Intergenerational Influences on Fathering: Lessons from 30 years of the NLSY79

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In my presentation today I would like to start out by giving you an overview of the National Longitudinal Studies of Youth or as we call it, the NLSY, specifically the NLSY79. Because the NLSY79 has been going for almost 30 years, I have a lot of information to share with you so I have tried to present the essential elements with a series of powerpoint slides. However, I should warn you upfront – I have a lot of slides! During my talk I'm going to focus on some of the elements that help to make the NLSY79 unique, and provide you with some brief synopses of research that has been done by either myself or others that will help to illustrate some of these unique elements. I'll conclude with a brief presentation of some results that pertain to "fathering" that are very much hot off the press and represent work currently in progress.

The NLS program was started back in the 1960s. In 1966 two cohorts of men were first interviewed: the Mature Men who were between the ages of 45 and 59 and who were targeted to study their shrinking labor force participation, and the Young Men who were between 14 and 24 years of age who were interviewed to find out more about the problems of unemployment among youth at the time. Both of these cohorts started out with just over 5000 individuals. A year later, in 1967, a cohort of over 5000 women ages 30-44 was begun in order to study the return of women to the labor force as their children grew up, and to study how women balanced the roles of homemaker, mother and labor

force participant. A cohort of over 5,500 younger women, also ages 14-24, was then begun in 1968 as they were completing school, making initial career and job decisions, and starting families. Interviews with both the male cohorts ceased in 1981 although some information was collected from respondents and next-of-kin of deceased sample members in 1990. The latest round of data collection for both the mature and young women was 2003. One thing that I would like to point out is that all of the NLS cohorts focus on individuals rather than households.

Then in 1979 we began the NLSY79. We used to just call this cohort the N**LSY** which was good enough because there was only one National Longitudinal Survey of Youth. But not any more -- now the NLSY79 might be more aptly named "the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth that used to be". In addition we have information on a whole bunch of their children, some of whom are not too youthful any more either, and finally the 1997 youth cohort who are also aging more rapidly than they might care to!

In this next overhead I present some information on the NLSY79 sample:

1979:	12,686 men and women 14-21 with oversamples of Blacks, Hispanics, poor whites and military
1984-5	Loss of most military oversample cases
1990-91	Loss of poor white oversample cases
1994	Last annual interview – biennial from then on
2006	Interviewed over 80% of actively fielded sample

A couple of points to underscore from this information that help to illustrate the unique nature of the NLSY79 are first, data have been collected either every year or every other year from the same set of people over a long period of time – starting in the teen years, these individuals were followed as they left secondary school, entered college

or training programs, moved into their first jobs, moved in with partners, got married, had children (although not necessarily in that order), changed jobs, had more children, bought houses, moved into middle age, began to think that they might like to retire one day, and paid into pension schemes. And throughout these years we have not just asked questions abut their labor force participation and their marriage and family building activities, but also about their beliefs, their hopes and expectations for the future, their mental and physical health, their alcohol and drug use, and their sexual activity and contraceptive use. As these figures also show, we have achieved a tremendously high retention rate of sample members: in 2006 we obtained interviews with over 80% of those respondents from the original 1979 sample who were still eligible to be interviewed – i.e. who were not part of the oversamples who were dropped in the mid 1980s and early 1990s, and who were still alive.

Something else that makes the NLSY79 unique is that not only has extensive data been collected on fertility, child health and child care from the early survey years, but beginning in 1986, all children born to NLSY79 females have been assessed every other year until they reach age 14. Children are given a variety of assessments, and information on each child is obtained both directly from the interviewer who is trained to administer the various assessments, and also from reports from the child's mother and then some interviewer remarks on, for example, the ways in which she notices the mother interacting with her child during the interview.

Children are given a variety of assessments covering a range of domains:

- Cognitive – memory; math & reading achievement, word reception & recognition

- Socioemotional – developmental milestones; temperament; perceived self-competence
- Behavioral – prosocial; behavior problems; peer conflicts; risk taking
- Physical Health & Development – height & weight measurements; self-reports

This next table gives some information on the child sample from 2004. A total of 3011 children were interviewed and there are a couple of things that I want to point out in this table. First is that a majority of these children have been interviewed at all, or nearly all possible time points. For example, look at the 331 11 year olds in 2004. 259 of them, or almost 80% have been interviewed at 5 or all 6 of the possible interview points! This means you have a simply amazing history on each of these children. Plus you have information from their mothers regarding some of their behaviors while they were pregnant! Eg. Whether they smoked or drank and how much, if they went for prenatal visits and when their first visit was etc.

Something else to notice, however, is that there are very few births and children at the youngest ages. This is because these children are born to women who were themselves born between 1957 and 1964 and so most of them have completed their fertility. It also means that the youngest children in the sample are born to the oldest mothers and conversely, the oldest children were born to the youngest mothers. So you have to be very careful about who your sample is!

One way of getting over this problem is to POOL cases across years and this then enhances the heterogeneity of the sample. So, for example, if you were to want to use a sample of 5 year olds, you could take all children who were age 5 in any of the years

between 1986 and say 2004 as this slide shows, and you would have a sample of 3665 children in total, born to women of all different ages, it is just that they would have been age 5 in different years rather than all being from the same single year birth cohort.

You might wonder why there are so few children age 14? The answer to this question is that when these "children" reach age 15, they graduate to becoming "young adults" although this may be a term that not all parents would use to describe their own 15 year olds all the time! So, if a "child" turns 15 during the year of the interview, he or she is interviewed as a young adult, and if they remain 14 for the rest of the year, they are still interviewed as "children".

The NLSY79 Young Adult survey was started in 1994. Again, this is a survey that is fielded every 2 years and we are currently interviewing for the 8th survey round. As of 2006, we have 5844 young adults between the ages of 14 and 35, and their numbers continue to grow each year. Remember, that the oldest of these young adults were born to the youngest mothers: in 2006, all young adults ages 25 and older had been born to mothers ages 25 and younger at the time of their births; conversely, of those young adults ages 14-17 in 2006, none of them had been born to mothers who were younger than 23 when they gave birth. So as each year passes, more children born to older mothers age into the sample.

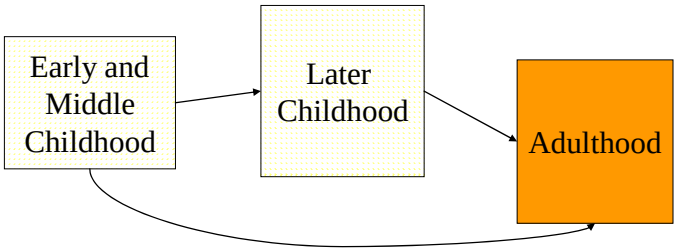
The young adult survey also contains a whole range of questions that are designed to parallel questions on both the current NLSY79 main questionnaire as well as our most recent nationally representative cohort, the NLSY97, questions that are designed to continue or parallel questions from the child survey, and a whole series of questions that

are tailored specifically for this age group in today's world. And, of course it is continually evolving. For example, in 2006 we

- Added Catastrophic events series
- Expanded Questions on assets and debts
- Added a Series of questions on financial help with living expenses
- Added a Ten-Item Personality Inventory
- Added a series of items to get at family conflict
- Included a series of political questions

And in 2008 we included questions on whether or not respondents had seen action in combat zones, found out who their biological children lived with at the time of their birth, added a 6 item anger scale, expanded our data gathering to ask about healthy activities that young adults engaged in, and building from qualitative research done by Wendy Manning and Pamela Smock, we designed new questions to get a better handle on the types of relationships and dating activities that youth are engaged in today during their teens and twenties.

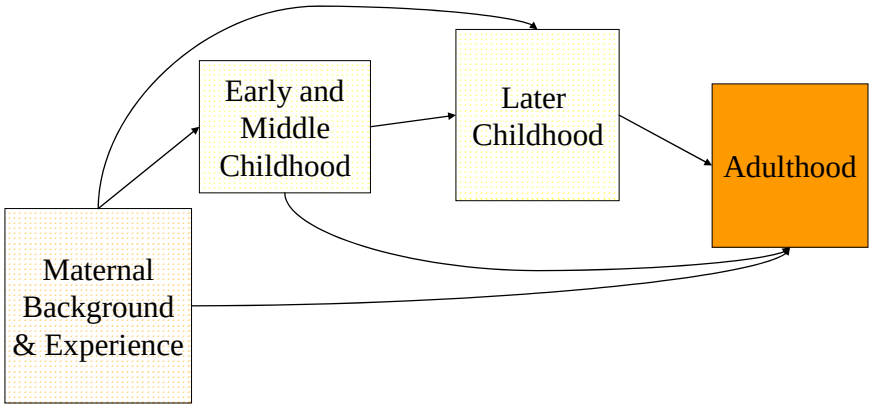
Research Possibilities



What the figure above illustrates is that given the wealth of data that have been collected on these children from very early on in their lives (if not from birth), and data that have been collected every other year, the NLSY child data present researchers with enormous possibilities to link information ascertained when the child was quite young to outcomes in later childhood, or to see how potential predictors from early or middle childhood of certain behaviors or outcomes in early adulthood might or might not be mediated by events and occurrences in later childhood or adolescence.

And then of course there are cross-generational research possibilities.

Cross-Generational Research Possibilities



So, for example, we might be interested not only in how deviancy develops from childhood into the young adult years, but in how the evolution of deviant behaviors might be related to behaviors and experiences in the prior generation – in this case among the youths' mothers. And what is really great about these data is that not only do we have similar data collected from both mothers and their children, but in order to link maternal reports of behaviors with those of their child we don't have to rely on retrospective reporting – data were collected from the mothers on their behaviors at, for example, ages 16 or 18 when they were 16 or 18, and then again from their children at the same ages.

But these aren't quite all of the NLS cohorts. In 1997 we began collecting data on a new cohort of approximately 9000 American youth who were 12-17 when first interviewed. And these youth have been interviewed every year since. The most recent data available to the public is from round 9 which was conducted in 2005/06 when these

youth were in their early 20s. This therefore means that we can use the 1997 data and compare information on this nationally representative cohort of youth with that collected from the another nationally representative cohort of youth from a prior generation (the 1979 cohort), and also with the NLSY79 young adults, many of whom are the same ages as the 1997 cohort members. What we get from the 1997 data is national representativeness and hence greater generalizability of results, plus these children have been born to women throughout their childbearing years. What we gain from the young adults is information from birth or very early childhood, plus indepth information from their mothers over the past 30 years.

Before I turn to discuss the research we are currently involved in with fathering that is the title of this talk, I'm going to ask you to bear with me for a few more minutes as we take a slight detour and I present some information on respondents' living arrangements. And here I refer to the living arrangements of both the NLSY cohort members themselves, and their children because of course as parents change their living arrangements, these changes impact who children live with. As you will see, this information helps to illustrate some of the points I have raised so far concerning the types of data that we have available, the data collection process that has taken place over many years and at frequent intervals, how comparisons can be made across cohorts, and from a life course framework, how children's lives are linked with those of their parents. This information should also provide a nice segue into what we are currently looking at in terms of fathering.

Since its inception, the NLSY79 has asked various questions on marital status, marital changes and cohabitation. Many of these have remained the same over the years, others have been added to reflect the changes that have occurred in living arrangements during the 1980s, 90s and first years of the new millennium. For example, we have always collected data on a respondent's current marital status. Since 1980 we have also collected data on marital changes in an event history format.

From this information we then create a series of variables indicating the beginning and ending dates (month and year) of marriages

- Start dates for up to 3 marriages
- End dates for up to 2 marriages
- Age at 1st marriage
- Number of months between first marriage and first birth

Over the past 30 years, cohabitation has increased tremendously in the United States. (The number of cohabiting households in the United States increased from 1 million in 1970, to 3 million in 1990, 5 million in 1998 and almost 10 million by the mid 2000s (U.S. Census). Our questionnaire design reflects this change. From the household roster that is collected at every survey point, we have always been able to ascertain whether or not the respondent is living with a partner of the opposite sex, but beginning in 1990 we also began to collect data on:

- Month and year when the respondent began living with an opposite sex partner
- Whether the respondent lived with their spouse before marriage, and if so
- Month and year when the respondent and their spouse began living together

Beginning in the 2002 survey, during any period of at least 3 months in which the respondent was unmarried, we also started to collect spells of cohabitation that are at least 3 months in duration—including start and stop dates. So while we have made changes to our data collection efforts to reflect changes in behavior, we don't have as complete a history of cohabitations as we do of marriages. One of the problems from the earlier survey rounds is that we are unable to tell whether or not partners of the opposite sex were in the respondent's household between survey rounds. We also miss partners who were present for short intervals of time. And then of course, even in the later years when we ask for start and stop dates for cohabiting relationships, whereas one's wedding day tends to definitively mark the start of a formal marriage, and either a date of separation or divorce marks the end, when a cohabiting relationship begins and ends isn't always so clear. Cohabitation is a much more difficult type of living arrangement to pinpoint as what constitutes cohabitation is more open to individual interpretation

So lets look at how all this information can be put together to describe the changes in living conditions that have occurred over time to NLSY79 respondents as these birth cohorts have aged from adolescence, through early adulthood and on into their late 30s and early 40s. And here I borrow very heavily from the work of one of my colleagues, Professor Claire Kamp-Dush.

What Claire does is to use all the marital and cohabitation data available and look to see at each year of age the percent of respondents who reported being in various marital and cohabitation states. As you can see, close to 100% of respondents are single

at age 16, and this percentage drops pretty steadily from the late teens through the late 20s as more and more young adults move into relationships. By age 23, half the NLSY79 sample respondents were no longer single. By age 40, only 12 percent have never been married or in a cohabiting relationship of more than 3 months duration (that we know of, bearing in mind the caveats that I mentioned earlier).

However, as these youth move through their 20s and 30s, an increasing proportion (up to just over 20% by age 40), are classified as "single" after a prior relationship has failed. So at age 30, for example, approximately 20 percent are single because they have never been in a marriage or marriage like relationship, and a further 17 percent are single after the dissolution of at least one earlier relationship.

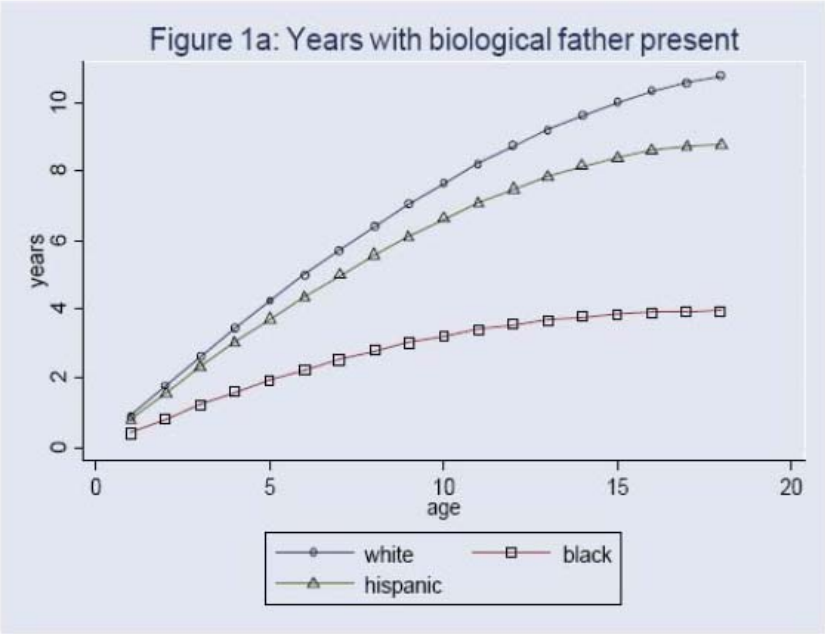
So what are the remainder of our youth doing at age 30? Approximately 45% of them are in a first marriage and this percentage stays fairly stable from the mid 20s through to age 40, although clearly some people shift into this group by marrying for the first time as others separate or divorce. The percentages cohabiting for the first time at each age dwindle as the percentages reporting being in a second or even a third or higher order marriage increase with age. By age 40, about 1/3 of these youth were single (1/3rd of those single had never entered a union and 2/3rd were single after a union dissolution), approximately 40 percent were in their first marriages, almost 20 percent were remarried and in their 2nd, 3rd or even 4th marriage, and just under 10 percent were cohabiting.

In this next slide of Claire's she compares youth from the 1979 cohort with youth from the 1997 cohort to describe their relationship formations and dissolutions during their late teens and early 20s. So in the top panel we have the 1979 data and in the

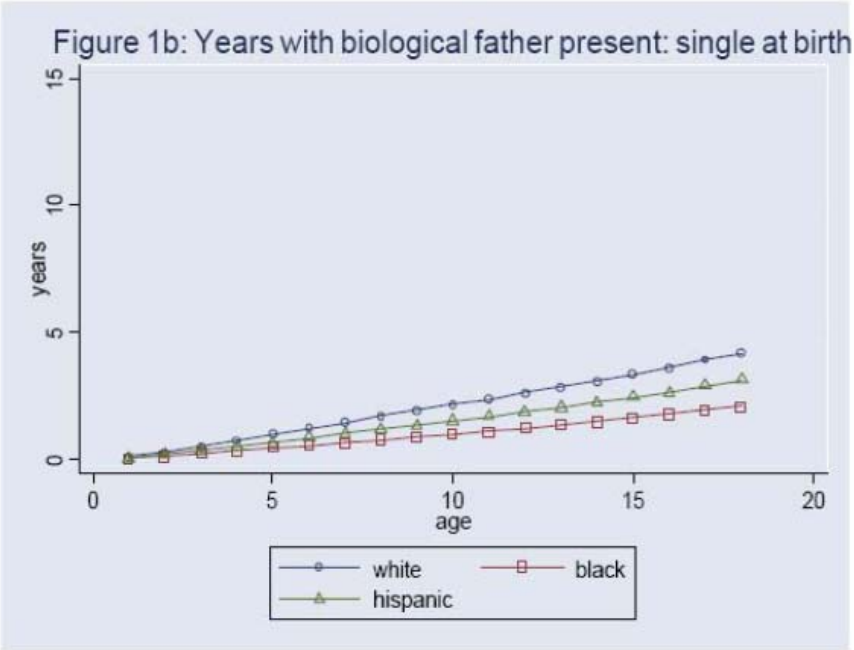
bottom panel, the 1997 data. By age 24, approximately the same percentage of youth in both cohorts are still single, having never been in a marriage or marriage like relationship. However, a greater percentage (20% vs. 11%) have experienced the dissolution of a first marriage by this age. 37 percent of the 1979 cohort are in a first marriage whereas only 20 percent of the 1997 cohort are. The numbers in 2nd marriages at age 24 are very low, but the 1997 cohort youth appear to be shying away from entering 2nd marriages at these young ages more than their counterparts in the 1979 cohort did. Instead, as we would expect, a higher percent are cohabiting in a first, second or even a third cohabiting relationship.

So what do all these numbers mean for children? The next few figures are taken from Blau and van der Klaauw's (2006) analysis of the same NLSY79 cohort of women whose data have been merged with that of their children taken across many years of surveys from the NSLY79 Children and Young Adult study, but Blau and van der Klaauw break their information down by the race/ethnicity of the mothers, which Claire did not, as we know that the living arrangements of women in young adulthood vary quite considerably by race. What figure 1a shows is that by age 18, children born to white mothers have spent about 11 years of their childhood with their biological father on average, compared to 9 years for children of Hispanic mothers, and only 4 years for children of black mothers. Put another way, by age 18, White children on average have spent 39% of their childhoods in some family form other than a union including both of their biological parents, and correspondingly, Hispanic children have spent 50%, and

Black children have spent 78% of their childhoods in some family form other than a union including both of their biological parents.



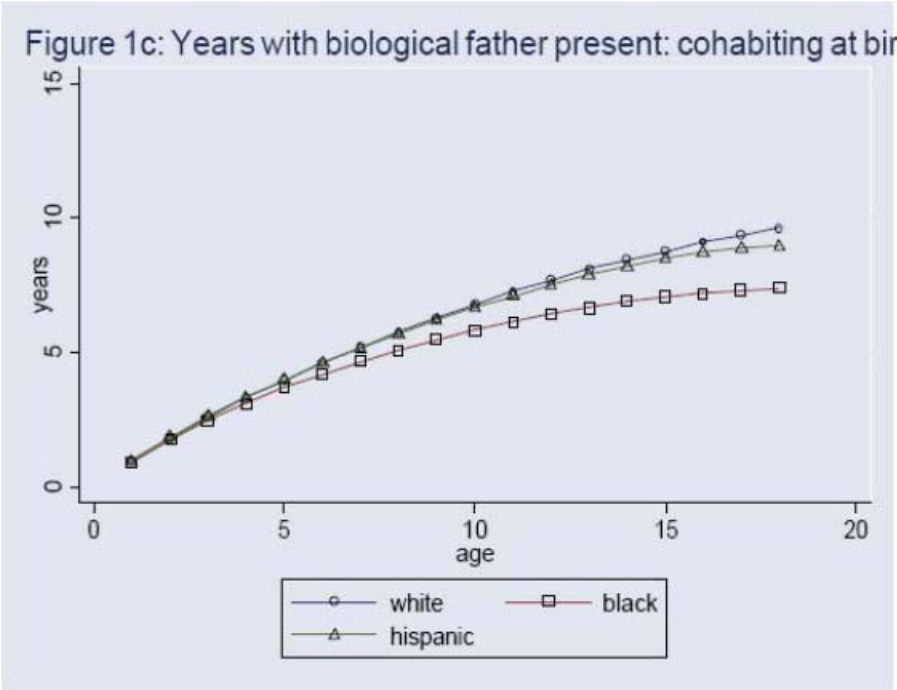
In Figure 1b, Blau and van der Klaauw find that children born to a White, Hispanic, or Black single mother spend approximately 20%, 16%, and 11%, respectively, of their childhoods up to age 18 with their biological fathers. Their mothers, many of whom never enter a union with their child's father, have several years to form other unions across childhood. Indeed, three quarters of children born to single-mothers eventually see their mothers enter a cohabiting union before their 16th birthday (Bumpass and Lu 2000).

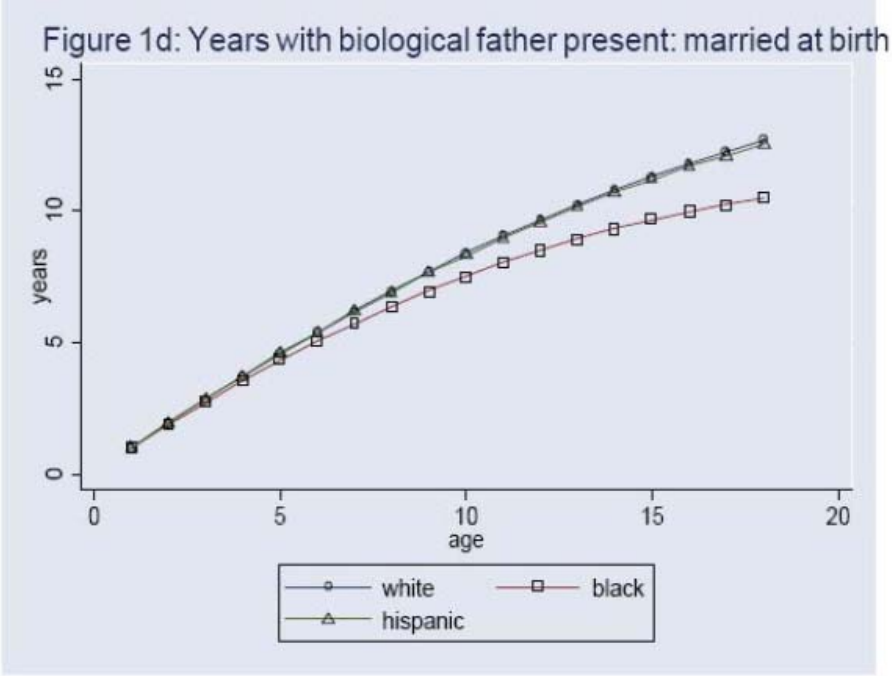


The number of years that children spend living with their biological fathers is higher for white, black, and Hispanic children if their mothers were cohabiting at the time of their birth (Figure 1c) and higher still for those born to married parents (Figure 1d), but still quite a number of these children, especially black children, will live for several years of their childhoods not co-resident with their biological fathers, and instead will experience single parent family living, along with their mothers' union entrances and dissolutions.

Additional research by Manning, Smock, and Majumbar (2004) find that 15% of children born to cohabiting relationships saw their parents' relationship dissolve before the age of 1, half by the age of 5, and over two-thirds by the age of 10. For children of married couples, 15% experience dissolution by age 5 and 30% by age 10. Again, it is likely that these children then experience new unions and perhaps new dissolutions as

their mothers attempt to find a union that is satisfying and able to withstand whatever stressors these mothers are under.





So how are the National Longitudinal Surveys of Youth unique?

- Many rounds of the data collection with broad range of data and amazing retention rates
- Ability to do intergenerational research in the NLSY79 by linking children/young adults to their mothers
- Ability to follow children born to NLSY79 mothers from birth through early adulthood
- Ability to do cross-generational research by comparing NLSY79 and NLSY97 cohorts
- Think creatively comparing NLSY79 young adults with NLSY97 – Young adults have many years of data collected contemporaneously, NLSY97 are nationally representative.
- Geocoded data
- Kinship data

The latter I haven't talked about but due to the fact that all youth of eligible ages in a household were originally interviewed, this means that there are siblings present in the NLSY79 main youth cohort, and there are also some cousins. This then also means that among the children of the NLSY79, we have cousins, half cousins, and quarter cousins. And although I am not going to go into this today, this kind of kinship information has been used by several researchers, for example Joe Rogers at the University of Oklahoma, who have used kinship information to try and separate family household effects from those of individuals.

To finish up today, having introduced the topic of father presence or absence with my presentation of Blau and van der Klaauw's graphs on children's living arrangements, I will turn my attention to some research that I am currently involved in with Canada Keck and Jonathon Vespa, also at Ohio State, where we ask the question: How do the

ways in which men were raised influence their own fathering skills? There has been a lot of attention paid to fathers and fathering in recent years and much of this recent research has focused on the effects of family structure, parenting practices and parental involvement on children's development. Other studies have concentrated on how family structure and family processes might impact adolescent behaviors and young adult well-being, including how youth make their own transitions into family living arrangements. For example, using data from the Baltimore Parenthood Study, a 30-year longitudinal study that followed the reproductive patterns of teenage parents and their children, Frank Furstenberg and Christopher Weiss (2000) found a strong link between the stable presence of a biological father in the histories of a sample of 110 young men, and the timing of their own family formation – early fatherhood was more likely if young men didn't grow up living with their own fathers, and if they hadn't lived with a stepfather who was a stable presence in the home. Young fathers were also less likely to then live with their own children if their own fathers hadn't lived with them throughout childhood.

Less attention has been paid to the intergenerational transmission of parenting practices, i.e. the influence of the parents' own experiences as a child on their own childrearing practices, however, and those studies that do have tended to be plagued by less than optimal design issues. As Van Ijzendoorn notes in his 1992 review of studies in non-clinical populations, the ideal design would include information from at least two generations of parents at the same point in their life span, and include comparable parenting measures. In practice, most studies undertaken to date have been cross-sectional, focus on parenting *beliefs/attitudes* rather than actual parenting practices, and

rely on retrospective reports from parents regarding their early upbringing as inputs. Many prior studies have also focused on the more punitive, disciplinary aspects of parenting, less have focused on more constructive measures of parenting (a notable exception here is Chen and Kaplan's 2001 study on the intergenerational transmission of constructive parenting).

So we decided that the NLSY79 would enable us to get around some of the problems that have been faced in prior research. In the first phase of our project we decided that we would concentrate on fathers, although we plan to also look at mothers in the next stage. By 2006, just under 600 young adult males reported that they had fathered at least one child. Of these fathers, approximately 350 reported living with at least one of their children. We decided to focus on these co-residential dads because past research has tended to concentrate more on whether or not a father is present or absent in the household of his child or children, and for those absent fathers on the extent of his contact with his non-coresidential children and the nature of his involvement with them (e.g. Cooksey and Craig, 1998), rather than on the kinds of parenting practices that he actively engages in with the children he does live with. And due to the nature of the NLSY79, we not only have information available from these fathers on the kinds of parenting practices that they engage in, but we also have information from their mothers (the children's grandmother) about the ways in which they raised these fathers when they were children themselves. So our sample of fathers is drawn from the NLSY79 young adults, and we take the answers they provide concerning the parenting of the oldest child they live with. Our information is drawn first from the 2006 data, but we then look back

to 2004 to include fathers who were not interviewed in 2006, and to 2002 to include a small number of fathers who were not interviewed in either 2004 or 2006.

Next we looked to see what kinds of questions had been asked of both the NLSY79 females about the kinds of activities they did with their children at various ages, and of the young adult males about how they were raising their own children. We settled on three dimensions of parenting: learning, discipline and affection. In the analyses I'll present today we only use a subset of questions asked because not all questions were asked of all age groups of children, and given the fact that the mean age of the fathers in our sample is 25.5 years, most of their children are young. We have therefore tried to use questions that were asked of both generations, but also that apply across the range of ages of children in our sample. Our final sample size is just over 300 children between the ages of 1 and 9 years of age.

Our fathers range in age from 18 to 33. What this means is that because they represent some of the oldest NLSY79 "children" themselves, and the NLSY79 child data collection effort was only started in 1986, we don't have information on a good number of these fathers from when they were young children because they were already past the youngest ages in 1986. We therefore draw information on how they were parented from when they were 10-11 years old. For those cases where we have no valid data for this age range, we draw it from when he was ages 12-13, and if there is no valid data from then either, we draw it from ages 8-9. It also makes theoretical sense to use data from these older childhood ages as these are likely to be ages when the fathers actually

remember what their mothers did with them and how they were parented, rather than from much earlier in childhood.

The learning dimension is captured by a single variable measuring how often the child is read to by the parent (Mothers of the young adults were asked "How often do you get a chance to read stories or read aloud to your child" and the young adults were asked "How often do you read to your child"). Two dummy variables are created for each measuring medium and high reading involvement with an omitted reference category of low involvement which equates to only several times a year or less.

Affection is constructed by combining answers to two questions: How many times in the past week have you praised your child for doing something worthwhile (NLSY79 mothers)/How many times have you praised your child in the past week(Young Adult fathers), and "How many times in the past week have you shown your child physical affection, such as kissing, hugging, stroking hair etc (NLSY79 mothers)/How often have you shown physical affection to your child in the past week (Young Adult fathers). The omitted reference category is low affection of 7 times per week or less. Approximately 64 percent of fathers reported showing affection 8 times per week or more.

Unfortunately we were only able to use one dimension of discipline – whether or not the parent spanked their child in the past week. Between these two generations spanking has fallen out of favor as a mode of discipline, although 32 percent of young adult fathers admitted to having spanked their 1-9 year old children during the past week!

We also included a measure of family structure and stability as experienced by the young adult father from birth to age 13. We differentiate those fathers who lived

continuously from birth to age 13 with both their biological parents, from those who lived with their biological father at least some of the time, (either with the mother also present or in the father's own household), and those who never lived with their biological father during these childhood years.

Additional characteristics that we control for in our analyses are the father's age in years at the time when his parenting practices are measured, the age of the child at this time, the sex of the child, the race of the child where white children are compared with blacks and Hispanics, whether the father had less than a high school education, a high school diploma, or education past high school, and whether or not his mother had been a teenager when he was born.

Given the categorical nature of the dependent variables, we used logistic regression. We ran a series of models starting with only the paternal measure of parenting behavior and the age of the child, and building up to a final model in which we include all of our variables. Here I am only showing you the results, expressed as odds ratios for the final models.

So in this first figure we present odds ratios pertaining to the odds of the father reading to his child daily or almost daily compared with never or rarely reading to his child. Those odds ratios that reach statistical significance have the odds noted either above or below the columns. The most obvious result from this figure is that fathers who were themselves read to when they were children have approximately twice the odds of reading to their own children daily versus never or rarely. Also, interestingly, those

fathers who never lived with their own biological fathers during childhood also have a much higher odds of reading often to their own children than fathers who lived with both their biological parents.

The same sort of pattern of results is found when we look at the odds of reading about monthly versus never or rarely.

In this next figure the parenting dimension modeled is affection, and again there is a positive association between the father's own experience growing up and his parenting behavior: dads who received affection and/or praise have a higher odds of giving affection and/or praise to their children. Another interesting finding is that Hispanic and black children are less likely to be shown affection by their fathers than are white children. This time the family structure and stability of the father's own living arrangements as a child appears unrelated to his likelihood of reporting affectionate behavior to his oldest child.

And finally we have discipline. Here, whether or not the father was spanked as a child appears to have no bearing on whether he spanked his child in the previous week. We didn't find this result surprising as the measure is not a particularly good one of "discipline". Ideally we would have liked to have been able to consider additional measures of discipline. Fathers were also asked about grounding a child, or sending them to their room but only of children at older ages, and we simply didn't have enough children at these ages to look at these behaviors. This will have to wait a few years.

So these are our preliminary results. We would like to explore some of these dimensions further, although the sample size is already quite small. We also have to

remember that we are modeling the behaviors of “young” fathers, and whether or not these results will change when children born to older fathers are included in our models remains to be seen. As I noted earlier, our next stage is to expand this work to mothers and to see if the patterns that we describe here also hold for them, but these initial results to appear to lend some support to the idea that the ways in which men were raised do impact the ways they themselves go on to parent.