Implications of New Marriages and Children for Coparenting in Nonresident Father Families

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Abstract

Prior research has noted that although cooperative coparenting between resident and nonresident parents is beneficial to children, this positive form of shared parenting is relatively uncommon. Relying on nationally representative data from two waves of the National Survey of Families and Households (N = 628), we examine the importance of nonresident fathers' and resident mothers' new marriages and new children for levels of cooperative coparenting and test whether changes in coparenting are linked to changes in parents' marital or fertility statuses. Consistent with prior studies, our data suggest that cooperative coparenting does not occur in most nonresident father families. Results suggest that changes to the nonresident father's family structure are of primary importance for cooperative coparenting, but that mother's family structure is relatively unimportant.

As a consequence of the continuing high rates of nonmarital childbearing and divorce, roughly half of all children will spend at least part of their childhood in a household without their biological fathers (Bianchi, 1990; Bumpass & Sweet, 1989). One implication for these children is that any coparenting that occurs between their biological mothers and fathers must be negotiated across households. Some parents who live apart are able to cooperatively coparent, engaging, for instance, in joint decision making (Seltzer, 1991) and actively sharing the responsibilities of childrearing (Ahrons, 1981; Furstenberg & Cherlin, 1991). Most parents who live apart, however, do not engage in a cooperative coparenting effort, but rather are much more likely to do "parallel parenting" (Furstenberg, 1988; Furstenberg & Nord, 1985; Maccoby & Mnookin, 1992).

Difficulties in shared parenting may be further exacerbated when changes in the household structure of either parent occur. Many nonresident father families will experience new partnerships (Bumpass, Sweet, & Cherlin, 1991; Glick, 1989) and the birth of new children (Sorensen, 1996), which may have implications for coparenting across households. Prior studies have documented the influence these changes can have on children's well-being (Bray, 1999; Hetherington & Jodl, 1994), parents' well-being (Wang & Amato, 2000), and parent-child relationships (Hetherington & Jodl, 1994; Kiernan, 1992; Seltzer, 1991). New marriages and children might also be related to the coparental relationship between the resident mother and nonresident father (Ahrons & Wallisch, 1987; Christensen & Rettig, 1995).

It is important to identify the factors that influence cooperation between parents who live apart because this cooperation is beneficial to children. Children whose parents engage each other in shared parenting have better adjustment (Maccoby and Mnookin, 1992; Whiteside & Becker, 2000. Conversely, low cooperation and high conflict among divorced parents is

associated with children's depression and anxiety through feelings of being caught between parents (Buchanan, Maccoby, & Dornbusch, 1991; Crosbie-Burnett, 1991; Maccoby and Mnookin, 1992), and has been linked to poorer behavioral, social, and health outcomes for children (Johnston, 1990). Moreover, the distress associated with experiencing parents' divorce itself appears to be more pronounced among children whose mothers and fathers had persistent post-divorce conflict (Ahrons & Rodgers, 1987; Emery, 1982). Problems in the coparental relationship may also be linked to consequences for children that extend into adulthood (Morris & West, 2001).

Positive coparenting can also promote children's well-being through an increase in nonresident father involvement. Cooperation between the resident mother and nonresident father is linked to parents' positive perceptions of the father's involvement (Ahrons, 1983), and to more father-child contact, closer father-child relationships, and more authoritative fathering (Carlson, McLanahan, & Brooks-Gunn, 2008; Sobolewski & King, 2005). More nonresident father involvement - especially through authoritative parenting and close affective ties to children - in turn, is associated with more positive child adjustment (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999; King & Sobolewski, 2006).

Prior studies have made valuable contributions toward identifying the contexts in which cooperative coparenting is more or less likely to occur (e.g., Ahrons, 1981; Ahrons & Rodgers, 1987; Ahrons & Wallisch, 1987), but the antecedents of coparenting between mothers and fathers who live apart are still not well understood (Adamsons & Pasley, 2006). Although important in its own right, research on coparenting in continuously married families (e.g., McHale, 1995; McHale & Rasmussen, 1998) cannot be easily applied to understanding the coparental relationship in nonresident father families (McHale, et al., 2002). The nature of this

relationship is quite different when the mother's and father's spousal or couple relationship is dissolved (Ahrons, 1981) or never existed. For this reason, the factors that predict cooperative coparenting in continuously married families may differ from those that predict cooperation between resident mothers and nonresident fathers.

Although less attention has been given to what drives coparenting across households, several studies, including those conducted by Ahrons and colleagues, have focused on coparenting in nonresident father families (e.g., Ahrons, 1981; Ahrons, 1994; Ahrons & Wallisch, 1987). Research on convenience and court-based samples suggest that the coparental relationship is influenced by changes to mothers' and fathers' household structure (e.g., Ahrons & Wallisch, 1987; Christensen & Rettig, 1995), as well as others factors such as whether the mother and father were ever married (Insabella, Williams, & Pruett, 2003), satisfaction with financial child support (Bonach, 2005), less hostile divorce proceedings (Bonach, 2005), perceived expectations about and commitment to coparenting (Markham, Gonong, & Coleman, 2007), and forgiveness of the former spouse (Bonach & Sales, 2002). Much of the research on the predictors of coparenting, however, has not been informed by nationally representative data (see Seltzer, 1991 for an exception), and few studies include never-married parents (exceptions include Bonach, Sales, & Koeske, 2005; Insabella, et al., 2003; Seltzer, 1991). Previous studies predicting coparenting have also relied largely on samples of families in which nonresident parents have current contact with their children (e.g., Ahrons, 1981; Bonach, 2005; Bonach & Sales, 2002), thus excluding families that are likely to have the lowest levels of cooperative coparenting.

The current study analyzes nationally representative data from the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH) to study nonresident father families – both divorced and never

married - at two time points to consider the importance of fathers' and mothers' new marriages and new children for cooperative coparenting. We also include families in which the father has little or no contact with his nonresident children to assess the importance of changes in household structure for the full range of cooperative coparenting patterns. The first aim of this study is to establish the levels of cooperative coparenting at each of the two waves and the increases, decreases, and stability in coparenting over time. The second aim of this study is to test whether there is an association between parents' new marriages or new children and the level of cooperative coparenting. The third aim of this study is to assess whether a change in fathers' and mothers' marriage or fertility status is associated with a change in cooperative coparenting over time. Finally, as a supplementary goal, we test for differences across several groups of nonresident father families including those with higher and lower levels of socioeconomic status, Whites and Blacks, formerly married and unmarried parents, and girls and boys.

Why Should Parents' New Marriage and Children Influence Coparenting?

The addition of a new spouse (Ahrons & Rodgers, 1987; Christensen & Rettig, 1995) or a new child (Pasley & Ihinger-Tallman, 1982) marks a change to the family system to which a child belongs, and may alter the existing coparenting arrangements between the biological mother and father. Remarriage may also re-ignite old conflict and anger between the parents such that the coparenting relationship becomes more antagonistic and less cooperative (Adamsons & Pasley, 2006). The potential influence of parents' new marriage and children, however, may differ for resident mothers and nonresident fathers. The resident mother's new marriage or child might decrease cooperative coparenting in several ways. For instance, mothers in these circumstances are likely to be interested in developing a new nuclear family with her new spouse and her children, and may be less motivated to engage the father in shared parenting.

New children may also draw the mother's new partner into the parenting role. These mothers might come to view the nonresident father's involvement as less necessary and might even feel that continued coparenting with the father is an intrusion into her new family (Buehler & Ryan, 1994; Seltzer, Schaeffer, & Charng, 1989).

For nonresident fathers, a new spouse or child may be particularly likely to create new obligations that compete with existing obligations to former partners and children (Furstenberg & Cherlin, 1991; Furstenberg & Spanier, 1984; Manning & Smock, 1999). Seltzer (1994) notes that women continue to attend to their children's needs and to their parenting responsibilities whether or not they live with or are married to the child's father and regardless of new relationships. In contrast, she reports that men generally approach marriage and parenting as responsibilities that are bound together (see also Furstenberg & Cherlin 1991). When their marriages or partnerships with the child's mother end, they often withdraw not only from their former partner, but also from the child, and they tend to shift their attention to new partners and children. This suggests that while both mothers' and fathers' family changes might reduce coparenting, the nonresident father's new marriage or new child may carry more consequences for the coparental relationship than will changes in the resident mother's marital or fertility status.

There is little empirical evidence regarding parents' new marriage and children for levels of cooperative coparenting, and the lack of longitudinal research on coparenting patterns and what predicts those patterns limit what we know about shared parenting. (Adamsons & Pasley, 2006). Findings from three convenience sample studies of divorced families showed that mothers' and fathers' remarriage was associated with less co-parental interaction, feelings of less support from the other parent, and more negative attitudes about or conflict with the other parent

(Ahrons & Wallisch, 1987; Buehler & Ryan, 1994; Christensen & Rettig, 1995). Ahrons and Wallisch, however, found no evidence that new children reduced the quality of the coparental relationship. In their study of divorced California families, Maccoby and Mnookin (1992) also found that both fathers' and mothers' new partnerships were predictive of decreased cooperative coparenting, although the decline in cooperation occurred early in fathers' new relationships, while typically occurring for mothers' new partnerships only when they became more serious. Relying on data from the first wave of the National Survey of Families and Households study, Seltzer (1991) found that mothers' and fathers' remarriage was associated with less discussion of childrearing. Empirical evidence is limited with respect to the difference between mothers' and fathers' family changes for subsequent coparenting. Some prior research, however, suggests that post-divorce coparenting is especially likely to suffer when the father is remarried (Ahrons & Wallisch, 1987; Seltzer, 1991). This may be related in part to the fact that mothers are still much more likely to have primary physical custody of their children (Emery, 1994; Maccoby & Mnookin, 1992).

Extant research on nonresident fathers' contact with their children also suggests that new marriages and children are related to changes for nonresident father families. Fathers' and mothers' new marriages have been linked to less contact between nonresident fathers and their children (e.g., Furstenberg & Nord, 1985; Seltzer, 1991). Alternatively, Manning and Smock (1999) found that nonresident father-child contact was lower when the father had new biological children, but that fathers' new unions and resident stepchildren were less important for contact with nonresident children.

Group Differences

It is unclear whether the potential influence of parents' new marriages and children for cooperative coparenting is uniform across different groups of nonresident father families. It is possible that changes in the mother's or father's household structure may be similarly related to coparenting in all families. Alternatively, it is possible that a new marriage or child will be more strongly associated with a reduction in cooperative coparenting in families whose characteristics or circumstances are related to lower levels of cooperation between the child's parents. This may occur because coparenting is already tenuous in these families and thus might be more vulnerable to additional changes.

Previous research shows differences in the level of coparenting by the parents' socioeconomic status and whether the mother and father were ever married. For instance, parents' higher socioeconomic status (Madden-Derdich, Leonard, & Christopher, 1999) and mothers' higher education (Maccoby, Mnookin, Depner, & Peters, 1992) have been linked to higher quality coparenting. Shared parenting is also more likely when the mother and father were once married to each other (Insabella, et al., 2003; Seltzer, 1991). Coparenting may also vary by race and by the child's gender, although few studies explicitly test whether these factors connect to coparenting behaviors between the resident mother and nonresident father. Seltzer found that Black parents discussed childrearing decisions more than other groups, and that fathers of girls were somewhat more likely to discuss childrearing with the mother than fathers of boys, but only when they had been separated for more than five years. Related studies – such as those that assess the importance of race and child's gender for nonresident father-child involvement – have produced mixed results. For example, some studies find that nonresident fathers are more involved with sons than with daughters with respect to the frequency and duration of visits (Hetherington, Cox, & Cox, 1982) as well as the affective closeness between

the father and child (King, Harris, & Heard, 2004). Other studies, however, report few if any differences in nonresident father involvement by children's gender (Cooksey & Craig, 1998). Similarly, some studies report that Black children see their nonresident fathers more frequently than other groups (King, 1994; Seltzer), and that Black adolescents report more closeness to their fathers (King et al.) than do White adolescents.

To assess whether the potential importance of a new marriage and children for coparenting differs across groups of nonresident father families, we examine whether the association between mothers' and fathers' marriage and fertility statuses and cooperative coparenting is similar for Whites and Blacks, girls and boys, higher and lower levels of mothers' and fathers' education, and families in which the mother and father were once married.

Control Variables

Our models include controls for measures that are related to cooperative coparenting. These measures include those discussed above (race, child's gender, parents' education, and whether the mother and father were married) along with indicators of the distance between the father's and mother's household, father-child contact, the time since separation, and the child's age. Previous research suggests that cooperative coparenting is lower when the father and mother live farther apart, and when parents have been separated for a longer period of time (Seltzer, 1991). Coparenting has also been linked to more father-child contact (Carlson, McLanahan, & Brooks-Gunn, 2008; Sobolewski & King, 2005). Maccoby and colleagues (1992) report higher levels of cooperative coparenting when children are younger, although related studies on children's age and nonresident father's involvement with children are mixed. For instance, Seltzer & Bianchi (1988) note that father contact is more common for older children, but that, once contact occurs, younger children are more likely to have frequent contact. Another study found that nonresident

father-child involvement declines as children move into adolescence, but that certain types of involvement can increase in frequency (King et al., 2004).

METHOD

Sample

Our analysis is based on data from the first two waves of the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH). The first wave (NSFH1) was a national probability sample of 13,007 adults interviewed between 1987 and 1988 (see Sweet, Bumpass, & Call, 1988 for a detailed description of the data). The second wave included follow-up interviews with 10,007 of the original respondents between 1992 and 1994 (NSFH2). Among the wide range of family life items available in these data were questions asked of 2049 parents in Wave 1 and 1410 parents in Wave 2 who did not live with their child's other biological parent. These included questions about the coparental relationship as well as the nonresident parent's demographic characteristics.

The sample for this study includes only mothers who live with a biological focal child whose biological father is living elsewhere in Wave 1 and Wave 2 (n = 830). We restricted the sample to mothers who reported on the same focal child in both waves, thus reducing the sample size to 656. The sample was further reduced to 653 cases because three of the remaining focal children were more than 18 years of age in Wave 2. Finally, 25 mothers did not answer any questions about the father or the coparental relationship, so these cases were omitted, bringing the final sample size to 628 custodial mothers. The sample includes mothers who were never married to the child's nonresident father as well those who were once married to the father and are now divorced or separated. All measures were reported by the resident mothers.

To deal with possible bias resulting from attrition between the first and second waves, we used Heckman's (1979) method. We first used several demographic variables to construct a

regression equation predicting attrition from the sample. Attrition was higher for Blacks, Hispanics, and Asian Americans than for Whites, and was significantly greater among men, those who were older, were widowed, had lower education and less income, had never owned a home, and had no children. These predictors were used to calculate lambda, which is the predicted probability of dropping out of the study for all of the original respondents. This lambda was included as a control in all models that employed data from the second wave.

Analysis Strategy

We use structural equation modeling (SEM) to test our hypotheses (Arbuckle & Wothke, 1999). SEM offers advantages over traditional multiple regression that were useful for this study. In particular, factor analysis in SEM is confirmatory, which allows for the specification of a theoretical model, its estimation, and an evaluation of how well the theoretical model fits the observed data. SEM also allows for the incorporation of measurement error into the equations, which produces more accurate estimates of effect sizes.

Measures

Cooperative coparenting. Cooperative coparenting at Time 1 (NSFH1) and cooperative coparenting at Time 2 (NSFH2) were each treated as uni-dimensional latent variables, which were constructed using confirmatory factor analyses with the Analysis of Moments Structure (AMOS) software (Arbuckle & Wothke, 1999). Cooperative coparenting was measured at each time point with two items reported by the custodial mother. The first item asked mothers how much (1 = none, 3 = a great deal) influence the father had in major childrearing decisions (Time 1: $M = 1.49$, $SD = .72$; Time 2: $M = 1.42$, $SD = .66$). The second item assessed how often (1 = not at all, 6 = more than once a week) the mother and father discussed the child (Time 1: $M = 3.26$, $SD = 1.86$; Time 2: $M = 2.54$, $SD = 1.60$). Confirmatory factor analysis revealed

significant factor loadings for each of these items as observed indicators of cooperative coparenting ($p < .001$).

Parents' new marriage and children. The mother was asked whether she or the focal child's nonresident father had married a new partner or had children since those they had with each other. Mothers reported that 27% of the nonresident fathers had married another person and 24% had fathered a child with another person by Time 1. The corresponding Time 1 percentages for resident mothers were 11% and 22%. An additional 21% of fathers and 23% of mothers had married by Time 2, while an additional 21% of fathers and 23% of mothers had new children by Time 2.

Fathers' and mothers' marital and fertility status at both waves were used to create a series of dummy variables reflecting change or stability in these statuses over time. Among fathers, just over 21% were married at both time points, 21% had married between the waves, and 58% were unmarried at Time 2. (Nearly all fathers who were coded as unmarried at Time 2 were unmarried in both waves. There were, however, 36 fathers who were divorced between the waves.) Mothers were also categorized into being married at both waves (10%), marrying between the waves (23%), or being unmarried at Time 2 (67%). (As with the fathers, a small number of mothers ($n = 10$) who were unmarried at wave 2 had divorced between the waves. The divorced groups were too small to analyze separately, so they were included in the groups that were unmarried at Time 2. We tested the final model without these cases, but because the findings were unchanged, these cases were included in the final analysis.) With respect to the fertility status categories, 24% of fathers and 22% of mothers had new children by wave 1, 21% of fathers and 23% of mothers had children between the waves, and 55% of fathers and 55% of mothers had not had any new children in either wave.

Controls. Controls include the focal child's gender (1 = female, 48%; 0 = male) and age (in years; Time 1: *M* = 5.76, *SD* = 3.40; Time 2: *M* = 11.45, *SD* = 3.41), and the time since the mother and father had lived together (in months; Time 1: *M* = 57.28, *SD* = 39.07; Time 2: *M* = 127.71, *SD* = 39.02). Some mothers had never lived with the nonresident father (*n* = 187), making this length of time equivalent to the focal child's age. We also controlled for the distance between the mother's (and focal child's) household and the nonresident father's household (in 100 mile categories: *1 = less than 100 miles, 11 = 1000 miles or more*; Time 1: *M* = 2.71, *SD* = 3.43; Time 2: *M* = 2.86, *SD* = 3.48). (We acknowledge that the inclusion of distance in our models raises the issue of the direction of causality. Distance could hinder parents' ability to engage one another in childrearing, but fathers who are less involved in shared parenting may also be more likely to move further away from their children and their children's mother. Regardless, distance is an important control variable to include when assessing cooperation between parents that live in separate households.)

Single item dichotomies (0 = *no*, 1 = *yes*) measure whether or not the focal child was born in marriage (*yes* = 50%), whether the mother had at least some college education (Time 1: *yes* = 34%), whether the father had at least some college at the time of the focal child's birth (*yes* = 22%), and whether the father has any contact with the focal child (Time 1: *yes* = 79.7%; Time 2: *yes* = 72.9%). In alternative analyses, we controlled for the frequency of father-child contact. (We also tested our models with a sub-sample that included only cases in which the father and child had at least some contact. Both tests yielded nearly identical results to our main models. Results are available from the first author upon request.) (We note that direction of causality might also be an issue that pertains to the association between father-child contact and mother-father coparenting. While coparenting may enhance father-child involvement, more father-child

contact may also provide more opportunities for parents to cooperate with each other. However, two prior studies find evidence that the direction of the association between coparenting and father-child contact flows more from coparenting to contact rather than in the other direction (Carlson, McLanahan, & Brooks-Gunn, 2008; Sobolewski & King, 2005). Nevertheless, father-child contact is controlled in our models because it is an important correlate of coparenting.) The number of Hispanics, Asian Americans, Native Americans, and other groups were too small to analyze separately, so mother's race was dichotomized (0 = *White*, 1 = *non-White*, 44%; 34% are Black, 8% are Hispanic, and Native Americans and Asian Americans each make up less than 1% of our sample). Finally, all models that include data from the second wave include the lambda for attrition as a control. We considered including a control for the child's household income in our models, but because income is more likely to be an outcome of the parents' (especially the mother's) remarriage than a predictor of a new marriage, we omitted it from our final models. Findings from alternative analyses that included income as a control were not markedly different from the results of our final models (results available from the first author upon request).

Aside from a handful of cases on various items, missing data was not a major problem in this study for most measures used. However, there were a large number of missing cases on the items about the father, ranging from 7% to 15% missing. To deal with this, we created two variables reflecting missing status on any of the items about the father – one for each wave. Including these items as controls in preliminary models did not change the results of any of the analyses, so we omitted them from our final models. Moreover, we relied on full information maximum likelihood estimation to handle all data that were missing (Arbuckle & Wothke, 1999).

RESULTS

Levels of Cooperative Coparenting

Table 1 shows the levels of cooperative coparenting between custodial mothers and nonresident fathers for each observed indicator at Time 1 and Time 2. As the table suggests, cooperative coparenting is quite low, although it is more common for parents to be engaged in discussions of childrearing than it is for fathers to have much influence in childrearing decisions. According to mothers' reports at Time 1, nearly one-third of parents never discuss childrearing with each other, and roughly 65% of fathers have no influence in major childrearing decisions. The proportion of parents who do not coparent at Time 2 is even larger, with 42% reporting no discussion of childrearing, and about 70% reporting no influence from the nonresident father. A sizeable minority of parents, however, do manage to frequently engage each other in shared parenting, although this is particularly true for discussions of childrearing. At Time 1, 46% of parents discuss childrearing at least once per month, but only 13% of mothers report that the nonresident father has a great deal of influence in childrearing decisions. Frequent discussions and fathers' major influence are less common by Time 2, with comparable levels at 27% and 11%, respectively.

-- Table 1 about here --

To further illustrate how often parents are able to engage in cooperative coparenting, we divided the families into high, medium, and low coparenting categories. The distribution of families into these categories is shown in Table 1. A high level of cooperative coparenting was indicated by frequent discussions of childrearing – at least once per month – combined with a great deal of influence from the father regarding childrearing decisions. As Table 1 suggests, few parents attain high levels of both discussion and fathers' influence, with only 12.3% at Time

1 and 9% at Time 2. Mothers who reported at least monthly discussions and some influence from the father were categorized as having a medium level of coparenting. At Time 1, this was somewhat more common (17.3%) than high coparenting, but by Time 2, only 8.6% of mothers reported a medium level of coparenting. All other mothers comprised the low coparenting group, which clearly emerged as the most common category (Time 1: 70.4%; Time 2: 82.4%).

The majority of those categorized in the low coparenting group reported no influence from the father and little or no discussion (several times a year or less) about childrearing (Time 1: 69% of the low coparenting cases; Time 2: 72.7%). The remaining low coparenting sub-groups had either frequent discussions but with no influence from the father (Time 1: 22.6%; Time 2: 11.6%), or at least some father influence but with little or no discussion of childrearing (Time 1: 8.4%; Time 2: 15.7%). We view these latter subgroups as constituting low cooperative coparenting given that levels on one of the two indicators was especially low and arguably both should be sufficiently frequent to achieve successful coparenting (Markham, Ganong, & Coleman, 2007). These categories are, of course, subjective, but we feel that they provide a reasonable estimation of how often custodial mothers and nonresident fathers are able to successfully cooperate in shared parenting. Although other reasonable cutoff points for the categories of overall coparenting would result in somewhat different frequencies, the overall conclusion would remain the same: most parents who live apart have difficulty achieving high levels of cooperative coparenting.

Table 2 shows the stability and change in cooperative coparenting over time. The top two panels are based on subtracting scores on the original Time 1 measure from scores on the corresponding Time 2 measure, picking up any change that occurs. The third panel looks at changes between the high, medium, and low coparenting categories over time and also

differentiates between families that do not experience much change. Results indicate that for both the discussion of childrearing and fathers' influence, a decrease in coparenting is more common than an increase, with a decrease in parental discussions especially pronounced. Stability in coparenting is also common, and this is particularly true for fathers' influence. As the categories of change in Table 2 show, however, much of this stability represents chronically low (or no) cooperative coparenting. Mothers report low levels of overall cooperative coparenting across time in 65% of the cases (roughly 90% of all stable cases). Conversely, high stable levels of coparenting are rare, reported by just 3.6% of the sample. Similarly, only 3.4% of mothers report stability in coparenting at medium levels. Moreover, 19.4% of the cases experience some decrease in overall cooperative coparenting, while only 8.6% have any type of increase. Clearly, cooperative coparenting seems to be a difficult arrangement for most parents to achieve and maintain.

-- Table 2 about here --

Parents' New Marriage and Children and Cooperative Coparenting

Figure 1 shows the results of the structural model, in which cooperative coparenting at Time 1 was regressed on the Time 1 measures of the nonresident father's and the resident mother's marital status and whether the father or mother had any additional children since those they had with each other. The model also included all controls. (We standardized the latent variable representing cooperative coparenting, so that the unstandardized coefficients in the figures represent effect sizes.) As the figure shows, prior to the addition of control variables, all four of the independent variables are negatively associated with cooperative coparenting. If the father or mother had married someone else since their separation from each other, or if either had children since those they had together, cooperative coparenting is significantly lower than if the father or

mother remained unmarried or had no additional children ($p < .05$; for father's new children, $p < .001$). Once controls are added, however, only the item for the nonresident father's new children is associated with less cooperative coparenting – a difference of about one-third of a standard deviation relative to families in which the father had not had new children ($p < .001$). The reduced magnitude of the coefficient for parents' marital statuses and the mother's new children was largely attributable to the inclusion of father-child contact and time since separation. Distance to the nonresident father's household also reduced the coefficient for mother's new marriage, and the focal child's age further reduced the coefficient for mother's new children. Results from the control variable estimates (not shown) revealed that cooperative coparenting was lower among mothers whose time since separation from the father was longer ($p < .05$) and those who lived farther from the father's household ($p < .001$). Mothers reported more cooperative coparenting when there was at least some father-child contact ($p < .001$) and when the father had at least some college ($p < .05$).

-- Figure 1 about here --

It is possible that any new union – not just a marriage - in which either of the parents resides with a partner may influence coparenting. To test this, we conducted alternative analyses (not shown), in which we considered the importance of mother's cohabiting union (father's cohabitation at Time 1 was not available) and compared all mothers who were in a married or cohabiting union to those who were not. These analyses revealed that mothers' new union was not associated with cooperative coparenting once the control for father-child contact was included in the model. It is also possible that the addition of new children may be especially important for coparenting when the mother or father's new biological child is also a biological child of the current partner. To test this, we ran alternative models (not shown) in which we

confined the measure of mother's additional children to those she had with her current partner (comparable data for the father were not available). The results showed no significant association between this measure and cooperative coparenting.

These findings suggest that the father's, but not the mother's family status is related to (less) cooperative coparenting. Once important controls – especially father-child contact and the amount of time since separation - were considered, only cases in which the nonresident father had new children reported lower average cooperative coparenting. It appears that the potentially competing obligations of having children with a subsequent partner and coparenting with a previous partner are more relevant for fathers than for mothers. To explicitly test this, we compared our main model with an alternative model (not shown) in which the paths for the addition of new children were constrained to be the same for fathers and mothers. The constrained model was significantly different from the main model ($\Delta\chi^2 = 4.727$, $\Delta df = 1$, $p < .05$), indicating that the difference between the coefficient for fathers' new children and the coefficient for mothers' new children is statistically significant.

Group differences. Additional analyses (not shown) tested for differences in the Time 1 model between boys and girls, Blacks and Whites, children born within and outside of marriage, families in which the mother had at least some college versus none, and families in which the nonresident father had at least some college versus none. We tested for interactions between each of the four main independent variables (father's and mother's new marriage and father's and mother's new children) and each of these groups by running the model twice for each group comparison: once with all paths free to vary between the groups, and a second time with each of the four paths from new marriages and children constrained, one at a time, to be the same between groups. A significant change in chi-square would indicate a statistical interaction.

The results of these analyses suggest that our main findings are largely consistent across these groups, with one exception. When the association between fathers' new children and coparenting is compared between fathers who have at least some college and those who have no college, the coefficient is only significant for families in which the father has no college education ($b = -.954$, $p < .01$). Among families in which the father has at least some college, mothers reported no difference in coparenting by whether or not the father had new children ($\Delta\chi^2 = 6.542$, $\Delta df = 1$, $p < .05$). This is consistent with prior research findings that parents with higher socioeconomic status report more shared parenting (Maccoby, Mnookin, Depner, & Peters, 1992). It appears that fathers' education - though not mothers' - makes the coparental relationship less vulnerable to changes in the father's household structure.

Changes in Cooperative Coparenting over Time

Figure 2 shows the results of the structural model testing the importance of changes in parents' marital and fertility status for changes in cooperative coparenting over time. To conduct these analyses, we relied on the change categories described earlier. The marriage categories indicate whether either parent was married at both Time 1 and Time 2, was married between Time 1 and Time 2, or was unmarried at Time 2. Similarly, the categories for new children grouped each parent by whether they had new children by Time 1, had a new child between Time 1 and Time 2, or had not had a new child at either Time 1 or Time 2. The model regressed cooperative coparenting at Time 2 on these categories, along with all controls. To achieve a test of change, we also controlled for cooperative coparenting at Time 1. (To deal with the problem of autocorrelation, the model allowed the error terms for the observed indicators of cooperative coparenting at Time 1 and Time 2 to be correlated. Additionally, to make the measures of coparenting equivalent over time, the unstandardized factor loadings for the observed indicators

were constrained to be equal at Time 1 and Time 2.) The coefficients in Figure 2 correspond to the cases in which there were family changes by the first wave or between the waves, relative to those who had not married or who had no new children in either wave. Because the results are similar in the models with and without controls (with one exception noted below), only coefficients from the full model are included in the figure.

-- Figure 2 about here --

The results show that when the nonresident father married between Time 1 and Time 2, there was a decrease (roughly one-half of a standard deviation) in cooperative coparenting compared to families in which the father was unmarried at Time 2 ($p < .001$). Changes in cooperative coparenting did not differ between fathers who were married at both time points and those who were unmarried at Time 2. In additional analyses (not shown), we tested for a difference in coparenting between fathers who were married in both waves and those who married between the waves. To do this, we constrained the paths to cooperative coparenting to be the same for these two groups and compared the constrained model to the original unconstrained model in which these paths were free to vary. A significant difference emerged between the two models ($\Delta\chi^2 = 5.716$, $\Delta df = 1$, $p < .05$) revealing that when the father married between the waves there was also a decrease in cooperative coparenting relative to families in which the father was married in both waves. No differences in coparenting change emerged between any of the mothers by marital and fertility status.

Although the controls did little to change the results, there was one exception with respect to father-child contact. Prior to the addition of this control, which was positively related to more cooperative coparenting ($p < .001$), the birth of the nonresident father's new children between Time 1 and Time 2 was associated with a decrease in cooperative coparenting compared

to cases in which the father had not had any new children in either wave (B = .33; $p < .05$). Fathers who had new children by Time 1 did not differ on changes in coparenting from either of the other two groups. Finally, with respect to the other control variables, only distance to the father's household was significant, with increasing distance associated with a decrease in coparenting over time ($p < .001$).

Similar to the findings from the Time 1 analyses, these results show that changes in the nonresident father's family status are of more consequence for cooperative coparenting over time than are changes in the mother's family status. When the father marries a new partner between Time 1 and Time 2, the mother reports a decline in cooperative coparenting relative to families in which the father does not marry. Moreover, the father's marriage between the waves is also associated with decreased coparenting compared to families in which the father was already married by Time 1. No changes in the mother's family status, however, were related to changes in coparenting over time.

As with the Time 1 analysis, we tested for differences between the coefficients for fathers' and mothers' family changes. We ran two models that constrained the paths for mothers' and fathers' marriage between the waves to be equal (one for marriage in neither wave as the reference group [Constrained Model 1], one for marriage at both waves as the reference group [Constrained Model 2]). We compared each of these constrained models to the unconstrained model to test for significant chi-square differences. The findings revealed that Constrained Model 1 was significantly different from the unconstrained model ($\Delta\chi^2 = 5.081$, $\Delta df = 1$, $p < .05$) but that the difference between the unconstrained model and Constrained model 2 did not reach statistical significance ($\Delta\chi^2 = 3.235$ $\Delta df = 1$). This indicates that the coefficient for fathers' marriage between the waves compared to the coefficient for no marriage in either wave

is significantly different than the corresponding coefficient for mothers. The importance of marriage between the waves relative to marriage in both waves, however, does not appear to differ for mothers and fathers. Overall, it appears that only a change in fathers' family status – particularly marriage to a new partner between Time 1 and Time 2 - is associated with a decrease in cooperative coparenting.

Group differences. In additional analyses (not shown) we tested whether the association between parents' marital and fertility status over time and cooperative coparenting differed across groups of nonresident father families. As with the Time 1 analyses, we tested for differences between boys and girls, Blacks and Whites, children born within and outside of marriage, families in which the mother had at least some college versus none, and families in which the nonresident father had at least some college versus none. We tested for chi-square differences between the constrained and unconstrained models (one test for each group comparison), thereby assessing whether a statistical interaction emerged between any of these groups and the change in marital or fertility status over time. No significant differences between the groups emerged, with one exception. The association between fathers' new marriage between the two waves and less cooperative coparenting at Time 2 was significant for parents who were once married to each other (B = -.78, $p < .001$), but not for those who were never married ($\Delta\chi = 3.906$, $\Delta df = 1$, $p < .05$). The influence of the father's marriage to a new partner appears to differ for divorced and never married families.

DISCUSSION

This study found that cooperation between resident mothers and nonresident fathers is quite low, and that coparenting over time is largely characterized by stably low levels of shared parenting (65% of our sample). Moreover, roughly 20% of the families in our study report a decrease in

cooperative coparenting over time, while less than 9% experience any increase in coparenting. This is consistent with prior research that finds that cooperative coparenting is uncommon, with most resident mothers and nonresident fathers engaging primarily in disengaged coparenting or "parallel" parenting (Furstenberg & Nord, 1985; Maccoby & Mnookin, 1992). Despite this, some parents are able to cooperatively coparent, and this appears to be related to changes in the parents' – particularly the father's – family structure following the mother's and father's separation. Our cross-sectional analyses indicate that cooperative coparenting is lower when the father has new children, but that neither the father's marriage nor the mother's marriage nor her new children is linked to coparenting. Alternatively, our longitudinal analyses reveal that father's marriage between Time 1 and Time 2 is associated with a decrease in shared parenting between the resident mother and nonresident father.

Our findings suggest that changes to the father's family structure are more important for cooperative coparenting than changes to the mother's family structure. This may be related to the fact that mothers are the custodial parent for all families in our study. Co-residence with the child might ease the adjustment to one's own new marriage or child and the competing obligations these might produce. Changes to the nonresident father's household or family status, conversely, might make coparenting more difficult. Because the child does not live in the father's household, the new obligations that come with a new spouse or child might more easily eclipse the old responsibilities of coparenting with the child's mother. It is unclear whether mothers' household changes would be more important for coparenting among custodial father families. Future research that examines the process by which a new marriage or a new child relates to coparenting would contribute to our understanding of the gender differences that arose in our study.

Although our findings were largely consistent across nonresident father families, two important group differences emerged. First, the cross-sectional results suggest that cooperative coparenting is less vulnerable to changes in the father's family structure among families with highly educated fathers. Perhaps these fathers have more resources at their disposal to stay connected to prior children and to coparent with the resident mother. These resources may reduce the difficulty nonresident parents have in attending to both new and old family obligations. Second, the longitudinal results suggest that divorced families may be especially vulnerable to the negative influence of a nonresident father's remarriage. This finding is inconsistent with the proposition that changes in the parents' family structures might more strongly affect coparenting among groups who are already less likely to coparent. Although previous research finds that parents who had been married to each other have higher average levels of coparenting (Insabella, et al., 2003), in this study, these families were more vulnerable to the influence of the father's new marriage. It is possible that marriage is more salient for parents who were once married to each other, and that the father's marriage, therefore, is more likely to be experienced as a disruption to existing coparenting arrangements. Future research should explore the conditional link between changes in parents' family structure and coparenting. A key goal should be to identify the mechanisms that underlie group variation, such as the differences by socioeconomic resources and parents' marital history. Future studies should also examine the possibility that some groups should be the focus of intervention and assistance measures aimed at improving coparenting.

The findings from this study should also be considered with respect to the potential implications for children's well-being. The low levels of cooperative coparenting - and a common pattern of decreased cooperation over time - evidenced in our national study do not

bode well for children given prior findings on the link between positive coparenting and child well-being. Moreover, our findings that shared parenting is especially likely to be low and to decline over time as fathers go on to form new families, which most fathers do, suggest that many children are unlikely to reap the benefits that accrue from a cooperative coparental relationship. Accordingly, future research needs to continue to try to understand what can promote cooperative coparenting among resident mothers and nonresident fathers.

One limitation of our study is that we only have reports of coparenting from the resident mothers. Having reports from both parents would improve the reliability of the reports of coparenting behaviors and their antecedents. Related to this, we only have limited information about the nonresident fathers. For instance, there are too many missing cases of fathers' household income to include this measure in our models and we have no information on whether the father lives with the mother of his new children or the children themselves. The collection of more information from and about the nonresident fathers will be an important contribution of future studies. Our study would also be improved if we had more measures of coparenting than those available in these data. For instance, it would be useful to know what the parents discuss when they talk about childrearing, and to know more about the tone and nature of those discussions. Likewise, more information on the dynamics of nonresident parents' influence would be valuable. Future research needs to develop more specific items relevant for coparenting between parents who do not live together. Another limitation is our restriction to comparing Whites to non-Whites. Our sample did not include enough cases of non-Whites to make more specific group comparisons. This also needs to be addressed in future studies. Future research should also consider the importance of mothers' and fathers' new cohabiting relationships for coparenting. Also, we were unable to study these families from the time of

separation and follow them across time. Some of the families in our sample had already been nonresident father families for some time by the first wave of data collection. This limited our ability to study early changes in the coparenting relationship, a time when more dramatic changes might occur.

Despite these limitations, our study has made important contributions to what we know about levels of coparenting over time and to how changes in the parents' household structure are linked to shared parenting. Prior research has been limited by small, unrepresentative samples or cross-sectional data that precludes a strong assessment of how changes in marriage and fertility influence changes in coparenting. By relying on national data at multiple time points, we have provided a broader understanding of how mothers and fathers who live apart share – or do not share – parenting and how that is linked to their marriage and fertility patterns across several groups of nonresident father families. This is a key contribution bearing in mind the role cooperative coparenting can play for the well-being of children and the high numbers of parents who will go on to marry and have children with new partners.

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Table 1. Levels of Cooperative Coparenting at Time 1 and Time 2

How often mother and father discuss childrearing	Time 1	Time 2
Not at all	30.5%	42.1%
About once a year	6.2%	8.9%
Several times a year	17.6%	21.9%
1 to 3 times a month	15.3%	14.0%
About once a week	13.3%	6.5%
More than once a week	17.1%	6.6%
	100.0%	100.0%
How much influence father has in childrearing		
None	64.5%	69.5%
Some	22.4%	19.2%
A great deal	13.1%	11.3%
	100.0%	100.0%
Overall cooperative coparenting[a]		
High	12.3%	9.0%
Medium	17.3%	8.6%
Low	70.4%	82.4%
	100.0%	100.0%

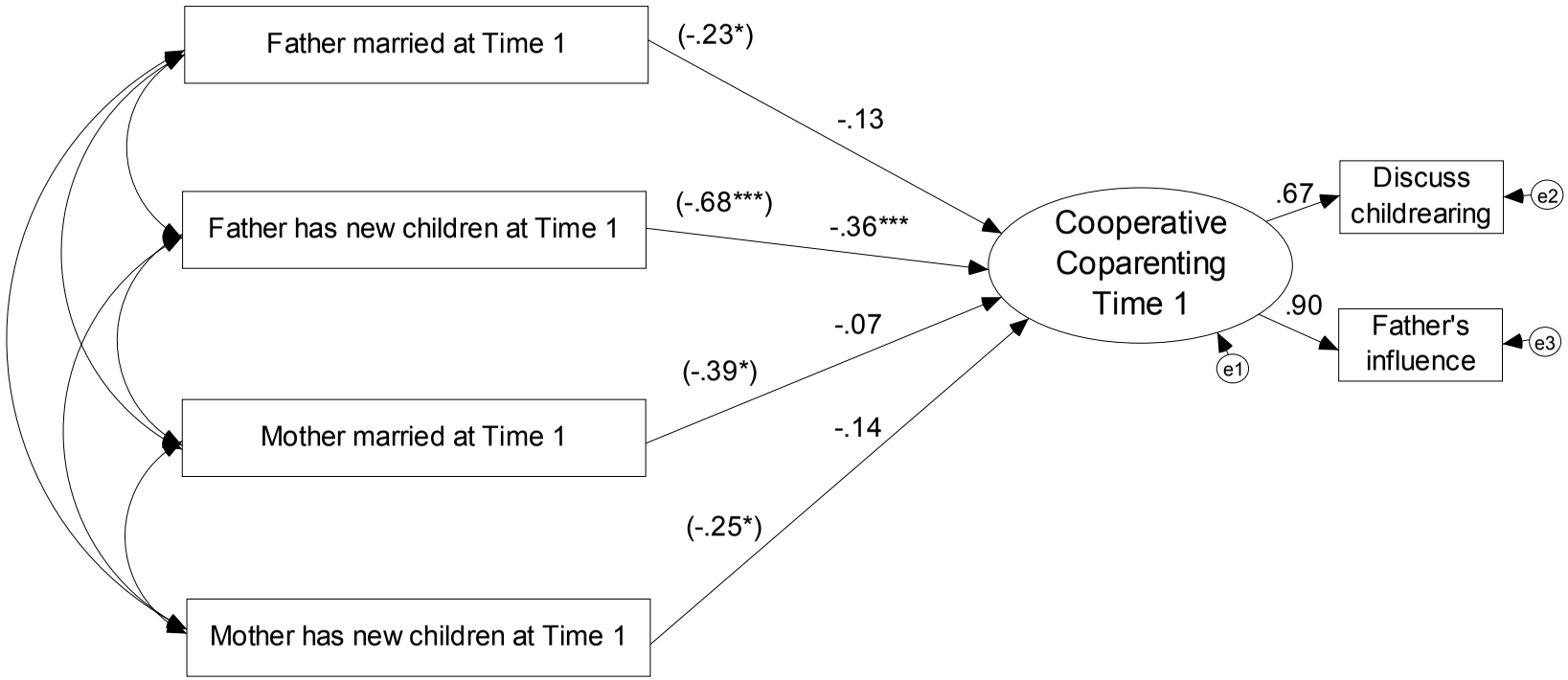
Note: [a]High levels of cooperative coparenting include cases in which the mother reports at least monthly discussions with the nonresident father and a great deal of influence from the father in childrearing decisions; medium levels included cases in which the mother reports at least monthly discussions and some influence from the father; all other cases are coded as having low levels of cooperative coparenting. *N* = 628

Table 2. Stability and Change in Cooperative Coparenting from Time 1 to Time 2

Change in mother and father discussing childrearing over time[a]	
Decrease from Time 1 to Time 2	45.6%
No change from Time 1 to Time 2	35.9%
Increase from Time 1 to Time 2	18.5%
	100.0%
Change in father's influence in childrearing over time[b]	
Decrease from Time 1 to Time 2	18.7%
No change from Time 1 to Time 2	66.7%
Increase from Time 1 to Time 2	14.6%
	100.0%
Categories of change in coparenting over time[c]	
Stable	
High stable	3.6%
Medium stable	3.4%
Low stable	65.0%
Decrease	
Medium at Time 1, low at Time 2	11.1%
High at Time 1, medium at Time 2	2.1%
High at Time 1, low at Time 2	6.2%
Increase	
Low at Time 1, medium at Time 2	3.1%
Low at Time 1, high at Time 2	2.6%
Medium at Time 1, high at Time 2	2.9%

Note: [a]Change is based on subtracting the Time 1 measure of discussing childrearing (coded 1-6) from the Time 2 measure of discussing childrearing. [b]Change is based on subtracting the Time 1 measure of father's influence (coded 1-3) from the Time 2 measure of father's influence. [c]High levels of cooperative coparenting include cases in which the mother reports at least monthly discussions with the nonresident father and a great deal of influence from the father in childrearing decisions; medium levels included cases in which the mother reports at least monthly discussions and some influence from the father; all other cases are coded as having low levels of cooperative coparenting.
N = 628

Figure 1. New Marriage and Children on Cooperative Coparenting at Time 1

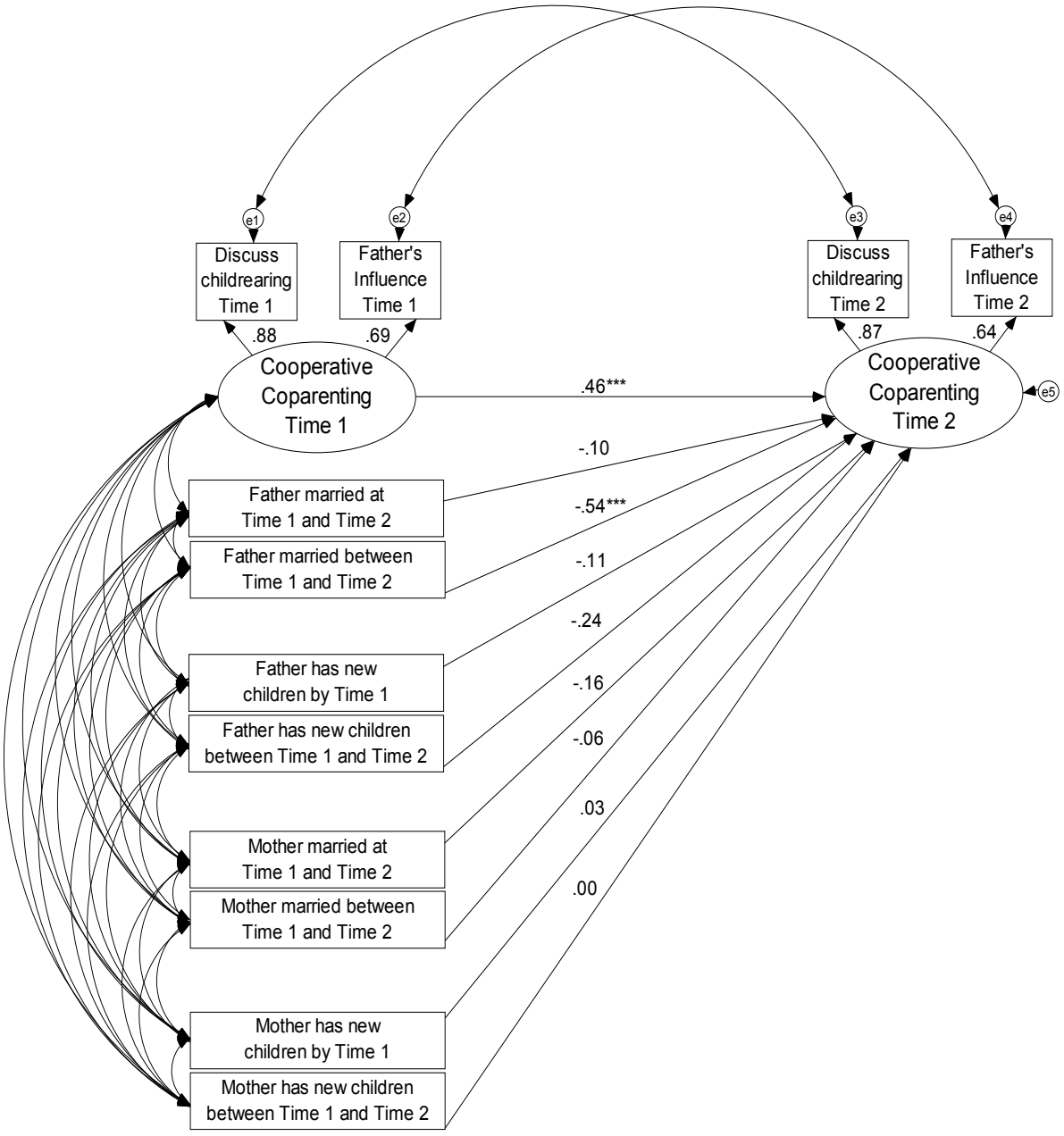


Note: Model controls for time since the mother and father were separated, distance to the father's household, whether the focal child was born in marriage, the focal child's age and gender, whether the father and child have any contact, the mother's race, and the mother's and father's education. The latent variable representing cooperative coparenting has been standardized, so the unstandardized coefficients predicting coparenting represent effect sizes. (Coefficients for the model without control variables are in parentheses.) All factor loadings are standardized coefficients and are significant at $p < .001$. R Square = .387; Chi Square = 17.865; df = 12, comparative fix index = .997; root mean square error of approximation = .028.

N = 628.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed tests).

Figure 2. Changes in Cooperative Coparenting over Time



Note: Mothers and fathers who were unmarried at Time 2 or had no new children at either Time 1 or Time 2 served as the reference groups. Model controls for Time 2 measures of time since the mother and father were separated, whether the focal child was born in marriage, the focal child's age and gender, the mother's race, the mother's and father's education. and attrition. The model also controls for Time 1 and Time 2 measures of whether the father and child have any contact and the distance to the father's household. Tha latent variable representing cooperative coparenting at Time 2 has been standardized, so the unstandardized coefficients predicting coparenting represent effect sizes. All factor loadings are standardized coefficients and are significant at p < .001. R Square = .573; Chi Square = 50.741; df = 40; comparative fix index = .997; root mean square error of approximation = .021.

N = 628.

* *p* < .05. ** *p* < .01. *** *p* < .001 (two-tailed tests).