men with those same characteristics (Collins & Read, 1990). They did not find any connection between men's relationships with their fathers and the partners they chose. The men's choice of partners was influenced by how they viewed their mothers (Collins & Read, 1990).

In another convenience sample of undergraduate students, of which 65% were female, the effect of mothers' and fathers' parenting on the child's eventual relationship quality was examined (Dalton, Frick-Horbury, & Kitzmann, 2006). They found that "fathers' parenting behaviors were associated with the quality of young adults' relationships with a romantic partner, and that young adults who provided more positive rating of the parenting they experienced in childhood also reported greater belief in their ability to form secure and close relationship with others" (Dalton et al., 2006, p. 13-14). This did not appear to be related to the opposite-sex parent, as was found in the Collins and Read study (1990). The authors note that because there was a majority of females

(65%), this may have skewed the results toward fathers seeming to have a more significant influence on the grown child's current romantic relationships than mothers.

Choosing Cohabitation or Marriage

Cohabitation in the U.S. began to gain more social acceptance as an alternate choice of living arrangement during the 1960's and 1970's as the divorce rate was rising (Smock, 2000). It has been estimated that there were 0.4 million heterosexual cohabiting couples in 1960, which grew to nearly 3 million in 1990 and nearly 4.6 million in 2000 (Seltzer, 2004). One recent study found that the rate of women who have ever cohabited has risen from 45% in 1995 to 54% in 2002 (Kennedy & Bumpass, 2008). Manning and Smock (2005) found that cohabitation measurements might not be completely accurate. They surmise that researchers might be underestimating the number of couples who are cohabitating (Manning & Smock, 2005). In addition, other researchers have found that retrospective data on cohabitation might be underestimating the cohabitation rates when respondents try to remember the facts of their cohabitation from many years before (Hayford & Morgan, 2008).

Smock (2000) has found that those who decide to cohabit tend to be of a lower socioeconomic status, more liberal and less religious. It appears that cohabitation is not always seen as a deliberate decision, like marriage. Smock (2000) further explains that cohabitation, as a family structure, tends to be viewed in one of three ways. First, cohabitation may be viewed as one of the steps that lead to marriage. Second, it could be looked upon as a substitute to the institution of marriage. Lastly, many people may be choosing cohabitation as an alternative between remaining single or getting married (Manning & Smock, 2005).

Cohabitation generally seems to be thought of as being more of a temporary arrangement (Waite & Gallagher, 2000) with data showing that cohabitation usually ends within two years in either marriage or dissolution (Bumpass & Sweet, 1989). In one study, twenty-five percent of the cohabitating women stated that they did not plan on marrying their current partner (Manning & Smock, 2002). It should also be noted that Bumpass & Sweet (1987) found that both cohabitation and marriages preceded by cohabitation were more likely to dissolve than living relationships initiated upon marriage.

Other researchers have found that cohabitation may keep some people in relationships regardless of whether the relationship is good or the people are a good match for each other. When couples date (versus cohabit), it is easier for them to break up when the relationship may not be good or they realize that they do not have a good match with their partner. These researchers call this the “inertia of cohabitation” (Stanley, Rhoades, & Markman, 2006, p. 499).

Financial issues seem to be one of the main concerns of those who choose to cohabit. Several researchers have found that cohabitators often believe that marriage should only occur once their financial status changes for the better (Smock, Manning, & Porter, 2005). Other studies have shown that when men earn more money the relationship tends to move toward marriage (Carlson et al., 2004), whereas men with a lower socioeconomic status tend to be those who cohabit (Manning & Smock, 2002). College education in men also seems to be a significant factor in deterring cohabitation (Carlson et al., 2004).

Even though both men's and women's financial stability are affected when cohabitating couples choose to separate, it appears that the women's financial status declines much more significantly. Cohabitation dissolution appears to leave many women in poverty, just like what happens to many divorced women (Avellar & Smock, 2005).

In a random sample of 1,293 adolescents, it was found that those adolescents who had the following characteristics were more likely to cohabit: being involved in more delinquent behavior, living in a family form other than two biological parents (single, cohabiting, stepparent), having low-educated mothers, active in dating and sexual relationships, having lower educational performance and goals, holding less traditional beliefs, being from a minority group (Manning, Longmore, & Giordano, 2007).

Cohabitation also seems to have an influence on young people's values about family formation (Axinn & Barber, 1997). One particular study by Axinn & Barber (1997) found that "cohabitation significantly reduces young people's fertility preferences and significantly increases their tolerance of divorce, but experiences with nonfamily living arrangements do not" (p. 608). What was even more significant about this study was that the longer young people were exposed to cohabitation (in terms of months), the less excited they were about marriage and childbearing.

Cohabitation, Marital Stability and Divorce

In addition to cohabitation having an effect on choices about marriage and childbearing, cohabitation appears to have an effect on the stability of future relationships. Even though some people may choose cohabitation to see if they are well-matched, research has found that premarital cohabitation is associated with lower marital quality and an increased risk of divorce (Smoock, 2000). Axinn & Barber (1997) found

that the experience of ending a cohabitation relationship may be similar to that of a marriage ending in divorce, and that those who cohabited had a greater acceptance of divorce. Other researchers have concluded that “cohabitation in the United States is associated with a greater hazard of dissolution even after counting the time spent in unmarried cohabitation as part of marital duration” (DeMaris & Rao, 1992, p. 178).

Research has also differentiated between the timing of the cohabitation, whether it is pre-marital, pre-engagement, or non-marital. As mentioned earlier, pre-marital cohabitation has been found to be associated with an increased risk of marital problems and divorce (see also Stanley, Rhoades & Markman, 2006). Both pre-marital and non-marital cohabitation were found to be associated with lower levels of commitment to partners, and men who entered pre-marital cohabitation were also found to be both less committed and less religious (Stanley, Whitton, & Markman, 2004).

Several other researchers found that those couples who cohabited pre-engagement were found to have “more negative interactions, lower interpersonal commitment, lower relationship quality, and lower relationship confidence than those who did not cohabit until after engagement or marriage” (Kline et al., 2004, p. 311). This shows a trend that there is a greater risk of marital problems to those who cohabit early (pre-engagement) as apposed to those who cohabited later (pre-marriage/post-engagement) (Kline et al., 2004).

Father Absence and Cohabitation

Women have also been found to be affected by parental divorce, or growing up with a single mother (Teachman, 2004). In a study from the National Survey of Family Growth (1973-1995), Teachman (2004) found that those women who grew up in a single

mother home were more likely to have premarital pregnancy, marry with less than a high school education, or enter into a marriage with both spouses having less than a high school education. Those women who had experienced parental divorce were more likely to have premarital birth and premarital cohabitation (Teachman, 2004). This study concludes that women who live in alternate types of families (instead of intact) “marry younger and with less education, marry husbands with less education, are more likely to have a premarital birth (or conception), and are more likely to cohabit before marriage” (Teachman, 2004, p. 104).

Premarital Fatherhood and Cohabitation

It appears that men may see more advantages to remaining single than women. Men who remain single after fathering a child tend to make more money than women. Men are also not looked down upon in our society for fathering a child out-of-wedlock as much as women (Shafer, 2006), although some studies show that society’s negative perception of single mothers might be changing (Goldscheider & Kaufmann, 2006).

In an analysis of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY), Nock (1998) looked at what the consequence of premarital fatherhood would be for men and women ages 14-21. He found that those men who father a child out-of-wedlock have higher rates (twice as likely) of non-marital cohabitation than those men who do not. Nock (1998) also found that “premarital fatherhood is associated with a range of negative socioeconomic consequences. Unwed fathers earn less, complete fewer years of schooling, are less likely to be employed year-round, and have higher rates of poverty than men who do not become fathers before marriage” (Nock, 1998, p. 261).

Mothers' Influence on Children's Attitudes about Family Structure

Many children live with their mothers when they are born out-of-wedlock (father-preclusion), and also tend to live with them following a parental divorce (father-abrasion). In 2004, the U.S. Census Bureau reported that eighty-eight percent of children growing up in single-parent families lived with their mothers (Kreider, 2008). This often makes mothers a very significant influence on the attitudes and beliefs of their children. Two longitudinal studies (18 years, 31 years), build upon earlier research (Thornton, 1991), tested the intergenerational transmission of the mothers' attitudes about premarital sex and cohabitation to their children (Axinn & Thornton, 1996; Cunningham & Thornton, 2007). Both of these studies interviewed the mothers before they were divorced and years later when their children were 18 years or older. Cunningham and Thornton (2007) found that after a mother's divorce, there tends to be an increased acceptance of cohabitation. Remarriage after a divorce was found to be more influential (than divorce only) on attitudes about premarital sex, cohabitation and divorce (Axinn & Thornton, 1996; Cunningham & Thornton, 2007). The authors theorized that this change in attitude might have occurred because many mothers, who chose to remarry, cohabited and were sexually intimate with their new spouse. When children see their mothers act out their new beliefs about relationships (cohabitation, premarital sex), it appears that the children begin to model some of the same behaviors. The overall conclusion from the research is that mothers who are more accepting of cohabitation and premarital sex tend to have children who are more likely to cohabit and engage in premarital sex as young adults (Smock, 2000). It appears that mothers who married young and were pregnant at

marriage had children who also entered marriage and cohabitation at earlier ages (Thornton, 1991).

Children of Divorce: Marital Quality and Stability

Some research shows that parental divorce may also lower future marital commitment (Wolfinger, 2000), while other research suggests that marital stability (of children of divorced parents) might be affected when conflict comes into the marriage (Webster et al., 1995). Those children of divorce showed the most doubts about their marriage remaining stable (not divorcing) when compared to other types of single-parent families (Webster et al., 1995).

It appears that the conflict level of the marital relationship between the father and mother is a key factor in assessing the wellbeing of children. In a twelve-year longitudinal study, it was found that divorce in high-conflict families actually resulted in higher levels of well-being in young adults than those families who had stayed together. When the families had low-conflict levels, the young adults' well-being scores were higher if the parents stayed together (Amato, Loomis, & Booth, 1995). So it may be possible that high-conflict families may even be worse off than divorced families. This appears to be one of the few situations found in the research that shows that a divorce might actually benefit children.

Risk Factors for Divorce

In the book “Divorce: Causes and Consequences,” the authors identified ten risk factors for divorce in the first ten years of marriage (Clarke-Stewart & Brentano, 2006). They are listed below:

1. Young age: Marrying before the age of twenty-five.

2. Low income: Earning less than twenty-five thousand dollars per year.
3. Race: Being African American or marrying someone of another race.
4. Rape: Having been raped.
5. Religion: Having no religious affiliation
6. Children: Having children at the time of the marriage or having unwanted children.
7. Divorced parents: Having divorced parents.
8. Education: Having less than a college degree.
9. Work status: Being unemployed.
10. Poor communication: Nagging, stonewalling, escalating conflicts.

(Clarke-Stewart & Brentano, 2006, p. 42)

Race and Ethnicity in Context of Cohabitation, Marriage and Divorce

Although it has been found that there do not tend to be very many racial or ethnic differences in the number of people who choose to cohabit, there are racial differences in how cohabitation is viewed (Smock, 2000). Whites and Hispanics tend to look at cohabitation as a step in the process of marriage whereas blacks, mainland Puerto Rican women and Mexican Americans may view it more as a substitute to marriage (Manning, 2002; Osborne et al., 2007; Smock, 2000). Even though Black men and women may agree that it is best for a couple to marry instead of cohabit, they tend to marry less often (than other races) and at older ages (Shafer, 2006). Even when currently in a cohabitating relationship, Black women are less likely (than Whites or Hispanics) to anticipate marrying that partner (Manning & Smock, 2002). Black teens' expectations to marry are

lower than White teens, although they “share similar odds of expecting to follow the contemporary marriage path, cohabit and marry” (Manning et al., 2007, p. 572).

Hispanics tend to have higher marriage rates than Whites (Manning & Smock, 2002) and Blacks (Carlson et al., 2004), even though they may have a lower socioeconomic status. Whites also tend to have higher rates of marriage than Blacks (Carlson et al., 2004). Blacks have been found to have a higher risk of separation in marriage than Whites and a similar risk of separation in cohabitation (Osborne et al., 2007).

Although research has found few differences between cohabiting and married Blacks and Mexican Americans (Osborne et al., 2007), there are differences in Whites who choose to marry rather than cohabit. Whites who cohabit have lower education rates, higher substance abuse rates (in men), and more children in previous relationships than Whites who marry (Osborne et al., 2007). Researchers have found that Whites and Mexican Americans who cohabit are at a higher risk of separation than Whites or Mexican Americans who marry, as their cohabitations do not last very long (Osborne et al., 2007) because cohabitation is often seen as a precursor to marriage (Manning, 2002; Osborne et al., 2007; Smock, 2000).

Religiosity and Attitudes About Sexual Activity, Cohabitation and Marriage

Religiosity has been found to be a significant factor in pro-marriage attitudes (Shafer, 2006). Both pro-marriage attitudes and women’s church attendance have been shown to promote marriage (Carlson et al., 2004). Religiosity has also been found to be a factor in young adults’ choice between cohabitation and marriage. One longitudinal study found that lower religious importance and attendance were related to lower rates of

marriage and higher rates of cohabitation (Thornton, Axinn, & Hill, 1992). Several studies have found that parents' religiosity also had an influence on whether young adults would cohabit or marry (Osborne et al., 2007; Thornton et al., 1992). Another trend about religiosity was that marriage led to an increase in religious participation while cohabitation led to a decrease in religiosity (Thornton et al., 1992).

In one study, the effect of religious participation on marriage was analyzed using data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study (Wilcox & Wolfinger, 2007). The study found that the likelihood of being married at the time of childbirth was highly correlated to church attendance. Unlike many other studies, fathers' religious attendance was investigated as well as the religious attendance of mothers. Religious participation of fathers increased the likelihood of getting married by 95 percent, when those fathers had fathered a child out-of-wedlock. This study also found that when women give birth to a child out-of-wedlock, it was their church attendance increased the likelihood of getting married by 40 percent (Wilcox & Wolfinger, 2007). It appears that the father's religious attendance might be a better predictor of out-of-wedlock childbearing than the mother's church attendance.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

Overview

Even though research has examined how living in single-parent families (versus two-parent families) may affect children's choices of cohabitation, marriage and divorce, very little research has explored specifically the influence of father absence on these choices. The purpose of this study was to see what influence father absence had on their grown children's choices of cohabitation, marriage and divorce. In this chapter, research questions and hypotheses have been made based on the review of the literature on father absence. This chapter will also provide a description of how the variables in this study were measured as well as the description of the data analysis implemented.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this thesis:

1. How do parental marriage and divorce relate to father absence?
2. How does father absence relate to the propensity of a grown child to cohabit, marry and divorce in young adulthood?
3. How do father absence and the grown child's choice of cohabitation relate to the propensity of that child to marry and divorce in young adulthood?
4. How do gender, race and ethnicity relate to a child's the choice of cohabitation, marriage and divorce in young adulthood?

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were established to examine the research questions above and were generated based on the literature review completed previously:

1. Father absence will occur more frequently in families whose parents divorced or never were married.
2. Those young adults from father-absent homes will have higher rates of cohabitation than those from father-present homes, controlling for gender, race and ethnicity.
3. Those young adults from father-present homes who did not cohabit will be more likely to marry than those from father-absent homes, controlling for gender, race and ethnicity.
4. Those young adults from father-present homes who did not cohabit will be less likely to divorce than those from father-absent homes, controlling for gender, race and ethnicity.

Measures

Predictor Variables

Father absence (vs. presence). Father absence (vs. presence) was measured by the question “During the time you were growing up, who did you live with MOST of the time? Did you live with ...” The possible responses to this question were:

- 1 Both parents
- 2 Your mother, but not your father
- 3 Your father, but not your mother
- 4 Neither parent

9 Don't know/Refused

A subject was classified as “father-absent” when selecting “Your mother, but not your father” or “Neither parent.” A subject was classified as “father-present” when selecting “Both parents” or “Your father, but not your mother. When a subject selected “Don’t know/Refused” in any question on the survey, that response was classified as missing data.

Parental marriage and divorce status. It will also be important to know the marital status of the children’s parent growing up. The parents’ marital status was measured by the question, “What was the marital status of your parents during the time you were growing up—were they married, divorced, separated, widowed or never married to each other?”

- 1 Married
- 2 Divorced
- 3 Separated
- 4 Widowed
- 5 Never married
- 9 Don't know/Refused

The following question was asked to see if the child’s parents divorced later in life: “What about later on in life? Did your parents ever divorce each other, or not?”

- 1 Yes
- 2 No
- 9 Don't know/Refused

Outcome variables

Cohabitation. Cohabitation was measured first by the question about their current marital status (described in the previous variable). Those who respond as “living with partner” was put into the cohabitation category. It is possible that some of the people who are currently married or divorced were also cohabitating before they married. The following question discovered how many of the married couples cohabited before marriage: “Have you ever lived together with a partner without being married?” The possible responses to this question were:

- 1 Yes, have
- 2 No, have not
- 9 Don't know/Refused

Marriage. Marriage was measured by the question “Are you currently married, living with a partner, divorced, separated, widowed, or have you never been married?” Possible responses to this question were:

- 1 Married
- 2 Living with a partner
- 3 Divorced
- 4 Separated
- 5 Widowed
- 6 Never been married
- 9 Don't know/Refused

To assess if there were any respondents who were married previously, the following question was also asked: “Have you ever been married?”

- 1 Yes
- 2 No
- 9 Don't know/Refused

Divorce. Divorce was measured by those respondents who marked “divorced” in the marital status question (described earlier). All the people who did not mark “divorced” were also asked the following question: “Have you ever been divorced?”

- 1 Yes
- 2 No
- 9 Don't know/Refused

Demographic variables

Age. A specific question asked for their exact age: “What is your age?”

- _____ years
- 97 97 or older
- 99 Don't know/Refused

Gender. Gender was determined by the question: “I'd like to ask a few questions of the YOUNGEST MALE, 18 years of age or older, who is now at home. [IF NO MALE, ASK: May I please speak with the YOUNGEST FEMALE, 18 years of age or older, who is now at home?]”

Ethnicity. Ethnicity was measured by asking the question, “Are you, yourself, of Hispanic origin or descent, such as Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, or some other Spanish background?”

- 1 Yes
- 2 No

9 Don't know/Refused

Race. Race was determined by asking non-Hispanics, “Are you white Hispanic, black Hispanic, or some other race?” Hispanics were asked “What is your race? Are you white, black, Asian, or some other?”

1 White

2 Black

3 Asian

4 Other or mixed race

9 Don't know/Refused

Data source

The data used in this research project are from *The February-March 2007 Social Trends Survey*, sponsored by the Pew Research Center and conducted by the Princeton Survey Research International. This study was collected from telephone interviews, using random-digit dialing (RDD) methods, with a nationally representative sample of 2,020 adults, from 18-97 years old, living in the continental United States. The surveyors oversampled populations with respondents ages 18-49 and from areas with a high number of African-American and Hispanic households. The researchers used weighting adjustments to maintain that the sample remained representative of those adults living in the continental United States. The margin of sampling error for the whole data set was stated to be $\pm 2.8\%$. The response rate for this study was reported to be 23% (contact rate = 68%, cooperation rate = 37%, completion rate = 94%).

The relatively low response rate of 23% initially appears to be a limitation of this study. In a recent study of response rates, 14 major data collection organizations were

included (new media and government survey firms) along with 114 of their surveys conducted between 1996-2005 (Holbrook, Krosnick, & Pfent, 2008). Results found the mean response rate among the surveys to be 30%. There was also a significant negative correlation found between response rates and the year, meaning that response rates are declining over time. In another analysis of response rates, results from a rigorous survey method (50% response rate) were compared to the results of the same survey using standard methods (25% response rate) (Keeter, Kennedy, Dimock, Best, & Craighill, 2006). Results found no significant differences between the two surveys with different response rates, and the authors concluded that there is no evidence to suggest that surveys with a lower response rate are biased or unrepresentative of the population being surveyed.

In this analysis, respondents from the age range of 18-40 year olds were selected. This selection (or tactic) resulted in 802 young adults from both father present (n = 536) and father-absent (n = 266) homes.

Analysis

Bivariate analysis

The chi-square statistics were used to test associations between variables because the variables are all binary. Father absence was examined to find associations among the people who were involved in cohabitation, marriage and divorce, be they male, female, White, Black or Hispanic. Parental divorce and marriage were also examined to see if they were associated with father absence. Even though age was the only continuous variable evaluated, Pearson correlations were also performed for each set of variables as a conservative estimate of the amount of variance explained.

Binary logistical regression

Several tests using binary logistical regression were executed on the following binary variables: father absence, cohabitation, marriage, and divorce. The goal of these analyses was to see what variables were predictors of father absence, cohabitation, marriage, and divorce and to determine the odds ratios of those predictor variables.

Chapter 4 - Results

Sample Demographics

The overall sample was comprised of 53.5% females and 46.5% males. The highest percentage of respondents included Whites (42.2%), followed by Hispanics (31.2%) and Blacks (22.1%). There were another 3.2% of respondents that indicated other or mixed race. Almost exactly half of the respondents came from families earning less than \$40,000 (50.1%), with over two-thirds of the sample earning less than \$75,000 per year (68.8%). There were only 21.2% of the respondents earning \$75,000 or more per year. Only 15.7% of the sample had not completed high school or received a GED certificate, with many who had graduated from college (15.3%) or received at least some college education (26.0%).

Forty-six percent of the respondents were currently married, while 35.9% had never been married. At the time of the sampling, 8.2% were living with a partner, with the remaining 8.5% consisted of individuals who were divorced (4.4%), separated (3.1%) or widowed (1%). A total of 56.8% of the respondents had been married at some time, while 43.2% had never been married. Of those who had been married, 22.7% had divorced at least once and 77.3% had never divorced. In regards to cohabitation, 54.9% had never cohabited while 45.1% had. In terms of father absence, 66.8% were from father-present homes whereas 33.2% were from father-absent homes.

Hypothesis 1

In order to determine whether father absence will occur more frequently in families whose parents divorced or never were married, chi-square statistics were used as a measure of association as well as Pearson correlations and binary logistical regression.

Parental Divorce

The young adults' parents were divorced in 16.5% of the father-present homes and 54.9% of father-absent homes. Chi-square analysis showed a significant association between parental divorce and father absence ($\chi^2 = 124.0, p < .01$). Pearson correlation also revealed a significant relationship between parental divorce and father absence ($r = .39, p < .01$).

Next, the relationship between parental divorce and father absence was examined among gender, race and ethnicity. There was a smaller percentage of divorced parents in father-present homes when compared to father-absent homes among males (16.9% versus 56.2%), females (16.1% versus 53.7%), Whites (18.6% versus 79.0%), Blacks (28.0% versus 37.8%) and Hispanics (9.6% versus 47.1%). Chi-square analysis also showed a significant association between parental divorce and father absence among males ($\chi^2 = 60.3, p < .01$), females ($\chi^2 = 63.7, p < .01$), Whites ($\chi^2 = 99.8, p < .01$), and Hispanics ($\chi^2 = 44.1, p < .01$). There was no significant association between parental divorce and father absence among Blacks ($\chi^2 = 1.76, p = .18$). Pearson correlations also revealed significant relationships between parental divorce and father absence among males ($r = .40, p < .01$), females ($r = .39, p < .01$), Whites ($r = .55, p < .01$), and Hispanics ($r = .42, p < .01$). There was not a significant relationship between parental divorce and father absence among Blacks ($r = .10, p = .19$).

Unmarried Parents

The young adults' parents were never married in 3.7% of the father-present homes and 28.6% of father-absent homes. Chi-square analysis showed a significant association between having unmarried parents and father absence ($\chi^2 = 102.8, p < .01$). Pearson correlation also revealed a significant relationship between having unmarried parents and father absence ($r = .36, p < .01$).

Next, the relationship between unmarried parents and father absence was examined among gender, race and ethnicity. There was a much smaller percentage of unmarried parents in father-present homes when compared to father-absent homes among males (4.0% versus 26.4%), females (3.5% versus 30.6%), Whites (0.8% versus 11.1%), Blacks (9.3% versus 50.0%) and Hispanics (6.2% versus 25.7%). Chi-square analysis showed a significant association between having unmarried parents and father absence among males ($\chi^2 = 40.7, p < .01$), females ($\chi^2 = 62.6, p < .01$), Whites ($\chi^2 = 19.9, p < .01$), Blacks ($\chi^2 = 31.3, p < .01$), and Hispanics ($\chi^2 = 18.6, p < .01$). Pearson correlations also revealed significant relationships between having unmarried parents and father absence among males ($r = .33, p < .01$), females ($r = .39, p < .01$), Whites ($r = .25, p < .01$), Blacks ($r = .44, p < .01$), and Hispanics ($r = .27, p < .01$).

Logistical Regression

Binary logistical regression was used to determine if parental divorce and unmarried parents were significant predictors for father absence. The following variables were used as predictors: Gender, race, ethnicity, unmarried parents, and parental divorce. The logistical regression results found that race ($p < .01$), parental divorce ($p < .01$), and having unmarried parents ($p < .01$) were significantly associated with father absence.

Their respective odds ratios were: race = 1.99 (95% CI, 1.21 to 3.28), parental divorce = 16.0 (95% CI, 10.47 to 24.47), and unmarried parents = 28.2 (95% CI, 15.33 to 51.99).

Hypothesis 2

In order to determine whether those young adults from father-absent homes will have higher rates of cohabitation than those from father-present homes, controlling for gender, race and ethnicity, chi-square statistics were used as a measure of association as well as Pearson correlations and binary logistical regression.

In father-present homes, 42.1% of the young adults cohabited versus 57.9% who never cohabited. In father-absent homes, 50.9% cohabited versus 49.1% who did not. Chi-square analysis found there to be a significant association between father absence and cohabitation ($\chi^2 = 5.5, p < .05$). Pearson correlations resulted in a small, but still significant, relationship between father absence and cohabitation ($r = .08, p < .05$).

Chi-square analyses for each gender did not find significant association between father absence and cohabitation among males ($\chi^2 = 2.3, p = .13$) or females ($\chi^2 = 3.2, p = .07$). Chi-square analysis for race and ethnicity found father absence and cohabitation only significant among Hispanics ($\chi^2 = 4.1, p < .05$), with higher rates of never cohabiting in both father-present (69.1%) and father-absent (55.6%) homes. Both results for Whites ($\chi^2 = 3.6, p < .06$) and Blacks ($\chi^2 = 2.6, p = .11$) had non-significant results. Blacks were found to have higher rates of cohabitation in father-present (60.8%) than father-absent (48.4%) homes. Pearson correlations also only revealed significant relationships between father absence and cohabitation between Hispanics ($r = -.13, p < .05$), but not among males ($r = .08, p = .13$), females ($r = .09, p = .07$), Whites ($r = .10, p = .06$), and Blacks ($r = .12, p = .11$).

Binary logistical regression was used to determine the significant predictors for cohabitation. The following variables were used as predictors: Gender, race, ethnicity, unmarried parents, parental divorce and father absence. The logistical regression findings indicate that father absence is not significantly associated with cohabitation ($p = .83$). The only significant variable was ethnicity ($p < .01$) with an odds ratio of .62 (95% CI, .44 to .87). Parental divorce was also close to being significant ($p = .054$) with an odds ratio of 1.46 (95% CI, .99 to 2.14).

Another test of binary logistical regression was run without parental divorce and unmarried parents included. Ethnicity ($p < .01$) was again found to be the only significant variable with an odds ratio of .62 (95% CI, .44 to .87). This time, father absence was also close to being significant ($p = .08$) with an odds ratio of 1.32 (95% CI, .96 to 1.79).

Hypothesis 3

In order to determine whether those young adults from father-present homes who did not cohabit will be more likely to marry than those from father-absent homes, controlling for gender, race and ethnicity, chi-square statistics were used as a measure of association as well as Pearson correlations and binary logistical regression. Additionally, tables 4.4 through 4.9 track the number of respondents from father-present versus father-absent homes and their choices of cohabitation, marriage and divorce.

In father-present homes, 61.3% of the young adults married versus 47.9% from father-absent homes. Chi-square analysis showed a significant association between father presence and marriage ($\chi^2 = 12.9, p < .01$). Pearson correlation also revealed a significant relationship between father presence and marriage ($r = .13, p < .01$).

Chi-square analysis also showed a significant association between father presence and marriage among only males ($\chi^2 = 11.2, p < .01$) where 58.6% from father-present homes marry versus 40.2% from father-absent homes. There were no significant associations between father presence and marriage among females ($\chi^2 = 3.3, p = .07$), Whites ($\chi^2 = 1.8, p = .18$), Blacks ($\chi^2 = 0.08, p = .78$), and Hispanics ($\chi^2 = 0.52, p = .47$). Pearson correlations also only revealed significant relationships between father presence and marriage among Males ($r = .13, p < .05$). Females ($r = .09, p = .07$), Whites ($r = .07, p = .19$), Blacks ($r = .02, p = .78$), and Hispanics ($r = 0.05, p = .47$) were all found to be non-significant.

Binary logistical regression was used to determine the significant predictors for marriage. The following variables were used as predictors: Gender, race, ethnicity, unmarried parents, parental divorce, father absence, and cohabitation. The findings indicate that father absence is not significantly associated with next generational marriage ($p = .23$). The significant variables found were gender ($p < .05$), race ($p < .01$), ethnicity ($p < .05$), and having unmarried parents ($p < .05$). The following are the odds ratios determined: Gender = 1.43 (95% CI, 1.66 to 1.93), race = .31 (95% CI, .20 to .47), ethnicity = .69 (95% CI, .49 to .98), and unmarried parents = .48 (95% CI, .27 to .85).

Another test of binary logistical regression was run without either parental divorce or unmarried parents included. The significant variables found were gender ($p < .05$), race ($p < .01$), ethnicity ($p < .05$), and father absence ($p < .05$). The following are the odds ratios determined: Gender = 1.47 (95% CI, 1.09 to 1.97), race = .26 (95% CI, .17 to .38), ethnicity = .65 (95% CI, .46 to .91), and father absence = .73 (95% CI, .53 to 1.00).

Cross-tabulations were used to track the number of respondents from father-present versus father-absent homes and their choices of cohabitation, marriage and divorce (see tables 4.4 through 4.9). One of the purposes of this tracking was to see which groups would have the higher rates of marriage (lower percentages of those who never married). Looking at the entire sample, young adults from father-present homes had higher marriage rates, no matter their choice of cohabitation, than those from father-absent homes (see table 4.4). This was also true for males (table 4.5) and females (table 4.6), but not true among Whites (table 4.7), Blacks (table 4.8) or Hispanics (table 4.9). Whites had higher rates of marriage among those who cohabited in both father-present and father-absent homes and the lowest rate of marriage among those from father-absent homes who did not cohabit (table 4.7). There did not seem to be a consistent pattern among Blacks in regards to father absence and cohabitation (table 4.8). In general, it appears that Blacks have a lower marriage rate than Whites or Hispanics (compare tables 4.7 through 4.9). For Hispanics, it appears that those who did not cohabit, in father-present or father-absent homes, had the highest marriage rates (table 4.9), although those from father-absent homes who cohabit were very close. For Hispanics, there is a 10% drop in marriage rates when young adults from father-absent homes choose to cohabit (table 4.9).

Hypothesis 4

In order to determine whether those young adults from father-present homes who did not cohabit will be less likely to divorce than those from father-absent homes, controlling for gender, race and ethnicity, chi-square statistics were used as a measure of association as well as Pearson correlations and binary logistical regression. Additionally,

tables 4.4 through 4.9 track the number of respondents from father-present versus father-absent homes and their choices of cohabitation, marriage and divorce.

Among those who married, 21.5% of the young adults from father-present homes divorced versus 26.0% divorcing from father-absent homes. Chi-square analysis showed a non-significant association between father absence and marriage ($\chi^2 = 1.06, p = .30$). Pearson correlation also revealed a non-significant relationship between father absence and divorce as an adult ($r = .05, p = .30$).

Chi-square analysis also showed a non-significant association between father absence and divorce among males ($\chi^2 = 0.83, p = .36$), females ($\chi^2 = 0.27, p = .60$), Whites ($\chi^2 = 0.20, p = .65$), Blacks ($\chi^2 = 0.89, p = .35$), and Hispanics ($\chi^2 = 0.48, p = .49$). Pearson correlations also were non-significant between father absence and divorce among Males ($r = .06, p = .37$). Females ($r = .03, p = .61$), Whites ($r = .03, p = .65$), Blacks ($r = -.13, p = .35$), and Hispanics ($r = 0.06, p = .49$) were all found to be non-significant.

Binary logistical regression was used to determine the significant predictors for divorce among those who had been married. The following variables were used as predictors: Gender, race, ethnicity, unmarried parents, parental divorce, father absence, and cohabitation. The findings indicate that father absence is not significantly associated with divorce ($p = .90$). The significant variables found were race ($p < .05$) and cohabitation ($p < .01$). The following are the odds ratios determined: Race = 2.11 (95% CI, 1.03 to 4.33) and cohabitation = 5.2 (95% CI, 3.09 to 8.77).

Another test of binary logistical regression was run without parental divorce and unmarried parents included. The only significant variable found was cohabitation ($p < .01$) with an odds ratio for cohabitation was 4.98 (95% CI, 2.99 to 8.28).

Cross-tabulations were used to track the number of respondents from father-present versus father-absent homes and their choices of cohabitation, marriage and divorce (see table 4.4). Another purpose of this tracking was to see which groups would have the higher rates of marital stability (marriage where the couple never divorced). Among the young adults from father-present homes who did not cohabit, 92.9% of those who married never divorced. When those father-present young adults chose to cohabit, the number of those who never divorced dropped to 60.4%. Among father-absent homes, 78.7% of those who chose not to cohabit never divorced and 69.2% never divorced even when they chose to cohabit.

When gender, race and ethnicity were evaluated (see tables 4.5 to 4.9), in all cases, those young adults from father-absent homes who chose not to cohabit had the highest rates of marriages that never divorced (males = 91.5%, females = 94.0%, Whites = 94.3%, Blacks = 100.0%, and Hispanics = 88.9%). The other consistent trend was that those father-absent young adults who did not cohabit had higher rates of marital stability than those who did cohabit (males = 84.0% versus 65.2%, females = 75.0% versus 71.4%, Whites = 83.3% versus 72.2%, and Hispanics = 82.6% versus 66.7%). The lone exception was found in Blacks who had higher rates of marital stability (in father-absent homes) when they did cohabit (75.0%) versus when they did not cohabit (70.6%). Another puzzling finding was that the lowest rate of marital stability was found consistently among father-present homes in which young adults chose to cohabit (females = 53.7%, Whites = 62.2%, Blacks = 41.2%, and Hispanics = 64.5%). The lone exception was found among males, who barely had higher rates of marital stability (in father-

present homes versus father-absent homes) when they did not cohabit (68.7% versus 65.2%).

Marital stability was also evaluated looking at the number of those young adults who never divorced divided by the rest of the respondents in each group, whether they chose to marry or not. This was again divided among the categories of father absence and cohabitation (see table 4.3). In all cases, the highest percentage of marital stability was found in those from father-present homes who did not cohabit (males = 51.0%, females = 59.1%, Whites = 61.5.1%, Blacks = 31.0%, Hispanics = 52.9%, and the whole sample = 55.2%).

Table 4.1

Sample Demographic Data

Variable	Category	N	%
Gender	Male	373	46.5%
	Female	429	53.5%
Race/Ethnicity	White	335	42.2%
	Black	167	21.1%
	Hispanic	250	31.2%
	Other or mixed race	36	3.2%
Income	\$20,000 or less	152	21.7%
	\$20,000 to under \$40,000	199	28.4%
	\$40,000 to under \$75,000	201	18.7%
	\$75,000 to under \$100,000	79	11.3%
	\$100,000 or more	69	9.9%
Education	None to 8 th grade	38	4.8%
	High school incomplete	87	10.9%
	High school graduate or GED certificate	244	30.5%
	Technical training	24	3.0%
	Some college (including associate degree)	208	26.0%
	College graduate (4 year degree)	122	15.3%
	Post-graduate training	76	9.5%
Father Absence	Father-present	536	66.8%
	Father-absent	266	33.2%
Parental Divorce	Never divorced	468	67.2%
	Divorced	228	32.8%
Unmarried Parents	Married	696	88.2%
	Never married	93	11.8%
Cohabitation	Never cohabited	439	54.9%
	Cohabited	360	45.1%
Marriage	Never married	344	43.2%
	Married	453	56.8%
Divorced (of those who married)	Never divorced	350	77.3%
	Divorced	103	22.7%

Table 4.2

Categorical Differences between Father-Absent and Father-Present Respondents in Terms of Cohabitation, Marriage and Divorce

Variable		Father-present	Father-absent	χ^2	<i>p</i>
Cohabitation	Cohabitation	42.1%	50.9%	5.5	.018
	No cohabitation	57.9%	49.1%		
Marriage	Married	61.3%	47.9%	12.9	<.001
	Never married	38.7%	52.1%		
Divorce	Divorced	21.5%	26.0%	1.1	ns
	Never Divorced	78.5%	74.0%		

For all tests, df = 1.

Table 4.3

Never Divorced Respondents Divided among the Groups of Father Absence and Cohabitation

Variable		Father absence			
		Present		Absent	
		Cohabitation	No cohabitation	Cohabitation	No cohabitation
Male	(#)	44/102	75/147	15/60	21/61
	(%)	43.1%	51.0%	25.0%	34.4%
Female	(#)	43/123	94/159	30/75	27/68
	(%)	34.9%	59.1%	40.0%	39.7%
White	(#)	51/111	83/135	26/50	15/38
	(%)	45.9%	61.5%	52.0%	39.5%
Black	(#)	7/45	9/29	9/44	12/47
	(%)	15.6%	31.0%	20.5%	25.5%
Hispanic	(#)	20/55	64/121	10/32	19/39
	(%)	36.4%	52.9%	31.3%	48.7%
Total	(#)	87/225	169/306	45/135	48/129
	(%)	38.7%	55.2%	33.3%	37.2%

Table 4.4

Father Absence & Cohabitation: Effects on Marriage & Divorce

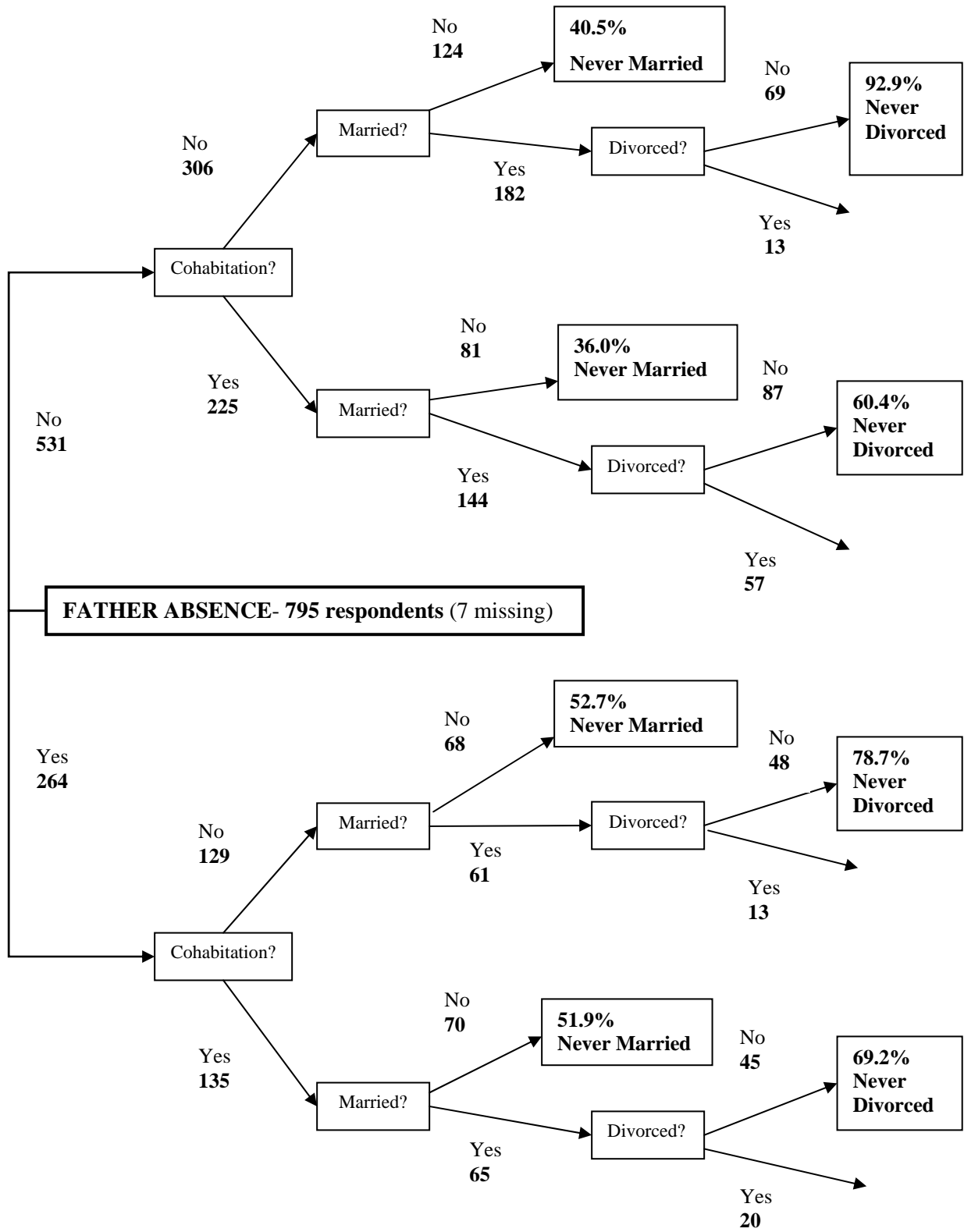


Table 4.5

Father Absence & Cohabitation: Effects on Marriage & Divorce (Males)

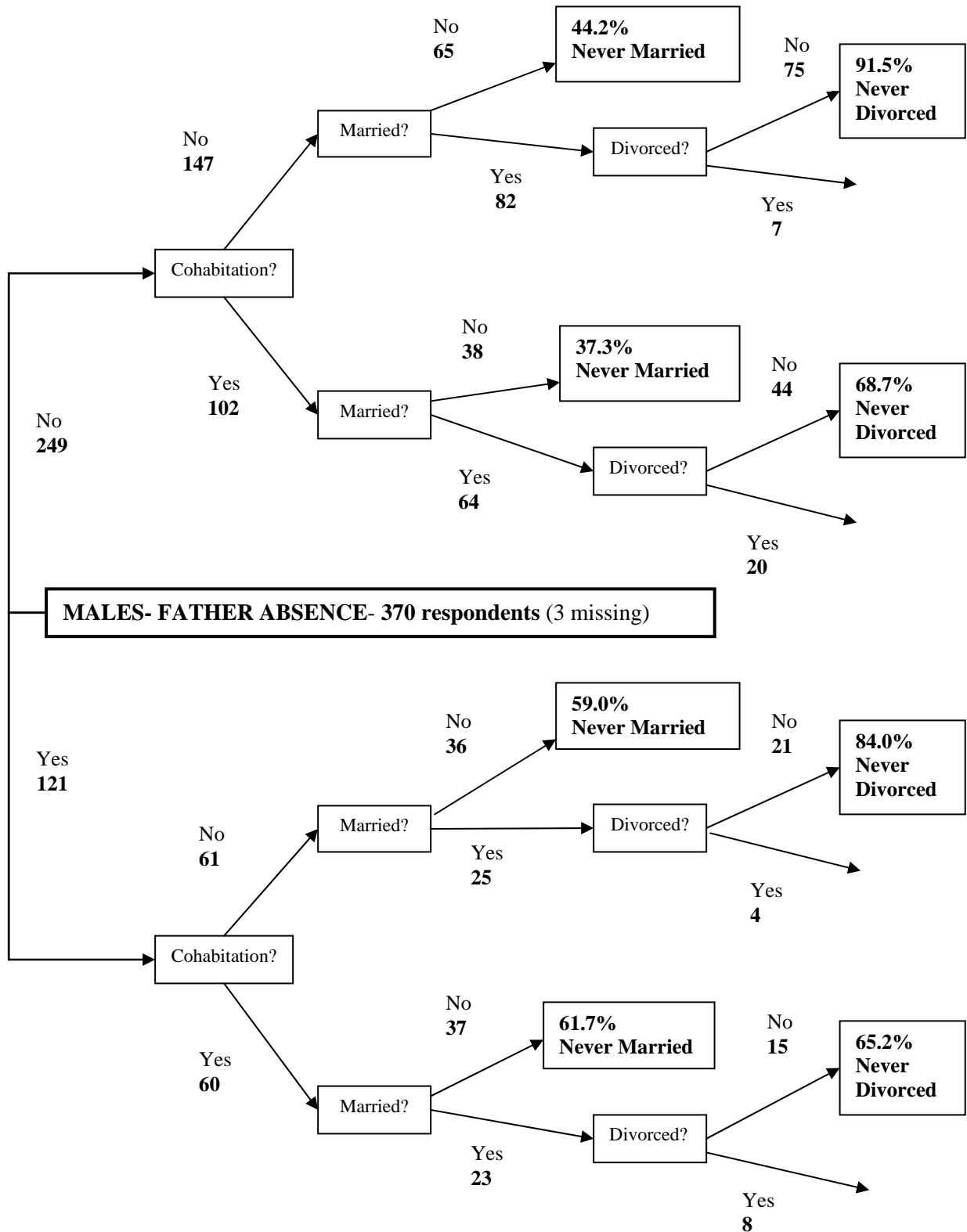


Table 4.6

Father Absence & Cohabitation: Effects on Marriage & Divorce (Females)

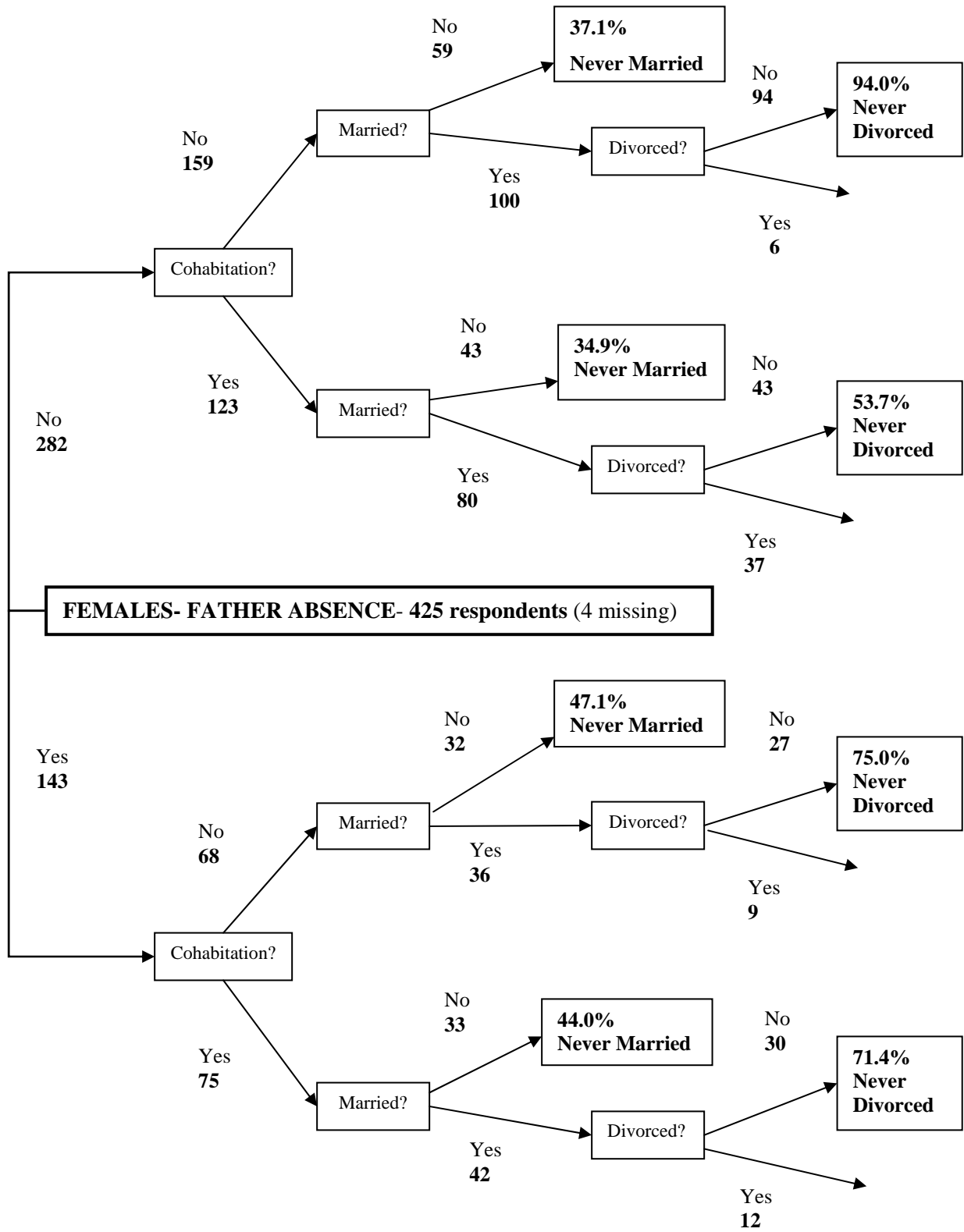


Table 4.7

Father Absence & Cohabitation: Effects on Marriage & Divorce (Whites)

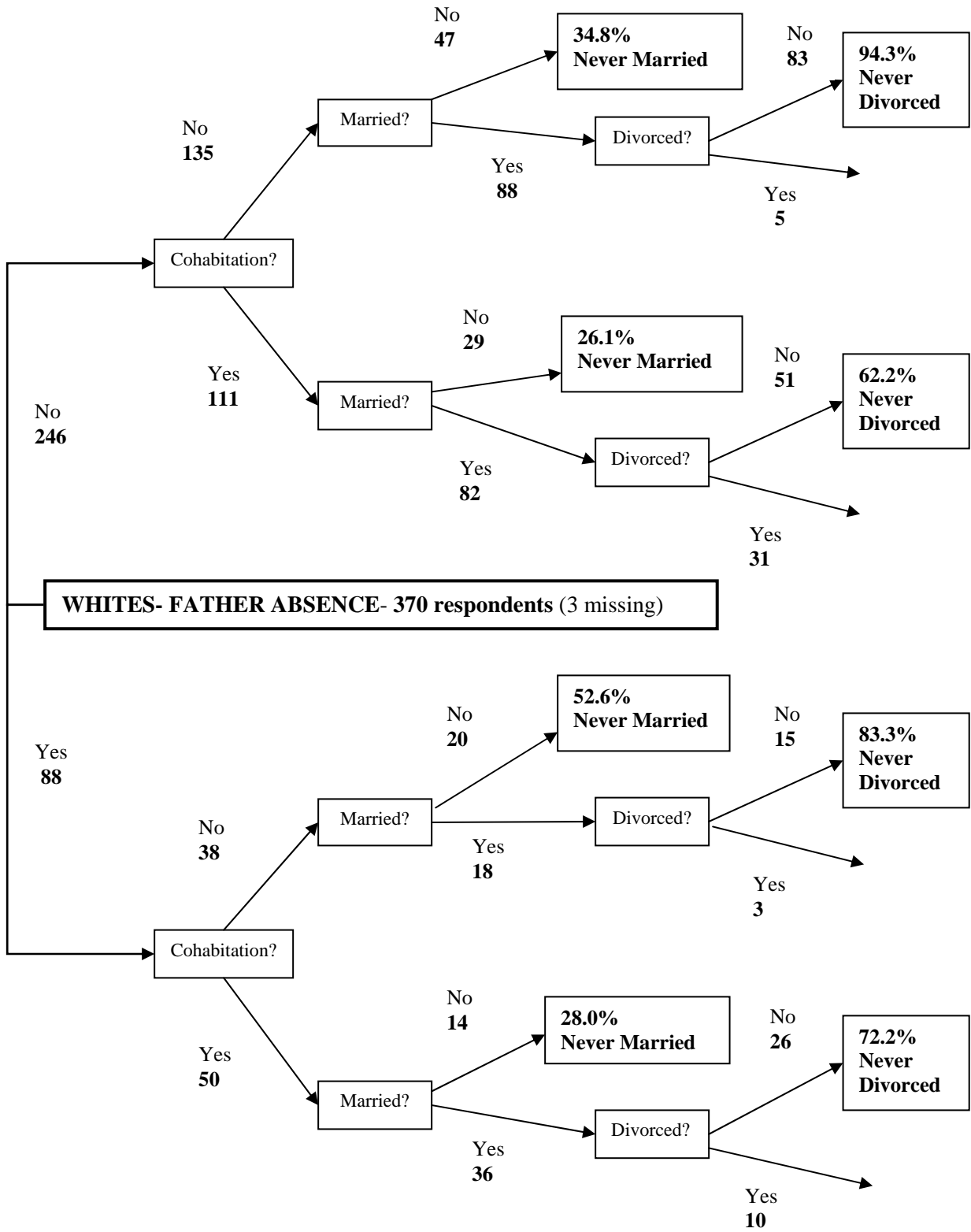


Table 4.8

Father Absence & Cohabitation: Effects on Marriage & Divorce (Blacks)

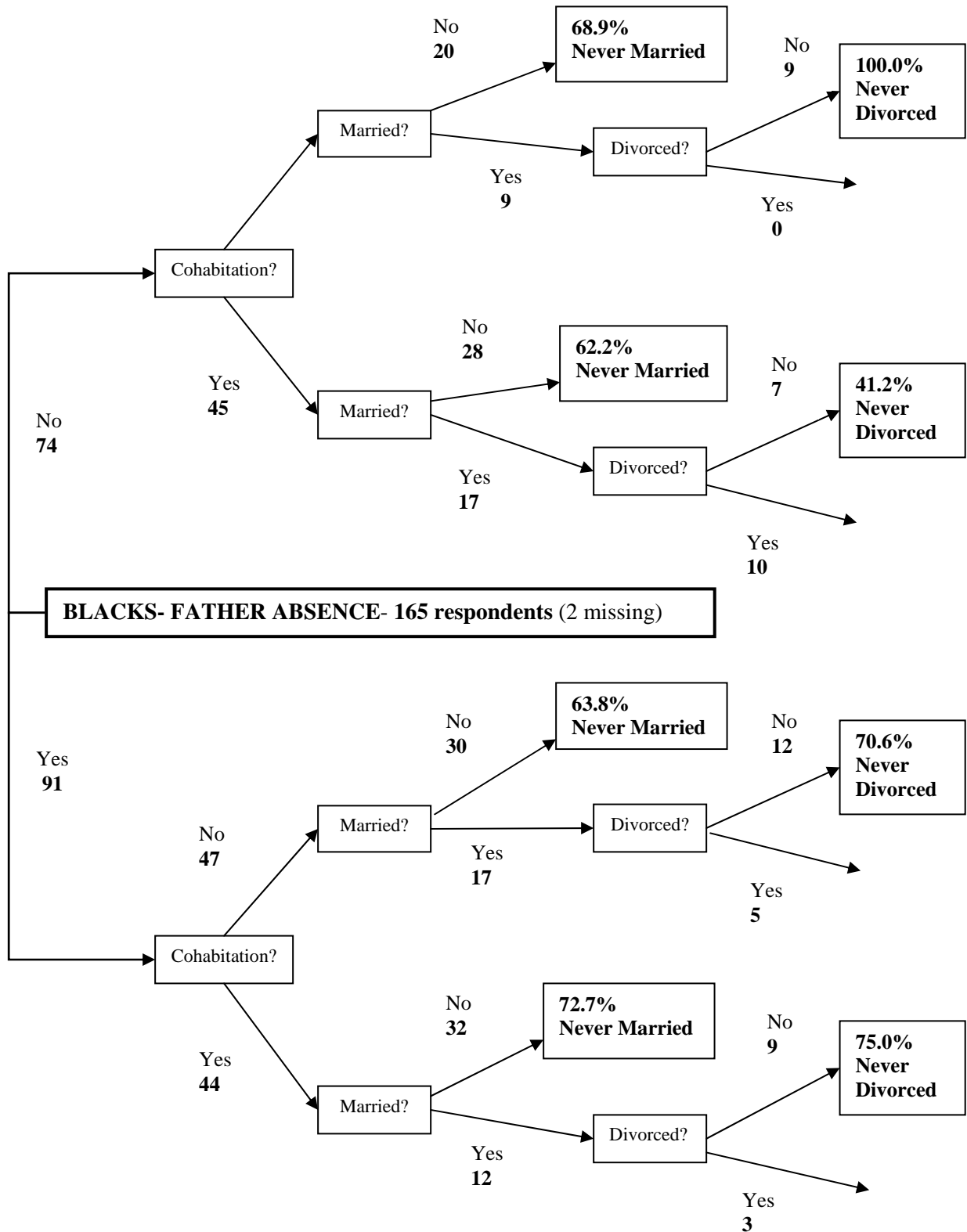
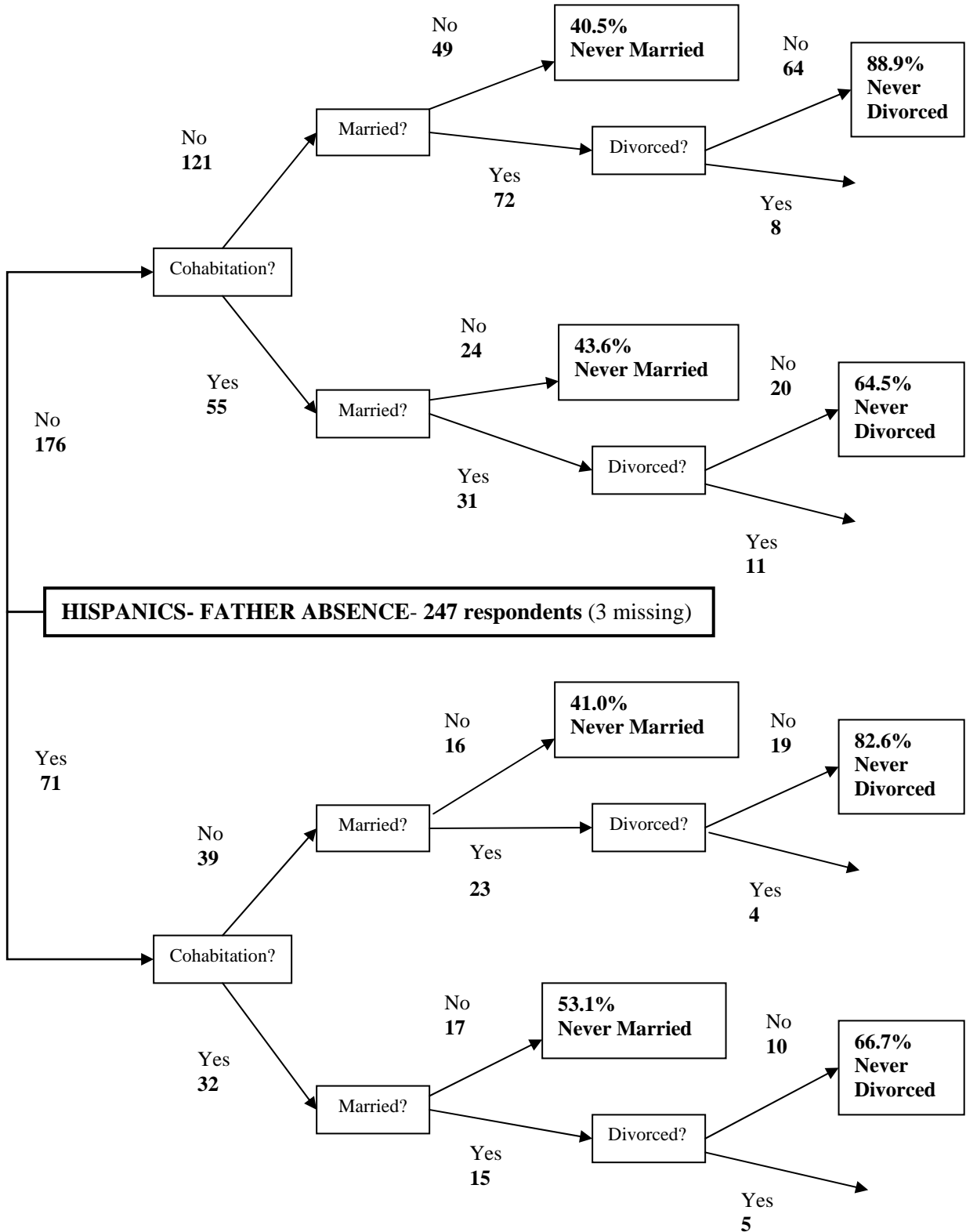


Table 4.9

Father Absence & Cohabitation: Effects on Marriage & Divorce (Hispanics)



Chapter 5 - Discussion

Analysis of the Results

Hypothesis 1

The findings of this study support previous research that has suggested that the two key factors leading to father absence are children who had unmarried parents or whose parents divorced (Clarke et al., 1998; Mackey & Immerman, 2007; Osborne et al., 2007). When looking at the logistical regression results, it appears that having unmarried parents is more of a contributing factor than parental divorce in creating father-absent homes. This can be explained with the fact that many children born to unmarried parents end up living with their mothers instead of their fathers (Kreider, 2008).

Hypothesis 2

The results about the association between father absence and a child's eventual choice of cohabitation are interesting. The chi-square analysis on the entire sample showed a significant association (table 4.2), but when these results were examined individually according to gender, race and ethnicity, only Hispanics had a significant association. In the previous research examined, Hispanics and Whites were found to have similar views and rates of cohabitation (Manning, 2002; Osborne et al., 2007; Smock, 2000), but the current results did not support this finding. It was also interesting to see that survey results for females ($\chi^2 = 3.2, p = .07$) were closer to being significant than for males ($\chi^2 = 2.3, p = .13$), which may be related to previous research that found that father absence associated to early sexual activity and pregnancy in women but not men (Ellis et

al., 1999; Ellis, 2002; Ellis et al., 2003; Quinlan, 2003). These findings also indicate that there may be other variables that are influencing young adults' attitudes and behavior about cohabitation besides father absence. One of the possible factors, not examined in this study, but found in previous research has been religiosity or church attendance (Carlson et al., 2004; Osborne et al., 2007; Thornton et al., 1992; Wilcox & Wolfinger, 2007).

Hypothesis 3

This study hypothesized that there would be an association between those young adults from father-present homes who did not cohabit and rates of marriage. The results found did not entirely support the hypothesis. Father absence was associated with marriage in the overall sample and in one of the tests of logistical regression. Individually, men were the only group that was found to have significant associations between father absence and marriage. This finding is supported by a study that found that when boys grew up with their fathers, they were more likely to live with their own children (Forste & Jarvis, 2007). Females were close to being significant ($p = .07$), but it was surprising to see that associations were not found among race or ethnicity. This might be partially explained due to the differences in the ways Whites, Hispanics and Blacks view the relationship between cohabitation and marriage (Manning, 2002; Osborne et al., 2007; Smock, 2000) or by the trend that Blacks tend to marry less than Whites or Hispanics (Shafer, 2006).

Hypothesis 4

The last hypothesis of this study was that young adults from father-present homes, who did not cohabit, would be less likely to divorce. Initial chi-square analysis of the

whole sample or individually among gender, race or ethnicity did not provide any significant associations between father absence and divorce. When tracking the respondents' choices of cohabitation, marriage and divorce according to father absence (tables 4.4 through 4.9), this hypothesis was supported. Those young adults who had the combination of a father-present and did not cohabit had the highest rates of marital stability. The most puzzling finding of this analysis was the disparity (in father-present homes) between those who did and did not cohabit. In many of the analyses, the highest rate of marital stability (never divorce) was found when there was no cohabitation and the lowest rate of marital stability when the young adults did cohabit. Past research suggests that religiosity may be a possible reason why those children from father-present homes choose to cohabit or not (Carlson et al., 2004; Osborne et al., 2007; Thornton et al., 1992; Wilcox & Wolfinger, 2007). This study did not assess the relationship quality between fathers and the young adults. It would be interesting to see if that relationship quality or father involvement would make a difference in their choice to cohabit or not.

Limitations

There are limitations to this study. Initially, relationship with father was going to be measured from one of the questions on the survey. Unfortunately that question did not ask specifically about the quality of the respondents' relationships with their fathers while growing up and was only asked of those respondents whose fathers were still living, so the question was discarded as biased.

The relatively low response rate of 23% initially appears to be a limitation of this study. In a recent study of response rates, 14 major data collection organizations were included (new media and government survey firms) along with 114 of their surveys

conducted between 1996-2005 (Holbrook, Krosnick, & Pfent, 2008). Results found the mean response rate among the surveys to be 30%. There was also a significant negative correlation found between response rates and the year, meaning that response rates are declining over time. In another analysis of response rates, results from a rigorous survey method (50% response rate) were compared to the results of the same survey using standard methods (25% response rate) (Keeter, Kennedy, Dimock, Best, & Craighill, 2006). Results found no significant differences between the two surveys with different response rates, and the authors concluded that there is no evidence to suggest that surveys with a lower response rate are biased or unrepresentative of the population being surveyed.

Unfortunately, the issue of family turbulence (Wu, 2001) was not tested in this study. This exclusion appears to be one of the drawbacks of secondary data analysis. It would be helpful to control for familial and ecological stressors like Ellis and his associates (2003) in their study regarding the effect of father absence and father involvement in parents dealing with teenage sexual activity. This appears to be the best way to see the true influence that father absence has on early sexual activity and cohabitation.

Not including socioeconomic status, as a potential confounding variable, in this analysis is also a limitation. Father absence has been shown to be related to child poverty (Sawhill, 2006), and increased rates of cohabitation (Smock, 2000) and divorce (Clarke-Stewart & Brentano, 2006) have been shown to be related to those individuals of a lower socioeconomic status.

Several other factors would have been helpful in determining the strength of father absence on the variables tested in this study. It would be helpful to know at what age the respondents' mothers had their first child or began menarche, since this issue has been found to be another factor that is associated with early fatherhood for young men (Forste & Jarvis, 2007; Pears, 2005). It would also be helpful to know the age of first sexual intercourse to determine whether or not father absence was, in fact, associated with early sexual intercourse as well as cohabitation.

Suggestions for Future Studies

After conducting this study, it appears that examining the effect that father absence and cohabitation have on divorce (marital stability) is very informative. Their combined effect on marriage was not as clear. Future studies could look at the quality of the relationships with fathers or the father's involvement to ascertain if that might provide a clearer look into why such an unexpectedly high percentage of young adults from father-present homes choose to cohabit.

It would also be beneficial to have more studies that compare fathers and mothers to see what their individual contributions are to their children's attitudes and behavior about cohabitation, marriage and divorce. This association could be examined by looking at paternal presence versus absence and the quality of the relationship with each parent.

Lastly, it would be beneficial to look at religiosity or church attendance to see if it is significantly associated with cohabitation, within this suggested framework. One scholar has found that religious fathers tend to be more involved and have better relationships with their children than nonreligious fathers (Wilcox, 2002).

Implications for Family Life Education

The results of this study provide insightful information not only to researchers, but also to parents, community members, policy makers and family life educators who work with adolescents and young adults. The study shows the effects that father absence has on young adults' choices of cohabitation, marriage and marital stability.

Even though fatherhood research began back in the 1970s, many people don't seem to realize the extent of fatherlessness and its affects (Sylvester & Reich, 2002). Social awareness about the importance of fathers has increased with programs like the National Fatherhood Initiative which has enlisted the help of many celebrity actors and athletes. Dr. Ken Canfield of the National Center for Fathering has said, "We need to change mindsets so that the public understands that fathers have something to offer children beyond what mothers offer—that the influence of two parents is good for children" (Sylvester & Reich, 2000, p. 24).

Decreasing father absence can be done by promoting stable marriages and discouraging out-of-wedlock pregnancy. One author has even shown how the growth of out-of-wedlock births was the key factor in the increasing the child poverty rate (15-20%) between 1970 and 1996 (Sawhill, 2006). Efforts should be made to specifically educate young men about the effects of father absence to limit fathering children out-of-wedlock, and to support them if they do. Our nation should take notice at how much money is spent by our federal government on fatherless families, but especially in this time of economic instability. One study entitled, "The one hundred billion dollar man: The annual public cost of father absence" found that a total of \$99.8 billion dollars was spent each year on direct assistance to father-absent homes. The authors explain that this

number amounted to almost 4% of the federal budget in 2006 (Nock & Einolf, 2008). Several researchers have taken notice to the enormous amount of money that has been filtered into funding these programs and possible solutions to this growing problem. One set of researchers have estimated how many single-mother families would escape poverty if they were married. This would likely result in a reduction of spending in these federal anti-poverty programs. One study estimated that 46.5% of single-mothers would be elevated out of poverty if they were married to the father of their children (Sigle-Rushton & McLanahan, 2002). Another study estimated that if our marriage rates of single-mothers had remained consistent since 1971, then 64.5% of the currently single-mother families would not be languishing in poverty today (Thomas & Sawhill, 2002).

There is an obvious increase in cohabitation in the last couple of decades among young adults that has led to cohabitation being viewed as normative in our society. One study showed how the cohabitation rate among women has risen by 9% from the year 1995 (45%) to 2002 (54%) (Kennedy & Bumpass, 2008). Even though there is a wealth of research on the adverse effects of cohabitation on marital stability, it appears that the information is not reaching young adults. There are plenty of small booklets that have been created to educate about the importance of marriage and the ill effects of divorce. A few examples are:

- Should we live together? What young adults need to know about cohabitation before marriage: A comprehensive view of recent research (2002). Published by *The National Marriage Project*.
- Why marriage matters: Twenty-six conclusions from the social sciences (2002). Published by the *Institute for American Values*.

- *The Positive Effects of Marriage: A Book of Charts* (2002). Published by *The Heritage Foundation*.
- Ten important research findings on marriage and choosing a marriage partner: *Helpful facts for young adults* (2004). Published by *The National Marriage Project*.
- *The Case for Marriage: Why married people are happier, healthier, and better off financially* (2000). This book was authored by Linda J. Waite and Maggie Gallagher and published by Doubleday, a division of Random House.

The Bush administration created the “healthy marriages” programs (McLanahan, Donahue, & Haskins, 2005) to “lower divorce rates and lower rate of cohabitation by converting cohabiting couples into more stable married households” (Donley & Wright, 2008, p. 133). Unfortunately, some critics of the “healthy marriages” programs have suggested that few differences have been found between the states that implemented these programs (between 1990 and 2000) versus those that did not (Donley & Wright, 2008), although it is possible that not enough time has passed for the results of these programs to be clearly seen. A possible suggestion for the “healthy marriage” programs is that more emphasis should be placed on preventing cohabitation instead of encouraging cohabiting couples to marry, since the results of this study indicate that marital stability is higher when couples do not cohabit before marriage.

Another problem found in research is that teenagers or young adults may have desires to marry, but these desires alone do not directly translate to future marriage. One

study suggested that future research is needed to identify and reduce these marriage barriers of single women (and men) (Lichter, Batson, & Brown, 2004).

In sum, education is needed for parents and children about the benefits of marriage and the possible consequences of cohabitation. If education is only provided to young adults (or teenagers), then it may not be fully effective. Previous research shows that parents are very influential on their children's choices of cohabitation and marriage (Axinn & Thornton, 1996; Cunningham & Thornton, 2007; Smock, 2000; Thornton, 1991). Family life education programs must be inclusive in their reach to entire families (including both parents) instead of only the mother or children. Some researchers suggest that these programs should target teenagers from unstable families to reduce future marital instability in young adulthood (Cavanagh, Crissey, & Raley, 2008). Special efforts should especially be made to reach out to children in single-parent homes.

One encouraging program that promotes marriage-readiness for young men from fragile families was developed by the National Fatherhood Initiative (National Fatherhood Initiative, 2009). The program entitled "Why Knot?" teaches young men relationships skills, gives them a greater understanding of themselves, educates them on the benefits of marriage, and helps them discover what type of husband and father they want to become.

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