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The Influence of Religion on Fathers' Relationships With Their Children

This study explores how aspects of a father's religiousness are related to the type and quality of involvement with his children. Factors that potentially confound or explain the connection between religiousness and fathering are also examined. Multiple measures of religiousness and father-child ties are considered in a series of bivariate and multivariate regression models. The sample of 810 fathers comes from the National Survey of Midlife Development in the United States (MIDUS). Results indicate that religious fathers are more involved fathers and that they report higher quality relationships; this is true for both married and divorced fathers. The greater involvement of religious fathers is explained only in part by demographic factors and the mediating influences of traditional attitudes and marital quality.

The role of fathers in family life is receiving increased attention as a result of the cultural shift in the role of fathers in families and the public concern over the increase in fathers living apart from their children (Marsiglio, 1995; Pleck, 1997). Prompted by feminism, women's rising workforce participation, and the profeminist men's movement, the *new fatherhood* ideal that has been growing since the 1970s has led to increasing demands that fathers spend more time with their children (Griswold, 1993). Divorced nonresident

fathers are also increasingly being called upon to maintain ties to their children. Increasing scientific and policy interest in father involvement is rooted in the belief that a father's active participation in his child's life has beneficial consequences for child well-being. Evidence for the benefits of father involvement on child well-being is strongest for resident fathers (e.g., Cooksey & Fondell, 1996; Harris, Furstenberg, & Marmar, 1998), but some evidence exists for nonresident fathers as well, particularly for more qualitative aspects of father involvement such as closeness and relationship quality (e.g., Amato & Gilbreth, 1999).

Despite demands for greater involvement by fathers in the lives of their children, some fathers remain relatively uninvolved. This is particularly true for nonresident fathers, many of whom have infrequent contact with their children after a divorce (King, 1994) that further declines over time (Furstenberg & Harris, 1992; Seltzer, 1991). Thus, understanding what motivates fathers to become involved in their children's lives is of particular importance. A neglected motivational factor with implications for father-child relationships is the influence of religion and ties to a religious community or faith. Are religious fathers more engaged in the father role than those without religious ties? This study explored how various aspects of a father's religiousness are related to the type and quality of involvement with his children. Factors that potentially link or explain the connection between religious involvement and fathering are also examined.

Prior research on the determinants of father involvement has largely ignored the role of religion. To my knowledge, only three national studies

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have directly explored the issue of whether religion affects the nature of the father–child relationship. All use the National Survey of Families and Households with two focusing on resident fathers (Bartkowski & Xu, 2000; Wilcox, 2002) and one on nonresident fathers (Cooksey & Craig, 1998).

Wilcox (2002) found limited evidence for a positive influence of religion on father involvement. Church attendance was significantly related to a father's involvement in youth-related activities, although his participation in these activities was not necessarily with his own child. However, church attendance was not significantly related to a father having dinner with his children, and it was negatively related to the father's involvement in one-on-one activities with his children. Conservative Protestants were more involved than unaffiliated fathers on all three measures of father involvement, although only differences for one-on-one activities remained significant when church attendance was added to the models. Furthermore, conservative Protestant fathers did not significantly differ from Catholics or mainline Protestants in regard to their involvement with children, with the exception of their being more involved in one-on-one activities with children than mainline Protestants. Catholics were more involved in youth-related activities than mainline Protestants and unaffiliated fathers.

Bartkowski and Xu (2000) found that a father's church attendance was positively related to paternal supervision, father–child interaction, and affective parenting (giving praise and hugs), although controls reduced the latter two relationships to nonsignificance and marginal significance ($p < .10$), respectively. Denominational differences were weak, particularly in multivariate models, although there was some evidence that conservative Protestant fathers engaged in more supervision and affective parenting compared with Catholics. An additional measure of theological conservatism was not related to any of the father involvement measures.

Cooksey and Craig (1998) also examined the influence of church attendance and denominational affiliation but focused on nonresident fathers and the frequency of their contact with children, both face-to-face and by phone or letter. They reported no influence of attendance or denomination on face-to-face contact but did find that fundamentalist Protestants report less phone or letter contact than do other Protestants.

Thus, there is some evidence that religiousness

influences father involvement but it is not particularly strong. I broaden the investigation by considering a fuller array of fathering measures and multiple dimensions of religiousness using a newly available national data set, the National Survey of Midlife Development in the United States (MIDUS). I include both married and divorced fathers and test whether the influence of religiousness on fathering differs. Divorce fundamentally alters the nature of the father–child relationship. Many fathers disengage from their children's lives after a divorce, and this early disengagement has lasting negative consequences for the father–child relationship over the life course (King, 2002, 2003). The type of relationship that fathers have with their children and the types of activities that they engage in vary considerably by whether they are married and living with their children. Therefore, whether a father believes that he has an obligation to visit his adult children takes on a different meaning for married and divorced fathers.

In addition, divorce and religion are reciprocally related. It is well known that religious individuals are less likely to divorce (Larson & Golz, 1989; McCarthy, 1979), but divorce also affects one's religiosity. Marital disruption significantly reduces men's probability of religious participation (Stolzenberg, Blair-Loy, & Waite, 1995). Because of these differences between married and divorced fathers, I explicitly tested for differences between them in the influence of religiousness on fathering. I hypothesized that religiousness would be positively related to father involvement among married men, but it was less clear whether this link would be as strong for divorced fathers. On one hand, to the extent that religious people are more likely to honor family obligations (Rossi, 2001), divorced fathers who are religious may be more involved with their children compared with their less religious counterparts. On the other hand, the difficulties of parenting after divorce that exist for many fathers (Doherty, Kouneski, & Erickson, 1998) may make the influence of religiousness less important in determining their involvement.

I tested whether a father's religiousness influences father involvement generally or only for specific aspects of fathering, considering measures tapping both the quality of the father–child relationship and the father's provision of supportive assistance to children and grandchildren. Providing support to children is likely to foster close relationships between fathers and children, and fathers who are close to their children are probably

more likely to provide assistance to them. Although related, these two major domains of father-child relationships are nonetheless distinctive facets of father involvement (Harris, Heard, & King, 2002).

Similarly, the multiple measures of religiousness enabled me to identify those that are most salient for fathering. Prior national studies of religion and fathering examine limited measures of religiousness, but people can be religious in different ways. They may rank high on one dimension and low on another. The intercorrelation of religious indicators is modest at best (Johnstone, 1983). Research on the influence of religion more generally finds public forms of religiosity (e.g., church attendance) to be more salient in some cases, whereas other studies identify private modes of religiosity (e.g., subjective feelings) as most important (Idler & Kasl, 1997). Measures of diverse characteristics of fathers that are known to be important correlates of both religiousness and father involvement were also included. The intent was to examine processes through which religious differences are operating. Thus, if religious fathers are more involved fathers, why?

WHY MIGHT RELIGIOUS FATHERS BE MORE INVOLVED WITH CHILDREN?

There are several reasons to hypothesize that religious fathers might be more involved with their children than less religious fathers. Religious teachings and values emphasize and support the centrality of family life, the importance of positive family relationships (including spending time with children), and a focus on the concerns and needs of others over the self (Abbott, Berry, & Meredith, 1990; Ellison, 1992; Pearce & Axinn, 1998; Wuthnow, 1991). Religious institutions promote profamily messages through sermons and church teachings, scriptural stories and Sunday School lessons, and church publications. They are reinforced by private religious activities such as Bible reading. Thus, religious fathers are involved in a culture that shapes their values and behaviors by emphasizing the importance of family relationships and a commitment to others that encourages them to be actively involved in the lives of their children (Wilcox, 2002).

Religious institutions also sponsor and support activities that bring family members together (Abbott et al., 1990; Ellison, 1992; Pearce & Axinn, 1998). Church services and related religious activities provide opportunities for family members

to interact and share experiences with one another. Religious fathers are more likely to find themselves involved in religious activities with their families than are less religious peers. They may also believe it is important to share their faith with their children, prompting them to spend time interacting with them on matters of faith and ethics. In addition, individuals who participate in religious activities are surrounded by like-minded co-religionists and may seek out friends who share similar beliefs, which can also reinforce profamily teachings and family-oriented activities.

In regard to denominational differences, I expected the largest differences to occur between those who express a religious preference and those who do not. Expressing a religious preference denotes an association with a religious culture, even though belonging to a particular denomination does not necessarily mean that one follows its practices or beliefs. I expected fewer differences between denominations even though denominational affiliation has been found to influence attitudes, beliefs, and behavior (Woodberry & Smith, 1998) because recent research demonstrates that measures of religiosity have a much stronger influence on intergenerational relations in the United States today than does specific religious affiliation (e.g., King & Elder, 1999; Pearce & Axinn, 1998). Furthermore, prior studies of father involvement have found only limited denominational differences (Bartkowski & Xu, 2000; Cooksey & Craig, 1998; Wilcox, 2002). To the extent that denominational differences exist, prior literature suggests that conservative Protestant fathers would be most involved with their children because their religious culture stresses active involvement for fathers (Bartkowski & Xu; Wilcox).

MEDIATING FACTORS

The foregoing suggests that religiousness may directly affect father involvement or be mediated through other mechanisms, such as attitudes. Religious individuals tend to hold more traditional or conventional attitudes concerning family issues and gender relations than their less religious counterparts (Brinkerhoff & MacKie, 1985; Hertel & Hughes, 1987; Roof, 1994). Fathers who hold such traditional beliefs about families and who have a greater familial orientation may be more likely to be involved with their children. To the extent that traditional attitudes foster the division of labor, however, men with traditional attitudes and gender relations may be *less* actively involved with their children. They may view their role as

a breadwinner as primary, focusing their time and energy in the workplace believing that their wives should be the primary caretakers of the children. To the extent that this is true, it is possible that religious fathers could be less involved with their children and have more formal or distant relationships.

Although research has found religiosity to be positively correlated with traditional family attitudes (Brinkerhoff & MacKie, 1985; Gesch, 1995; Roof, 1994; Roof & McKinney, 1987), the link between traditional family attitudes (and gender attitudes in particular) and father involvement is less clear (LaRossa, 1988; Wilcox, 2002). Although several studies have found traditional attitudes to be associated with lower levels of father involvement (e.g., Bartkowski & Xu, 2000; Marsiglio, 1991; Wilcox), some studies find no relationship (e.g., Barnett & Baruch, 1987) and still others find traditional attitudes associated with higher levels of father involvement (e.g., Cooksey & Craig, 1998).

Another potentially important mediating mechanism for married men is the quality of their marriages. Religious individuals report higher levels of marital quality (Bahr & Chadwick, 1985; Hansen, 1992; Thomas & Cornwall, 1990) and are less likely to consider or obtain a divorce (Larson & Golz, 1989; McCarthy, 1979). Marital quality is an important predictor of men's involvement with their children (Booth & Amato, 1994; Halle, Moore, Greene, & LeMenestrel, 1998). Furstenberg and Cherlin (1991) argue that marriage and parenthood are a "package deal" for men with strong marriages pulling men into the fathering role. If the marriage weakens or dissolves, men's roles as fathers attenuate as well.

CONTROL VARIABLES

Religious fathers could be more involved with children for reasons that have little to do with their religiousness. Therefore, it is important to control for factors that select fathers into religiousness or that might account for a spurious relationship between religiousness and father involvement. Several demographic factors are known to be associated with both religiousness and father involvement. Age may be an important factor because the process of aging changes both the amount and quality of religious involvement (Blazer & Palmore, 1976; Idler & Kasl, 1997; Stolzenberg et al., 1995). Many studies find religiousness to increase with age, but findings can

differ based on the ages considered and the measures of religiousness examined (Chatters & Taylor, 1989; McFadden, 1995). A father's age and stage in the life cycle are likely to influence the amount and types of involvements with children. For example, older fathers may be more able to provide financial assistance.

Blacks tend to report higher levels of religiosity and religious participation than Whites (Gallup, 1984; Levin, Taylor, & Chatters, 1994). Studies of minority families suggest they are distinguished from White families by their greater involvement with extended kin and generally greater emphasis on the importance of family ties (e.g., Wilkinson, 1987). Although one might expect the greater familial orientation of minorities to favor greater father involvement, minority fathers may depend on negotiations with extended kin in the cultural context of traditional roles of fathers. Few studies have examined racial differences in father involvement, and findings have been mixed with inconsistent effects of race on father involvement reported in the literature (Cooksey & Craig, 1998; Pleck, 1983). Recent research suggests that Black resident fathers may be less involved with their adolescent children compared with White resident fathers (Harris et al., 2002). Similar evidence has been reported for nonresident fathers, although much of this can be accounted for by the lower socioeconomic status and greater likelihood of nonmarital childbearing of Blacks, which depress levels of involvement (King, Harris, & Heard, 2002).

On one hand, higher education and other indicators of socioeconomic status are often coupled with greater religious involvement among adults, including church activities and attendance (Gallup, 1984; Kosmin & Lachman, 1993). On the other hand, traditional religious beliefs and the expressed importance of religion often declines with education (Gallup; Gallup & Castelli, 1989). There is some evidence that such differences have declined recently and may have even reversed in some cases (Roof, 1994). Studies of father involvement consistently demonstrate that education and other socioeconomic factors are associated with higher levels of father involvement (Goldscheider & Waite, 1991; King et al., 2002; Seltzer, 1991; Wilcox, 2002).

Many studies find a positive link between religious involvement and health (Ellison & George, 1994; Idler, 1994). Health could be either a control variable (e.g., good health promotes religious involvement whereas health limitations make public

religious participation more difficult) or a mediating factor (e.g., religiousness promotes good health). Good health would be expected to promote father involvement, although previous research has not examined this link. Research also suggests that paternal employment can influence the amount of time men have available for both religious participation (Marciano, 1991; Roof, 1994) and for activities with their children (Nock & Kingston, 1988; Wilcox, 2002).

Individuals who are actively involved in religious organizations and activities may be *joiners* who are predisposed toward all types of social interaction (Ellison, 1992). For example, religious organization membership and church attendance are strong predictors of volunteer service (Greeley, 1997; Wuthnow, 1991). If religious involvement identifies people who are joiners, then it may be this disposition that propels fathers to be active with children, not their religiousness.

Finally, characteristics of a father's children are also important. Religious fathers have more children, particularly biological children given their lower divorce rates (Roof, 1994; Stolzenberg et al., 1995; Thornton, 1985). They may also be more likely to have young children in their household at any given time. The number and ages of children also affect the nature of paternal involvement (Barnett & Baruch, 1987; Wilcox, 2002). Paternal involvement is greater with biological offspring than with stepchildren (Cooksey & Fondell, 1996; Harris et al., 2002).

The main hypothesis of this study was that religious fathers are more involved fathers—that they enjoy better quality relationships with their children and provide them with more support and assistance. I provide a stronger test of this hypothesis than research to date by focusing on multiple measures of both religiousness and father involvement using recent national data. I then assess factors that potentially explain the connection between religiousness and fathering. These factors include the father's age, race, education, marital status, work status, health, community involvement, characteristics of his children (number, ages, biological), traditional attitudes, and marital quality. Finally, this is the first study to test whether the influence of religiousness on fathering differs for married and divorced fathers.

METHOD

Data

The data for this analysis come from the National Survey of Midlife Development in the United

States (MIDUS), conducted in 1995 and based on a nationally representative random-digit-dial sample of noninstitutionalized adults aged 25 to 74. Respondents participated in a telephone interview (response rate = 70%) and were then asked to complete mailed questionnaires (response rate = 86.8%, with an overall response rate of 60.8%). Sample weights are available that adjust for differences in probability of selection and differential nonresponse.

The analytic sample used here includes all men who have at least one biological child and who are either currently married and in their first marriage ($n = 672$) or who are currently divorced ($n = 168$). Respondents with missing data on any of the control or mediating variables were deleted to keep *ns* consistent across models, resulting in a final sample of 647 married and 163 divorced men. The actual sample sizes for the analyses fluctuate slightly because of missing data for the father involvement measures ($M = 6$ cases).

Measures

Father involvement. Five measures assess the nature and quality of the father-child relationship. Relationship quality is the father's rating of his current overall relationship to his children (0 = *worst*, 1 = *best*; $M = 8.60$, $SD = 1.55$). Future relationship captures the father's expectation for his relationship with his children 10 years into the future (0 = *worst*, 1 = *best*; $M = 8.90$, $SD = 1.39$). Relationship effort is the amount of thought and effort the father puts into his relationships with children (0 = *none*, 10 = *very much*; $M = 8.22$, $SD = 1.87$). Contact obligation is the amount of obligation the father would feel to call, write, or visit adult children on a regular basis (0 = *none*, 10 = *very great*; $M = 7.70$, $SD = 2.22$). Negative life with children is the average of two items ($r = .35$) regarding whether it seems that family life with his children has been more negative than most people's and whether problems with his children have caused him shame and embarrassment at times (1 = *not at all true*, 4 = *extremely true*; $M = 1.28$, $SD = .51$).

Three measures assess supportive assistance. Emotional support is based on the number of hours per month the father spends giving informal emotional support (such as comforting, listening to problems, or giving advice) to children or grandchildren (0 = *none*, 1 = *one or more*; $M = .90$). Unpaid assistance is based on the number of hours per month the father spends providing un-

paid assistance (such as help around the house, transportation, or child care) to grown children or grandchildren (0 = none, 1 = one or more; $M = .60$). Financial assistance is based on the average amount of money per month that the father or his family living with him contribute to grown children or grandchildren (0 = none, 1 = any money; $M = .56$). The analyses for unpaid assistance and financial assistance are limited to men who have at least one biological child aged 18 years or older ($n = 506$) because the questions were asked in reference to grown children. Although the three measures of supportive assistance include support to grandchildren as well as to children, support to grandchildren can be viewed as an extension of support to children given that the nature and quality of grandparent–grandchild relationships are highly dependent on, and correlated with, the relationship between the grandparent and parent (King & Elder, 1995).

Correlations between the father involvement measures range from .02 (contact obligation and emotional support) to .81 (relationship quality and future relationship), with an average $r = .23$. Some fathers are involved with their children in multiple ways, whereas others are involved in more limited domains.

Father religiousness. Six dimensions of religiousness are examined. Religiosity is the average of four items ($\alpha = .88$) regarding how religious and spiritual the father is and how important religion and spirituality are in the father's life (1 = not at all, 4 = very; $M = 2.92$, $SD = 0.73$). Comfort is the average of two items ($r = .76$) regarding how often the father seeks religious or spiritual means when he has problems or difficulties in his family, work, or personal life and whether he asks himself what his religious or spiritual beliefs suggest he do when he has decisions to make in his daily life (1 = never, 4 = often; $M = 2.33$, $SD = 1.07$). Single items indicate how often the father usually attends religious or spiritual services (1 = never, 5 = more than once a week; $M = 2.81$, $SD = 1.36$), how closely the father identifies with being a member of his religious group (1 = not at all, 4 = very; $M = 2.70$, $SD = 1.04$), and how important it is or would be to send his children for religious or spiritual services or instruction (1 = not at all, 4 = very; $M = 3.22$, $SD = 0.87$).

Finally, denominational affiliation is grouped into five major categories—conservative Protestant (15%; based on Roof & McKinney, 1987; e.g., Assembly of God, Evangelical, Pentecostal,

Holiness), other Protestant (36%), Catholic (27%), none/Atheist/Agnostic (9%), and all others (13%). All others consists of a variety of diverse groups (e.g., Mormon, Jehovah's Witness, Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, and unknown) that are too small to analyze separately. Although this group is included in the models, attention is not focused on them. The MIDUS survey did not differentiate between Southern Baptists or equally conservative independent Baptists and more liberal American Baptist groups. Because the majority of Baptists in the United States are conservative (Sherkat, 2001), Baptists are included in the conservative Protestant group. The great majority of Baptists in the sample (87%) reported that they agreed with a literal interpretation of the Bible, a measure of theological conservatism (Bartkowski & Xu, 2000), and many also reported (75%) that they were *born-again* Christians, providing further evidence that most Baptists are conservative. Denominational differences are tested by changing the omitted category and reestimating the models for all comparisons.

Controls. Father's age was measured as a set of dummy variables: 25–34 (13%), 35–44 (27%), 45–54 (26%), 55–64 (20%), and 65–74 (13%). Models predicting unpaid and financial assistance for the subsample with grown children collapse age into three groups: 25–44, 45–54, 55–74. Race is a set of dummy variables for White (89%), Black (5%), or other (7%). Highest level of education completed is a set of dummy variables indicating high school (28%), some college (27%), or a college degree (35%). Working is whether the father is currently working (1 = yes, 61%; 0 = no). Marital status distinguishes currently married men in first marriages (= 1; 80%) from currently divorced men (= 0). Health is the father's own assessment of his health (1 = poor, 5 = excellent; $M = 3.52$, $SD = 0.95$). Community involvement is assessed from four questions regarding whether the father spends time doing volunteer work for any of the following (1 = yes, 43%; 0 = no): (a) a hospital, nursing home, or other health care-oriented organization; (b) a school or other youth-related organization; (c) a political organization or cause; or (d) any other organization, cause, or charity.

Characteristics of children included the number of children ($M = 2.73$; $SD = 1.47$), ages of children in his household (a set of dummy variables: 1–6, 7–13, and 14–17; 22%, 27%, and 21%, re-

spectively), and whether all of his children are biological (1 = *yes*, 88%; 0 = *no*).

Mediating factors: Traditional attitudes and marital quality. A factor analysis of items measuring family-related attitudes revealed three factors from which scales were created. Marriage is the average of four items ($\alpha = .90$) regarding whether fathers believe that men and women can have full and happy lives without marrying or without having children (1 = *agree strongly*, 7 = *disagree strongly*; $M = 2.96$, $SD = 1.65$). Family is the average of three items ($\alpha = .59$) regarding whether fathers believe that employed mothers can have just as good a relationship with their children as mothers who are not employed, whether children need to be raised in an intact family with both parents to grow up emotionally healthy (reverse coded), and whether single parents can rear children just as well as married adults (1 = *agree strongly*, 7 = *disagree strongly*; $M = 4.51$, $SD = 1.48$). Tasks is the average of two items ($r = .45$) regarding whether men should share equally with their wives in the work around the house and in taking care of young children (1 = *agree strongly*, 7 = *disagree strongly*; $M = 1.90$, $SD = 1.14$).

Marital quality is the average of five items ($\alpha = .90$; $M = 7.93$, $SD = 1.41$): father's rating of the marriage today (0 = *worst*, 10 = *best*); expectation of marriage 10 years into the future (0 = *worst*, 10 = *best*); amount of control over the marriage (0 = *none*, 10 = *very much*); amount of thought and effort the father puts into his marriage (0 = *none*, 10 = *very much*); and his description of the relationship (0 = *poor*, 10 = *excellent*). Divorced fathers were scored arbitrarily at the constant value of 0 on this measure so they could be included in all the models. Inclusion of the control for marital status in the models ensures that the true values on marital quality for married men are distinguished from the arbitrary values for divorced men (Cohen & Cohen, 1983). Conclusions remain unchanged when models were tested separately for married and divorced men (tables not shown; all tables referred to and not shown are available from the author upon request).

Analytic Strategy

The effect of religiousness on father involvement is assessed in a series of nested regression models. Ordinary least squares regression models are employed for the continuous fathering measures, and

logistic regression models are employed for the dichotomous fathering measures. Each father involvement measure is predicted by each of the six measures of religiousness, separately in a series of four models. The first is the bivariate model where the religiousness measure is the only predictor in the model. The second model tests the effect of religiousness adjusted for the control measures (father's age, race, education, marital status, work status, health, community involvement, and children—number, biological status, and ages in the household). Intervening mechanisms are then examined. Model 3 adds the traditional attitude measures, and Model 4 adds the measure of marital quality.

RESULTS

Are Religious Fathers More Involved Fathers?

The findings from Model 1 in Table 1 are consistent with the hypothesis that religious fathers are more involved with their children. At least one, and usually several, of the religiousness measures are significantly related to all of the fathering measures except for financial assistance. Only fathers who report using religion for comfort and decisions show a marginally ($p < .10$) higher rate of providing financial assistance. Multiple measures of a father's religiousness are associated with reporting better quality relationships with children, having greater expectations for positive relationships in the future, reporting a greater amount of thought and effort going into relationships with children, feeling a greater degree of obligation to maintain regular contact with adult children, and being more likely to provide emotional support and unpaid assistance to children and grandchildren. Denominational differences are small, and the biggest differences are between those fathers who report a religious preference (regardless of which one it is) and those who report having none. The only significant ($p < .05$) difference to emerge between denominations is that conservative Protestant fathers are less likely to provide financial assistance than are other Protestant fathers (given few differences between denominations, additional analyses exploring the effects of denomination net of other religious indicators such as church attendance were not pursued).

Thus, religious fathers do report stronger relationships with their children. Nevertheless, the effect size is clearly modest. A further illustration of the magnitude of the differences in father involvement by levels of religiousness is provided in the

TABLE 1. FATHER INVOLVEMENT PREDICTED BY DIMENSIONS OF RELIGIOUSNESS
(UNSTANDARDIZED REGRESSION COEFFICIENTS)

Model	Relation- ship Quality ^a	Future Relation- ship ^a	Relation- ship Effort ^a	Contact Obliga- tion ^a	Negative Life With Children ^a	Emotional Support ^b	Unpaid Assis- tance ^b	Financial Assis- tance ^b
Religiosity								
1	.35***	.37***	.45***	.48***	-.04	.29†	.40**	.09
2	.26***	.28***	.38***	.45***	-.02	.14	.23†	-.06
3	.23**	.25***	.34***	.36**	.002	.09	.21	-.04
4	.18*	.20**	.29**	.32**	.01	.13	.26†	-.03
Comfort								
1	.12*	.16***	.20**	.25***	.002	.27*	.23**	.15†
2	.07	.11*	.17**	.21**	.02	.16	.13	.08
3	.06	.10*	.16*	.16*	.03	.14	.12	.12
4	.04	.08†	.14*	.14†	.03†	.15	.14	.13
Attend services								
1	.16***	.15***	.11*	.22***	-.03*	.21*	.12†	.10
2	.09*	.09*	.07	.14*	-.01	.08	-.01	-.01
3	.09*	.09*	.07	.10	-.01	.07	-.02	.02
4	.07†	.07†	.05	.08	-.004	.08	-.002	.02
Identity								
1	.26***	.25***	.25***	.30***	-.05**	.34**	.29**	.08
2	.15**	.16**	.18**	.24**	-.02	.20	.14	-.12
3	.14**	.14**	.17*	.18*	-.01	.15	.13	-.12
4	.10†	.11*	.13†	.14†	-.004	.17	.16	-.11
Important for children								
1	.28***	.33***	.27***	.55***	-.001	.13	.26*	.08
2	.16*	.22***	.21**	.49***	.02	.01	.07	-.12
3	.14*	.20***	.19*	.43***	.03	-.02	.05	-.09
4	.13*	.19***	.17*	.41***	.03	-.01	.07	-.09
Denomination^c								
1 Conservative Protestant	.54*	.79***	.82** ^e	.81*	.06 ^d	.18	.53	-.53 ^{d,cc}
Other Protestant	.45*	.72***	.43†	1.14***	-.02	-.18	.75*	.06
Catholic	.61**	.86***	.62*	1.21***	-.04	.13	.77*	-.04
2 Conservative Protestant	.43†	.65**	.68*	.95**	.12 ^{dd}	-.21	.14	-.99 ^{b,d,cc}
Other Protestant	.28	.60***	.41†	1.03***	.03	-.53	.36	-.32
Catholic	.42*	.69***	.52*	1.10***	-.01	-.02	.37	-.44
3 Conservative Protestant	.37†	.58**	.60*	.72*	.16* ^{dd,cc}	-.32	.08	-.90 ^{†,cc}
Other Protestant	.26	.58**	.38	.93**	.05	-.55	.32	-.27
Catholic	.35†	.62***	.42†	.93**	.02	-.06	.31	-.36
4 Conservative Protestant	.32	.54**	.55*	.67*	.17* ^{ddd,cc}	-.27	.12	-.90 ^{†,cc}
Other Protestant	.23	.55**	.35	.90**	.05	-.52	.35	-.26
Catholic	.38*	.65***	.45†	.96**	.02	-.10	.28	-.36

Note: Average $n = 797$ (range = 780–805). Average n for unpaid and financial assistance = 492 (range = 483–500). Model 1 = regression coefficient for religiousness measure only. Model 2 = regression coefficient for religiousness measure adjusted for father's age, race, education, marital status, work status, health, community involvement, number of children, biological children, and ages of children in the household. Model 3 = regression coefficient for religiousness measure adjusted for the measures in Model 2 and for the traditional attitudes measures (marriage, family, tasks). Model 4 = regression coefficient for religiousness measure adjusted for the measures in Model 3 and for the father's marital quality.

^aOrdinary least squares regression. ^bLogistic regression. ^cOmitted category is no religious preference or atheist. Those of other religions are also in the model, but coefficients are not shown. ^dSignificant difference between conservative Protestants and Catholics at the ^a $p < .10$, ^b $p < .05$, or ^{ddd} $p < .01$ level. ^eSignificant difference between conservative Protestants and other Protestants at the ^c $p < .10$ or ^{cc} $p < .05$ level.

† $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Appendix. Each of the six measures of religiousness was dichotomized into *low* and *high* (corresponding to scores of less than 3 vs. scores of 3 or more, except for denomination, which was dichotomized into *none* vs. *any*). A final measure of overall religiousness was also created where *low* was defined as scoring low on all of the first five measures of religiousness (because only 7% of the sample did not report a denominational affiliation, this measure was not used here), and *high* was defined as scoring high on all five measures (they also all reported a denominational affiliation). Those who were in between (e.g., scoring low on some measures but high on others) were not examined in this particular comparison because the purpose is to illustrate the differences between a group of fathers who have generally low levels of religiousness with those who have generally high levels across religiousness domains.

These simple contrasts reveal significant but modest differences for many aspects of the father-child relationship. For example, the final set of comparisons for overall religiousness reveals that mean levels for the least religious fathers and the most religious fathers differ by more than three quarters of a point on average for relationship quality (8.17 vs. 8.89, respectively), expectations for positive relationships in the future (8.29 vs. 9.14), and the amount of thought and effort going into relationships with children (7.62 vs. 8.50) and by more than a point for feeling obligated to maintain regular contact with adult children (6.63 vs. 7.97). In addition, 71% of the religious fathers report providing unpaid assistance to their children compared with only 47% of the least religious fathers.

Why Are Religious Fathers More Involved With Children?

When controls are added in Model 2, the effect of religiousness weakens somewhat in many cases, but often remains significant. The reductions in significance and magnitude of the coefficients result largely from controls for volunteer activities and the father's marital status, both of which are positively associated with religiousness and father involvement.

Results from Model 3 reveal that the addition of family attitude factors further reduce, if modestly, the influence of religiousness, which nonetheless remains significant in most cases. This reduction was primarily driven by the sharing tasks measure. Religious fathers are more likely to

agree that men should share housework and child-care tasks with their wives, and this egalitarian attitude is associated with the greater involvement of fathers.

Additional analyses revealed that although the three measures of traditional attitudes are positively correlated (marriage and family $r = .46$; marriage and tasks $r = .17$; family and tasks $r = .21$), their relationship to the religiousness variables differed. In general, a father's greater religiousness is positively associated with traditional attitudes concerning marriage and family, but it is negatively associated with traditional attitudes concerning the sharing of household tasks. That is, religious fathers are more likely to agree with traditional statements about the importance of marriage and having children for a happy life, and the negative effects of single parents and employed mothers for children (consistent with prior research), but they are also more likely to espouse egalitarian statements about sharing housework and child care equally with their wives. Although the first two sets of attitudes are viewed as traditional and the last is viewed as egalitarian, the apparently inconsistent pattern exhibited by religious fathers can be viewed as consistently promoting men's ties to children—through marriage and childbearing, raising children within two-parent families, and sharing equally in child care.

This finding underscores the importance of thinking more carefully about religion and traditional values than has been the case in prior research that often combines family-related attitudes into a single scale. For example, the traditionalism scale in Wilcox's study (2002) combines items on attitudes about the appropriateness of mothers working and the sharing of household tasks. Although these items are positively correlated, this study suggests that they have opposite relationships to religiousness, a finding that is hidden by combining them into a single measure.

The addition of the marital quality measure in Model 4 further reduces the influence of religiousness. It is also a significant predictor of father involvement. Men who report being in good marriages are significantly more involved with their children in every way except for the provision of unpaid assistance and financial assistance (coefficients not shown). Thus, men who are more religious are more likely to report higher quality marriages, which in turn promote their involvement with children. Nevertheless, in some cases, the effect of religiousness remains significant even after all controls and intervening variables are added in

the final model. At least one of the religiousness measures remains significant in positively predicting better quality relationships, expectations for the future, more thought and effort going into relationships, and feelings of obligation for contact.

Denominational differences become stronger in the multivariate models predicting negative experiences with children. Conservative Protestant fathers are more likely to report negative experiences with children than are Catholic fathers (particularly after controlling for the higher divorce and lower marital quality among Catholics) or other Protestant fathers (particularly after controlling for the more traditional attitudes concerning sharing tasks among other Protestants).

The analyses presented here are based on unweighted data. All the models in Table 1 were reanalyzed using the available sample weight (RFNWT) in the MIDUS data set. Results were similar, and conclusions remain the same (tables not shown).

A final concern revolves around the measure of community involvement. Ideally, this measure would only include volunteer work that was not connected to religious organizations, but it was not possible to distinguish this. It is most likely that volunteering in connection with religious organizations would be mainly captured in the fourth question contributing to the scale regarding volunteering for any other organization, cause, or charity. I reanalyzed the models in Table 1 with a new measure of community involvement that was based only on the first three questions, and the results were largely identical to those based on all four questions (tables not shown). Furthermore, dropping the control for community involvement out of all the multivariate models has only a modest effect, with the religion coefficients occasionally slightly larger and more highly significant in Models 2 through 4. Overall conclusions, however, remain unchanged.

*Does the Influence of Religiousness on
Fathering Differ for Married and
Divorced Fathers?*

An interaction term between the religiousness measure and marital status was added to every model in Table 1 to test whether the influence of religiousness differed for married and divorced fathers (tables not shown). In all but five cases, the interaction term failed to reach statistical significance. The finding that religious fathers are more involved fathers holds for both married and di-

vorced fathers. In two cases in which the interaction term was significant (for the influence of seeking religious comfort on relationship quality and on expectations for the future), the influence of religiousness was stronger for divorced fathers than for married fathers. Three interactions with denomination were significant (Catholics vs. no religion for financial assistance, Catholics vs. other Protestants for relationship effort, and conservative Protestants vs. other Protestants for unpaid assistance). Although divorced fathers are generally less likely to provide financial assistance and generally report less thought and effort going into relationships with children compared with married fathers, there was no difference by marital status for Catholic fathers on these two measures. Divorced fathers are also less likely than married fathers to provide unpaid assistance, and this finding was even stronger for conservative Protestant fathers than other Protestants.

DISCUSSION

Religious fathers are more involved fathers. This finding holds for both married and divorced men. The positive influence of religiousness that has been reported for mother-child relationships (Pearce & Axinn, 1998) and grandparent-grandchild relationships (King & Elder, 1999) holds for the father-child relationship as well. Controlling for demographic and background factors only modestly reduces the influence of religiousness, suggesting that the link between religiousness and father involvement is not merely spurious. Of all the controls considered, a father's involvement in volunteer activities and being married had the greatest influence in reducing the influence of religiousness, although the reduction was often small. Married men and men who are involved in volunteer activities and helping others are more religious and more likely to be involved with their children as well.

The addition of traditional attitudes concerning marriage and family to the models had little effect. In some cases, however, the measure of support for the equal sharing of housework and child care explained part of the association between religiousness and father involvement. Although it was not surprising to find this egalitarian attitude associated with greater father involvement, it was somewhat unexpected to find that religious fathers were more likely to espouse this egalitarian view than their less religious peers given prior research that reports greater traditionalism among religious

individuals (Brinkerhoff & MacKie, 1985; Hertel & Hughes, 1987; Roof, 1994). Future research needs to consider more carefully the issue of traditional attitudes in relation to religiousness. Although religious individuals may be more traditional in certain respects, they may be less so in others. This finding could be masked in other studies that simply combine various items on family and gender attitudes into a single scale.

Marital quality also explained part of the association between religion and father involvement. The mediating role of marital quality has not been considered in other research on religion and father involvement, but these results suggest it plays an important role in linking religious men to their children, as well as being a significant predictor of father involvement more directly. Religious men enjoy higher quality marriages, and good marriages pull men into relationships with their children, suggesting that for men, marriage and childrearing might indeed be a “package deal” (Furstenberg & Cherlin, 1991). The possibility of a selection effect, however, cannot be ruled out. Instead of a good marriage promoting a father’s involvement with his children, it could be that some men are just good at all kinds of relationships—with wives, children, and others more generally—whereas other men have generally poor relationships. Given the importance of marital quality for the involvement of married men with their children, future research should examine the influence of the mother–father relationship on divorced men’s relationship with their children. Religious fathers who experience a divorce may be able to maintain a better relationship with their former spouse, which is an important factor in their continued involvement with non-resident children (King & Heard, 1999).

In some cases, the effect of religiousness remains significant even after taking into account all of these factors, suggesting that there is something about religion that directly enhances men’s ties to children. The influence of religiousness on father involvement is generally modest and should not be overstated. Certainly many nonreligious fathers have good relationships with their children, and religion is only one of many factors that influence father involvement. Nevertheless, certain aspects of father involvement are more frequent among the more religious, including better quality relationships, positive expectations for the future, greater thought and effort, and stronger feelings of obligation for contact with children. Further research is needed to shed light on what it is about

religion that directly influences men in positive ways toward their children, such as the relative importance of religious teachings and beliefs, religious activities and opportunities for family interaction, and participation in religious networks.

The results point to the importance of considering multiple measures of religiousness. In terms of predictive significance, religiosity (as indexed by its importance), having a religious preference, and believing religious instruction is important for children stand out, whereas seeking religious comfort, identification with a particular religious group, and church attendance are less significant after controls and other factors are taken into account. The relative unimportance of church attendance found in this study suggests that the influence of religion on fatherhood has been underestimated in prior studies, given that these studies largely rely on church attendance as the measure of religiousness (Bartkowski & Xu, 2000; Cooksey & Craig, 1998; Wilcox, 2002).

I found no support for the suggestion that conservative Protestant fathers might be more involved with their children than fathers of other denominations because their religious culture stresses active father involvement (Wilcox, 2002). Indeed, there were few differences in father involvement between conservative Protestants, other Protestants, and Catholics. One reason for this discrepancy may be that prior studies are limited in focus to fathers with young children, whereas this study considers father–child relationships across the life course. It should also be noted, however, that the influence of denomination in these prior studies tends to be fairly weak with limited differences based on low levels of significance ($p < .10$) or reduced to nonsignificance after controls are added. These results are consistent with other research that finds limited influence of religious affiliation on other types of intergenerational relationships (King & Elder, 1999; Pearce & Axinn, 1998) and on men’s participation in housework (Ellison & Bartkowski, 2002). The lack of denominational differences reported here are also consistent with suggestions that denominations have become less distinct from each other (and more diverse within themselves) in certain member attitudes and behaviors (e.g., Wuthnow, 1988, 1996).

The results also point to the importance of considering multiple measures of father involvement. A father’s religiousness was more predictive of the quality of the father–child relationship than a father’s provision of support and assistance. Al-

though this study examined a broader array of father involvement measures than previous research on religion and father involvement, future research should consider additional measures of father involvement, particularly those that capture the extent of support and interaction between fathers and children, and that are not limited in scope to adult children. The results, however, are consistent with prior research that has found a more limited influence of a father's religiousness on activities with children compared to its influence on relationship quality (Bartkowski & Xu, 2000). The finding that religiousness is most predictive of the quality dimension of the father-child relationship bodes well in its implication for children because prior studies have identified this dimension of fathering as particularly important in promoting child well-being, especially in divorced families (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999).

A limitation of the present study is that the measures of father involvement refer to all children on average (and in some cases, grandchildren as well), ignoring that relationships with some children may be better than relationships with others. Future research would benefit from examining individual father-child relationships and incorporating individual-level characteristics of the child into the analyses. Furthermore, the information regarding the father's religiousness and father-child ties are all obtained from the father, creating potential response bias (e.g., religious fathers may believe they should report more positive relationships).

This study demonstrates the important influence of religion on the father-child relationship for both married and divorced men. The question posed at the outset can be answered simply. Yes, religious fathers are more involved fathers. A better understanding of what motivates fathers to become involved in their children's lives has never been more crucial as fathers are increasingly being called upon to take a more active role with their children given the potential benefits for child well-being.

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APPENDIX
DIFFERENCES IN FATHER INVOLVEMENT BY LOW AND HIGH LEVELS OF RELIGIOUSNESS
(IN PERCENTAGES OR MEAN LEVELS)

Father Involvement	Religiosity		Comfort		Attend Services		Identity	
	Low (n = 324)	High (n = 481)	Low (n = 431)	High (n = 374)	Low (n = 388)	High (n = 421)	Low (n = 343)	High (n = 457)
Relationship quality	8.29	8.80***	8.48	8.72*	8.37	8.81***	8.32	8.79***
Future relationship	8.62	9.08***	8.76	9.05**	8.70	9.08***	8.66	9.06***
Relationship effort	7.90	8.42***	8.03	8.42**	8.03	8.40**	7.93	8.42***
Contact obligation	7.37	7.91***	7.48	7.93**	7.45	7.92**	7.40	7.90**
Negative life with children	1.32	1.26	1.28	1.28	1.33	1.24*	1.33	1.23**
Emotional support (%)	89	91	88	93**	88	92*	88	93*
Unpaid assistance (%)	54	63*	53	68***	56	64†	53	64*
Financial assistance (%)	56	55	51	60*	52	59	54	56

Father Involvement	Important for Children		Denomination		Overall Religiosity	
	Low (n = 151)	High (n = 653)	None (n = 74)	Any (n = 736)	Low (n = 101)	High (n = 254)
Relationship quality	8.23	8.68**	8.15	8.64**	8.17	8.89***
Future relationship	8.45	9.00***	8.19	8.97***	8.29	9.14***
Relationship effort	7.77	8.31**	7.69	8.27*	7.62	8.50***
Contact obligation	6.95	7.87***	6.71	7.80***	6.63	7.97***
Negative life with children	1.25	1.29	1.29	1.28	1.26	1.23
Emotional support (%)	90	91	90	90	90	95†
Unpaid assistance (%)	49	62*	43	61*	47	71**
Financial assistance (%)	56	56	57	55	55	62

Note: Each of the measures of religiousness were dichotomized into low (scores of less than 3) or high (scores of 3 or more) except for denomination, which was dichotomized into none versus any. Overall religiousness is based on a combination of the religiousness measures (except denomination) where low is defined as scoring low on all five measures of religiousness and high is defined as scoring high on all five measures; those with other scores were deleted.

†p < .10. *p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.