

NON-CHILD SUPPORT EXPENDITURES ON CHILDREN BY NONRESIDENTIAL DIVORCED FATHERS

Results of a Study

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Most states' child support guidelines adopt a "cliff" model in providing credits or adjustments for time spent in the nonresidential parent's home. Such guidelines implicitly or explicitly assume that no appreciable expenditures are made directly by obligors for child rearing expenses at level of contact or visitation beneath some threshold value, typically assumed to be around 30% time. As guideline developers are acutely aware, these assumptions have proceeded in the absence of any data. The present investigation sought to provide preliminary evidence of such expenditures by using the approach of getting information about the provision of certain benchmark items: clothes, toys and games, bicycles, a bedroom, and support for car-related expenses for teenage drivers. The authors generally found a linear, rather than a cliff-like, relationship of expenditures to time in the nonresidential father's home, with unexpectedly high levels of father's provision of these benchmark items even at quite low levels of contact. These findings support more generous and more continuous adjustments for visitation in child support schemes, to offset nonresidential parent's direct expenditures on children, which appear to be unexpectedly high and arise on a non-cliff-like pattern.

Keywords: incarcerated noncustodial fathers; reentry programs; noncustodial fathers; child support

The timing of this special issue on fathering is telling. It is well into the fourth decade of the divorce revolution, yet only now is attention being paid to scholarship, research, and policymaking about fathers in the full panoply of their roles and functions as parents. Until recently, fathers had been almost a forgotten figure in the divorce equation, as research and policy focused only on the experience of mothers and children (Braver & O'Connell, 1998). The current blossoming interest is reflected in other developments as well: a brand new journal called *Fathering*; many recently published books, academic (Tamis-Lemonda, Cabrera, & Kaufman, 2002; Day, Lamb, & Gadsden, in press; Lamb, 1997; Parke, 1996; Peters, Peterson, Steinmetz, & Day, 2000) and lay self-help titles for divorced fathers (Bernstein, Worth, & Worth, 1997; Brott, 1999; Condrell & Small, 1998; Feuer, 1997; Klatte, 1999; Knox & Leggett, 2000; McClure & Saffer, 2000; Prengel & Yale, 1999; Wasson & Heffner, 2002); many federally sponsored workshops; and the "Fatherhood Initiative."

As we documented previously (Braver & O'Connell, 1998), what minimal past interest in divorced fathers has been expressed was driven primarily by documenting their alleged failures: how they did not keep in contact with their children (Braver, Wolchik, Sandler, Fogas, & Zvetina, 1991; Furstenburg & Nord, 1985; Furstenburg, Morgan, & Allison, 1987; Furstenburg, Nord, Peterson, & Zill, 1983), how they out-negotiated and out-lawyered their ex-wives (Mahoney, 1996; Seltzer & Garfinkle, 1990; Sheets & Braver, 1998; Weitzman, 1985), and how they abandoned their families (Blankenhorn, 1995; Braver, Whitley, & Ng, 1993; Burns & Scott, 1994; Parkman, 1992). All of these failure portrayals were later shown to be substantially exaggerated or inaccurate (Braver & O'Connell, 1998; Sheets & Braver,

1996). Arguably most important of these failures (again exaggerated; Braver et al., 1993; Braver, Fitzpatrick, & Bay, 1993), however, was the failure to support their children economically, by their abrogation of their child support responsibilities (Chambers, 1979; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1980; Weitzman, 1985). This huge policy concern about “deadbeat dads” led inexorably to statutes that enabled federal regulation of child support collections as well as the setting of child support awards.

The Child Support Enforcement Amendments enacted by Congress in 1984 required that all states make numeric child support guidelines available to decision makers. Later amendments to the original act (the Family Support Act of 1988) required that the child support guidelines be made “rebuttably presumptive” (Venohr & Williams, 1999). This means that ordered child support amounts calculated by precise formulas will apply for each case unless a judge decides very explicitly and in writing that the facts of the case demand otherwise. Interestingly, however, the legislation did not specify any particular type of formula the states needed to specify, leaving it to the state’s discretion (Venohr & Williams, 1999). As a result, states’ guidelines vary widely (Morgan & Lino, 1999; Pirog, Klotz, & Byers, 1998), with identical circumstances yielding orders that could be twice as high in some states than in others. Part of the reason for the disparities is that states have developed at least three different models for child support setting, including the percentage of obligor income method (e.g., Wisconsin, Minnesota), the no longer used Melson formula (Delaware), and the most popular income shares approach, used in about 31 states. Recently, hybrid models have been proposed and used, and the American Law Institute (ALI) is recommending yet a new, more discretionary, and far more complicated model (Blumberg, 1999; ALI, 2002).

What appears more uniform in the first generation of federally mandated state child support guidelines is that policy makers included no calculations or crediting of the costs to the nonresidential parent for providing such things as recreational experiences, food, clothes, toys, nor even bedrooms for parenting plans that placed the child with the noncustodial parent for anything less than about 5 days every 2 weeks (i.e., less than 30% to 35% of the time; Venohr & Williams, 1999). The rule was, and in the great majority of states continues to be today, that unless visitation rises to this level of joint residential custody or shared parenting, no adjustments to child support are appropriate. In some states, adjustments are phased in after this level, and in other states they are calculated on the premise that at that level the obligor’s expenses are not substantially different from the custodial parent’s. In other states, no adjustment is made at all, even for 50-50 parenting plans.

This rule followed from the states’ implicit or explicit assumption that at levels of contact below about 30% of the time, \$0 was paid out-of-pocket by the obligor for expenses related to the child, and that the custodial parent had the full responsibility for expending money for all of the child’s material needs. In fact, the residential parent can be held accountable for willful failures to provide basic necessities such as a place for the child to sleep and proper clothing for the child. The nonresidential parent, however, has no legal responsibility to provide such things; rather, children are assumed to bring all their clothes, grooming items and toys and games with them on “visits,” and sleep in sleeping bags (which they also brought with them) on the living room floor. The nonresidential parent’s responsibility, instead, is defined as helping to provide for the child’s “real,” custodial home (Braver & Stockburger, in press).

This assumption is commonly known as the “cliff” model, illustrated in Figure 1, which shows virtually no expenditures by the obligor below 30% time with the child, and an abrupt increase at around 30%. Since 1996, only four states (Arizona, New Jersey, California, and

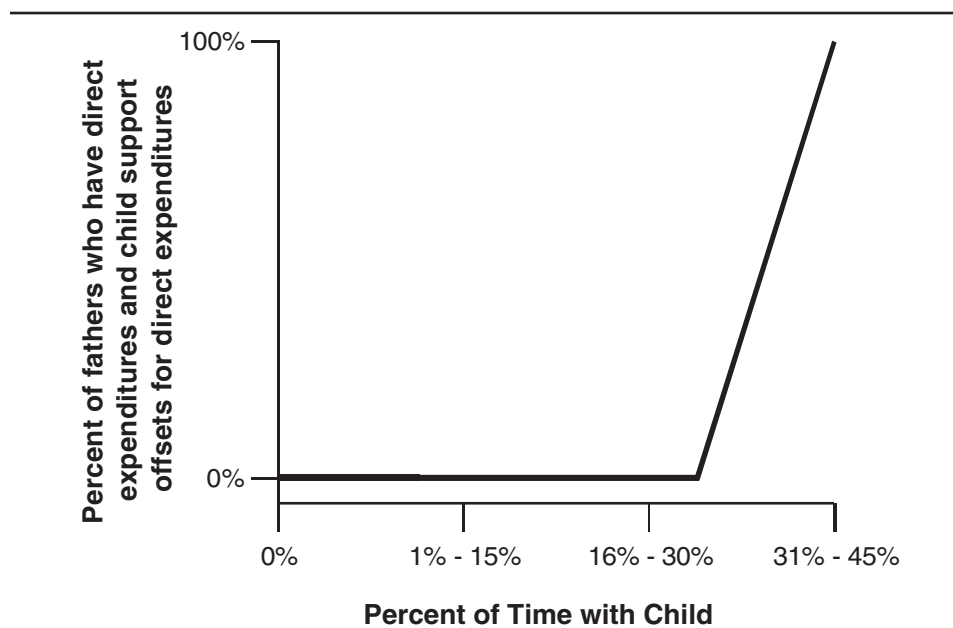


Figure 1. *The cliff model of credits for and assumptions about noncustodial fathers' direct expenditures for children.*

Missouri) have rejected the cliff model by incorporating child support credits for levels of visitation below 30% (Miller, in press; Venohr & Williams, 1999).

There seem to be at least four rationales for the cliff approach (Melli, 1999). One is the assumption we have indicated above: that obligors do not actually incur significant expenses at lower levels of visitation. A second rationale is that even if they do incur such expenses at lower levels, any crediting in the form of lowered child support payments would be at the expense of resources the child should preferably have available at the custodial parent's home. In fact, this rationale prompts some states' efforts to actively discourage shared residential custody arrangements to direct most of the combined parents' resources to the custodial home under the assumption that more financial resources in the custodial home are more beneficial to the child than a division of resources between the two homes (Czapanskiy, 1994). A third rationale for the cliff approach is that offering credits or offsets to child support obligations at lower levels of time with the child would only encourage bad faith efforts on the part of obligors to bargain for more time simply to reduce the amount of child support ordered.

A fourth rationale that was asserted in an influential article (see Melli, 1999) by Karen Czapanskiy (1994) was actually a mistake. She stated that when guidelines were initially formulated, they were based on the assumption that the child will spend about 20% of time with the obligor and a corresponding reduction in child support was already incorporated in guidelines for this standard visitation. In fact, the developer of most guidelines, Robert Williams, finally corrected this common misconception when he pointed out that his income shares approach in fact assumed zero visitation and had no provision to credit or offset child support for any visitation (Venohr & Williams, 1999).

As states confront having to modify child support guidelines every 4 years, as required by the 1988 statute, there have been calls for research to help evaluate the need for, and determine the amounts of reduction for, time spent with the nonresidential parent. For example, Williams writes:

There is little empirical evidence to guide states in their design of adjustments for shared parenting situations. Thresholds for applying the adjustments . . . are based on states' assumptions about what level of shared parenting must occur before a parent's direct expenditures on behalf of a child justify a reduction in child support payments. . . . More research on these issues would help states make more rigorous decisions concerning the appropriate design of shared parenting adjustments. . . . The effort to develop improved adjustments for shared parenting time is hampered by the absence of direct research in this area. There is an absence of credible studies . . . so that we do not know how differing levels of parenting time affect a parent's direct child-rearing costs. ([Venohr & Williams, 1999, pp. 29-30, 33](#))

The current investigation begins to provide such research. It makes no attempt at determining the actual dollar amount of expenses noncustodial parents may incur, nor does it offer evidence about the degree that a noncustodial parent's direct expenditures defrays such analogous expenditures by the custodial home. It does offer the first empirical research insight, however, into what obligors actually and voluntarily bear in terms of child-rearing expenses over and above mandated child support payments at different levels of time they have their children with them. As such, it can be useful to policy makers in evaluating the cliff model.

In designing the study, we hoped to compare the cliff model against the alternate linear model that nonresidential fathers do make substantial expenditures at lower levels increasing, more or less steadily with increases in time the child spends with them. We were especially interested in expenditures at very low levels of contact, and in standard visitation scenarios of 15% to 25% time.

Besides relating direct expenditures to parenting time, we expected that two other factors might play a role. First, we hypothesized that there should be a significant, positive relation between the obligor's standard of living and the amount he directly spends on the child. Second, we expected that the amount he spends would be related to whether he has joint legal custody. Joint legal custody status is related to fathers' child support compliance ([Braver & O'Connell, 1998; Seltzer, 1998](#)), and voluntary support of children through college ([Fabricius, Braver, & Deneau, in press](#)). It has been argued that conferring joint legal custody has a psychological impact on fathers by making them feel more like a father, and thereby spurring them to support their children above mandated levels, and that denying joint legal custody has the opposite effect ([Braver & O'Connell, 1998](#)).

In the absence of being able to conduct an exhaustive and expensive economic analysis similar to the multimillion dollar Consumer Expenditure Survey (on which all states' child support guidelines ultimately rely in one form or another) the current investigation sought to evaluate whether certain readily identifiable and tangible benchmarks of expenditures were available in the noncustodial parent's household. These benchmarks included: (a) clothes, shoes, and personal items; and (b) toys and games (including video gear) and hobby equipment. The above items are portable, and so, if the cliff model is valid, would be brought from the custodial parent's home during visits (or simply done without) at levels of contact below about 30%, rather than permanently available in the noncustodial parent's home. A similar but less portable benchmark was (c) a bicycle. Although it is a ubiquitous item of childplay, the cliff model would assume it would be done without at the noncustodial parent's house.

Another benchmark of a different sort is (d) a bedroom devoted to the child's use. Certainly cliff theorists would assume that very few noncustodial households would expend the extra money for rent or mortgage, utilities, and furnishings necessary to have a bedroom permanently available, unless the child was visiting for an appreciable extent. Finally, for older children, we investigated (e) contributions toward the purchase, upkeep, and (f) added insurance premium payments for an automobile owned or driven by the child. A cliff model would assume little if any of such expenses are borne by the noncustodial household (because it is virtually never required of either parent) until very appreciable amounts of the child's time are spent in the noncustodial home.

An important issue was how to determine fathers' levels of outlays for benchmark items. Inventorying the home was impractical, but there is evidence that the two parents commonly provide very different responses to questions about child support payments, visitation, and other aspects of postdivorce life, with the possibility that each one exaggerates in a self-serving and "ex-spouse bashing" fashion (Braver & O'Connell, 1998; Braver et al., 1993; Braver, Fitzpatrick, et al., 1991; Braver, Wolchik, et al., 1991; Pasley & Braver, in press). A reasonable solution is to ask the children (presuming they are old enough to be trustworthy) because they have fewer obvious systematic biases in their responses (albeit they may have distortions in their memory). Thus, as we have done in recent studies (Braver, Ellman, & Fabricius, in press; Fabricius & Hall, 2000; Fabricius et al., in press), we queried college students whose parents divorced when they were minors.

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS AND PROCEDURES

Data were collected at a large Southwestern state university from students enrolled in the introductory psychology class in fall of 2000. All 2,172 students present in class on the administration day were given a research questionnaire sponsored by the Psychology Department, of which the items below were a subset. Students were instructed to answer these items only if their parents were divorced. The 612 students who completed these questions and whose parents were thus divorced represented 28% of the total. They averaged 7 years old at the time of the divorce; 73% were Caucasian. Although it is possible that young adult children of divorce at this state university are a select sample of those whose parents divorce, the percentage of students from divorced families appears nearly without bias (e.g., National Center for Health Statistics, 1990, Table 1-31). For example, Bumpass and Sweet (1989) found that 31% of children whose parents are married are expected to experience parental divorce.

MEASURES

Visitation time was measured for two time periods: the first 2 years after the divorce and the entire time since the divorce. For the former, we asked students to report: (a) the number of days they spent any time at all with the father in an average 2-week period during the school year, (b) the number of school vacation weeks during which their time with their fathers was different from what it was during the school year, and (c) the percentage of time they spent together during those vacation weeks, in 10% increments from 0% to 90% or more. From these we calculated each student's total percentage of time with dad, then

recoded those scores into a variable divided into 5% increments from 0% to 100%. For the latter, we asked them to report the percentage of time they spent with dad in 10% increments from 0% to 100%.

We measured fathers' expenditures for most items during the first 2 years after the divorce. For clothes, shoes, and personal items (hairbrush, etc.), as well as toys, games, video gear, and hobby equipment, we asked how much of each they had at dad's home on a scale ranging from *none, a little, a fair amount, a lot but you still frequently needed to bring some from your primary parent's home, and a sufficient amount so that you rarely needed to bring some from your primary parent's home*. For bicycles we asked if they *never, some of the time, or always* had a bicycle at dad's house. For bedrooms, we asked whether (a) they had a bedroom of their own at dad's house; (b) they shared a bedroom with siblings; (c) they did not have a bedroom but slept in their father's bed; (d) slept on a couch, sleeping bag, futon, fold-away bed, and so forth; or (e) never or rarely slept there.

We measured car-related expenses for when they started to drive. For insurance, we asked, "Which parent paid for your auto insurance?" to which they could respond "neither, mom, dad, or both." For operation, we asked, "Which parent's car did you mostly use?" The responses were "neither (you had your own car that you mostly paid for), neither (you had your own car that your mom mostly paid for), neither (you had your own car that your dad mostly paid for), your mom's, your dad's, or both."

The measure of the fathers' financial condition was the question: "What is the financial situation in your father's household (including any new wife or live-in partner or girlfriend, if any) right now?" The response scale ranged from *complete poverty or welfare level to very wealthy, never skimp* (for details, see Fabricius et al., in press). Students were also asked about what the legal custody arrangement was, with the major categories being "joint legal custody (both parents shared legal responsibility for making decisions for you)" and "mother had sole legal custody (mother had legal responsibility for making decisions for you)," and they were also asked how old they were when their parents divorced.

RESULTS

Confining analyses to children of the appropriate ages. The questions about fathers' provisions of clothes, toys or games, bicycles, and bedrooms all asked about the first 2 years after the divorce. Consequently, in those analyses we eliminated those students who reported that their parents' divorces happened when they were less than 4 years old (28% of the sample) because they could not be expected to remember the next 2 years. In analyses of clothes, toys or games, and bedrooms, we also eliminated those who were older than 15 at the time of the divorce (9% of the sample) so that they would have had at least 2 more years at home. In the analysis of bicycles we also eliminated those who were older than 11 at the time of the divorce (25% of the sample), because they might be less likely to have even wanted a bicycle. For the questions about car usage and car insurance, we eliminated students who were older than 15 at the time of the divorce from those analyses so that all students' parents would have been divorced before they began to drive.

Father's standard of living and legal custody. We examined whether fathers' financial situations were related to the expenses they assumed. For all six benchmarks (clothes or personal items, toys or games, bicycles, bedrooms, car usage, and car insurance) the proportion

of fathers assuming those expenses increased as their standards of living increased (r 's = .14 to .26, p 's < .05).

We also examined whether joint legal custody was related to the expenses they assumed. In these analyses we statistically controlled for fathers' standard of living, because fathers with higher standards of living were also more likely to have joint legal custody and have their children spend more time with them. Thus any increases in expenditures associated with joint legal custody or time with the child might simply reflect the greater financial resources of those fathers. In the analyses below we used stepwise multiple regression to examine the relationship between fathers' expenditures and each variable of interest (time with dad, legal custody status, and dad's financial situation) independently of, or statistically controlling for, the other two variables. In every analysis below, there was a significant, independent relationship between the amount of time the child was with the father and the father's expenditures, independent of the father's standard of living. In every case except expenditures for clothes, there was a significant, independent relationship between the father's financial situation and expenditures. Only in cases of (perhaps more costly) expenditures for bedrooms, car usage, and car insurance were there significant, independent relationships between legal custody status and expenditures.

Clothes, shoes, and personal items. We first examined the percentage of fathers who provided at least a fair amount of clothes, shoes, and personal items during the first 2 years after the divorce. Figure 2 shows this percentage as a function of the time the child spent with the father during the first 2 years and whether the legal custody was joint or sole maternal. The 4-point scale of time intervals (0%, 5% to 15%, 20% to 30%, and 35% to 45%) was constructed by combining increments of the variable that measured total time with dad in the first 2 years in 5% increments to achieve groups of similar size. Of the students, 80% reported that they had spent 0% to 45% of their time with dad during the first 2 years (the remaining students are eliminated from all analyses). That gave us approximately 200 students, evenly divided between sole maternal legal custody and joint legal custody, for this analysis (and likewise for the analyses of toys and bedrooms). When custody was sole maternal, the percentage of fathers who provided at least a fair amount of clothes, shoes, and personal items rose from 0% to 10% to 22% across the first three time intervals. Too few students from sole maternal custody families had been with their fathers more than 30% of the time to make meaningful estimates. When custody was joint legal, there were too few students who had been with their fathers 0% of the time, but 19% of fathers who saw their child 5% to 15% of the time provided a fair amount of clothes, and the percentage rose to 27% (at 20% to 30% time) and 64% (at 35% to 45% time). There were no significant differences between legal custody groups at any time interval.

Toys and games. Figure 3 shows the percentage of fathers who provided a fair amount of toys, games, video gear, and hobby equipment during the first 2 years after the divorce. When legal custody was sole maternal, the percentage of fathers rose from 3% (at 0% time) to 15% (at 5% to 15% time), and finally to 56% (at 20% to 30% time). When legal custody was joint, the percentage of fathers rose from 35% (at 5% to 15% time) to 48% (at 20% to 30% time), and finally to 69% (at 35% to 45% time). There were no significant differences between legal custody groups at any time interval.

Bicycle. Figure 4 shows the percentage who provided a bicycle during the first 2 years after the divorce. There were 149 in this analysis, evenly divided between sole maternal and

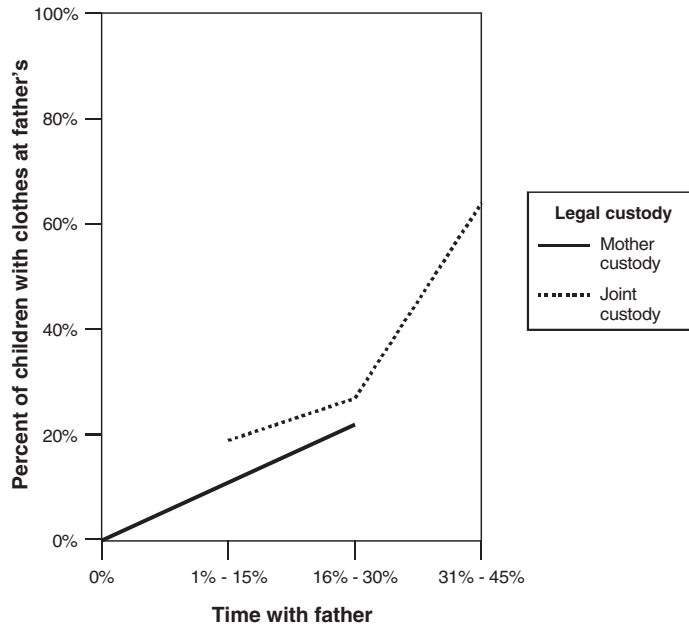


Figure 2. Percentage of children having at least a fair amount of clothes at father's home, by time with father and legal custody, for those aged 4 to 15 years at time of the divorce.

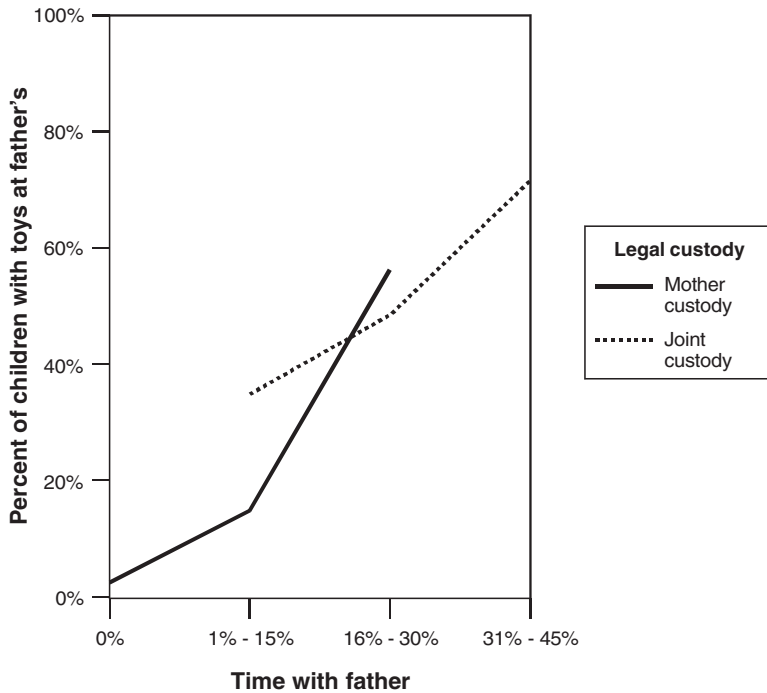


Figure 3. Percentage of children having at least a fair amount of toys or games at father's home, by time with father and legal custody, for those aged 4 to 15 years at time of the divorce.

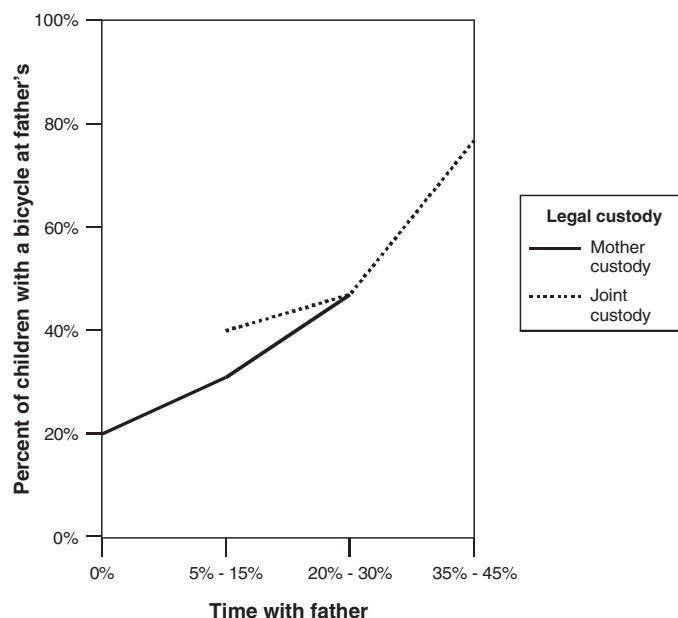


Figure 4. Percentage of children having a bicycle at father's home, by time with father and legal custody, for those aged 4 to 15 years at time of the divorce.

joint legal custody. When custody was sole maternal, the percentage of fathers rose from 20% (at 0% time) to 31% (at 5% to 15% time), to 47% (at 20% to 30% time). When custody was joint, the percentage of fathers rose from 38% (at 5% to 15% time) to 47% (at 20% to 30% time), to 77% (at 35% to 45% time). There were no significant differences between legal custody groups at any time interval.

Own bedroom. Figure 5 shows the percentage of noncustodial fathers who provided the child either their own separate bedroom or one shared with siblings during the first 2 years after the divorce. Of those who provided one or the other, 63% provided a separate bedroom. When custody was sole maternal, the percentage of fathers who provided a bedroom rose from 12% (at 0% time), to 39% (at 5% to 15% time), to 43% (at 20% to 30% time). When custody was joint legal, the percentage of fathers rose from 57% (at 5% to 15% time) to 77% (at 20% to 30% time), to 88% (at 35% to 45% time). At the 20% to 30% time interval, the difference between the two legal custody groups was significant (Fisher's exact $p < .01$, one-tailed).

Car expenses. Figure 6 shows the percentage of fathers who paid for their child's use of a car when he or she started to drive. Of these fathers, 55% paid most of the expenses for the child's own car, 30% allowed the child to use his car most of the time, and 15% allowed the child to use his car in conjunction with the mother's car. The time intervals in 10% increments represent the scale on which students reported the time they spent with dad considering the entire time since the divorce. On this scale, 79% of students reported that they had spent 0% to 40% of their total time since the divorce with their fathers. There were 310 students in this analysis and in the analysis of car insurance, with 56% reporting sole maternal

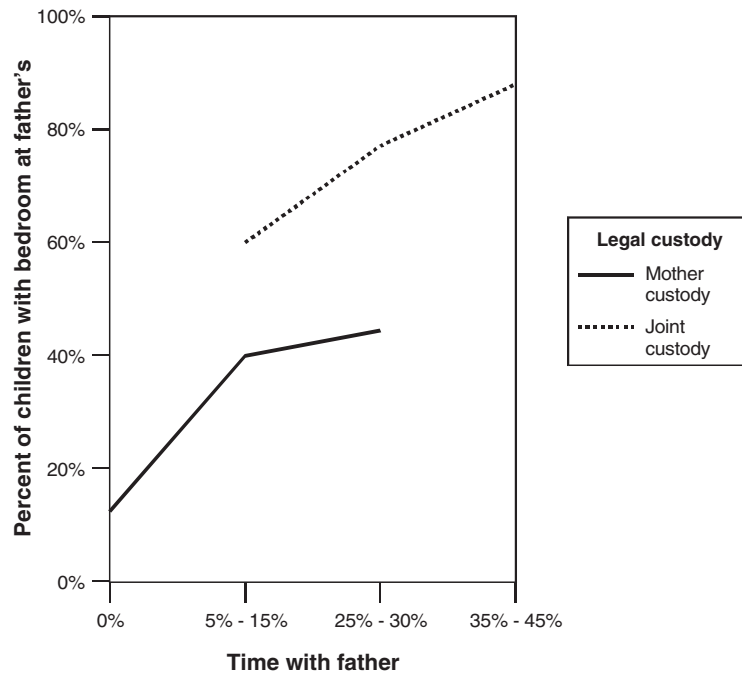


Figure 5. Percentage of children having own or sibling-shared bedroom at father's home, by time with father and legal custody, for those aged 4 to 15 years at time of the divorce.

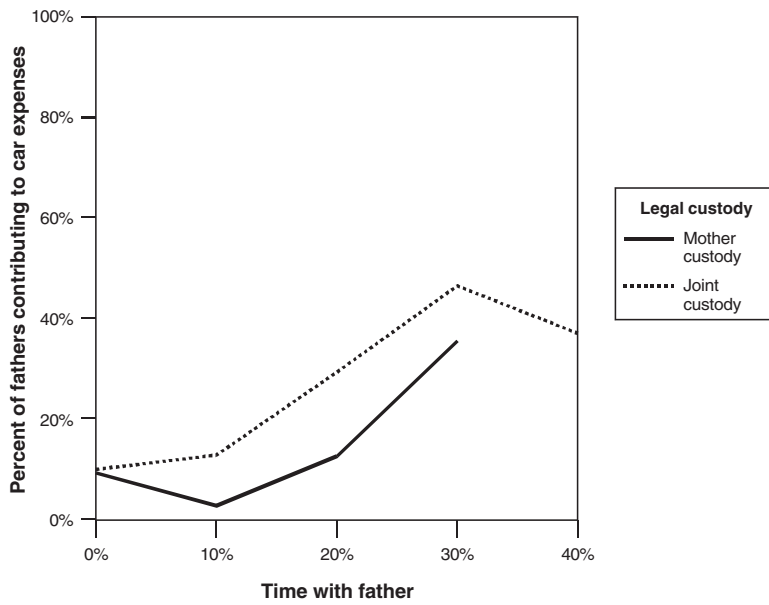


Figure 6. Percentage of fathers contributing to teenagers' car expenses, by time with father and legal custody, for those aged 15 years and younger at time of the divorce.

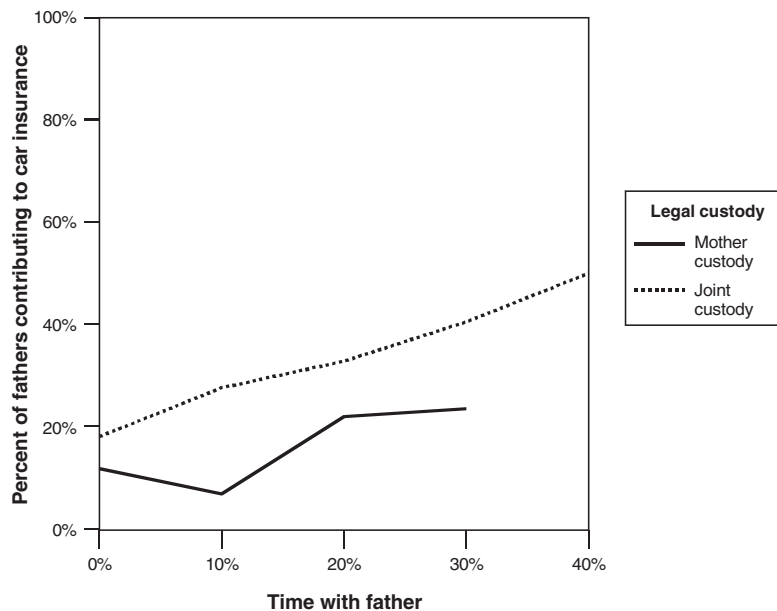


Figure 7. Percentage of fathers contributing to teenagers' car insurance, by time with father and legal custody, for those aged 15 years and younger at time of the divorce.

legal custody. When custody was sole maternal, the percentage of fathers who paid for their child's use of a car went from 8% (at 0% time) to 3% (at 10% time) to 13% (at 20% time), and finally to 27% when the child had been with the father 30% of the time. There were too few maternal-custody fathers who saw their child 40% of the time to make meaningful estimates. When custody was joint legal, the percentage of fathers rose from 12% (at 0% time), to 19% (at 10% time), to 30% (at 20% time), to 50% (at 30% time). There was no increase at 40% of time but rather a slight drop-off (to 41% of fathers). There was one significant difference between custody groups at the 10% time interval (Fisher's exact $p < .01$, one-tailed).

Figure 7 shows the percentage of fathers who paid for their child's car insurance, either alone or shared with the mother (of these, 71% paid for it alone). When legal custody was sole maternal, the percentage of fathers went from 8% to 6% to 25%, and finally to 27% when the child had been with the father 30% of the time. When legal custody was joint, the percentage of fathers rose steadily from 13%, to 27%, to 33%, to 39%, to 50% (at 40% time with the child). There was one significant difference between custody groups at the 10% time interval (Fisher's exact $p < .01$, one-tailed).

DISCUSSION

There was little evidence to support a cliff model (see Figure 1) in this data. The only variables for which there was any resemblance to the cliff model were students' reports of fathers' provision of clothes and bicycles. In each case, there was a disproportionate increase from the 20% to 30% interval of time with dad to the 35% to 45% interval. The percentage of joint custody fathers providing a fair amount of clothing at their homes jumped from 27% to

64% across these intervals, and the percentage providing bicycles jumped from 47% to 77%. However, the percentages bearing these expenses even at the low 20% to 30% interval (27% and 47% of joint-custody fathers) were not negligible, suggesting that although the bend in the line at 30% in these two cases resembles the cliff model, the model is not supported in its assumption that trivially few fathers make these contributions below the threshold. The other four cases (outlays for bedrooms, toys, bicycles, car usage, and car insurance) clearly did not support the cliff model of father-borne expenses because the increase in percentage of fathers was linear in these cases across the supposed 30% threshold.

In general, the levels of fathers bearing these expenses were substantially greater than expected. With the exception of clothes, by the time they reached 30% of time with their children, fully half of all fathers were already incurring appreciable expenses for these benchmarks. There were even greater percentages of fathers bearing these expenses among those with higher standards of living. Fathers' standard of living was significantly related to how much additional money they spent, and in each analysis, except for clothes, this was also independent of the time they had with their child and the legal custody arrangement. This means that on Figures 2 through 7, one can visualize parallel lines above and below each custody line, which represent even larger percentages of higher income fathers (and smaller percentages of lower income fathers) making these contributions.

The current findings suggest that the typical assumptions about the economics of noncustodial fathers may simply be wrong. The noncustodial fathers in this study generally did not have extraordinary amounts of visitation; indeed, 18% of students reported they did not see their fathers at all, and 45% reported that they saw them less than 15% of the time, in line with many reports of low father contact. Nevertheless, many fathers apparently did not refrain from providing direct financial support to the child over and above child support payments. Overall, for example, 55% of noncustodial fathers whose children lived primarily with their mothers nonetheless provided a bedroom for their children in their homes.

Of course, concern must be raised about the reliability and generalizability of these findings. Will they be replicated with more precise measurement of noncustodial dollar outlays than the benchmark approach we used; for example, with actual expenditure diaries as in the Consumer Expenditure Survey? Will a more objective and trustworthy measure of standard of living than children's report on a qualitative verbal scale provide corroboration? More important, will they be upheld when applied to a more general sample than children of divorce who later made it into a large state university? It is certainly possible that such a sample is unique or biased, and quite plausibly just because the fathers idiosyncratically somehow chose to spend money on their children when they did not have to. However, because the findings in other respects (e.g., proportion of various visitation schedules) match those of more representative national samples, it is not unreasonable to assume the present estimates of substantial child expenditures are unbiased.

How do we explain this unexpected behavior? The simplest explanation might be that it is limited and constrained to the particular benchmark items we happened to ask about in our survey, and thus not very important. Bicycles, games, and even clothes might not constitute very significant financial outlays, and thus might only be the tip of the iceberg of a range of other expenses noncustodial fathers voluntarily assumed (e.g., recreation, pets, birthday parties, vacations, lessons, club fees, etc.), which together might constitute significant outlays. Regarding bedrooms, fathers might have other reasons for wanting an extra bedroom than to provide a place to make their infrequently visiting child feel at home. Contributions to car expenses might truly constitute costly extra financial support, but that only occurs in the past

2 years of the child living at home as a dependent, and when divided out over the whole number of years the child grew up in a divorced family might not appear to be very significant.

This simple explanation might be tenable were it not for other recent findings from previous studies. First of all, divorced fathers maintained the generally little time they had with their children throughout the course of their children's growing up years. In the present study, students' reports of the time they had with their fathers in the first 2 years of the divorce were similar to their reports of the time they had with them overall. In addition, supporting these findings, a previous study (Fabricius & Hall, 2000) looked specifically for changes in students' reports of the time they had with their fathers during the 8 years after the divorce found none. If they were acting like stereotypical nonresidential fathers in making insubstantial additional financial contributions to their children, we might also expect them to have tended to see their children less as they got older, but they did not.

Even more to the point, however, is the substantial amount of financial support we found (see Fabricius et al., in press) that they contributed to their children's college expenses, in a state (Arizona) that does not require support for college expenses from noncustodial parents. In that study, we also controlled for parents' standard of living as we did here, so that if students reported, for example, that each of their parents contributed the same amount of money to their college expenses but their father had a higher standard of living, then he would be counted in that analysis as contributing proportionally less. Nevertheless, we found that the financial contributions students reported from their mothers and fathers were equivalent, after controlling for each one's ability to pay. This puts the other expenditures we found fathers making in the current study in perspective, and suggests that, rather than being inconsequential, they are part of a pattern of voluntary, additional, and substantial financial contributions that continues into the college years.

Furthermore, the same factors, more time with their children and joint legal custody, seemed to encourage all of these contributions from fathers. For example, Fabricius et al. (in press) found that college support from fathers also rose dramatically as their time with their children approached 50%. This finding immediately leads to concerns about the direction of causality. Perhaps "good dads," the ones who made these outlays, were the ones who got joint legal custody and more time with their children. But we know from other research (e.g., Braver & O'Connell, 1998) that most divorcing fathers say they want joint legal custody, and students report that even when they saw their fathers very little, 60% to 80% of those fathers wanted to see them more (Fabricius & Hall, 2000). Importantly, the linear relationships we mostly see in this study suggest that more time spent together does cause fathers to spend more money, as one would naturally expect. That does seem more plausible than having to assume that different numbers of "good dads" sorted themselves into such neat categories. At the very least, we can see that those fathers who had more time with their children did in fact assume more financial responsibilities that by law are those only of custodial parents.

These findings are relevant to the issue of determining the postdivorce standards of living of mothers versus fathers (Braver, 1999; Braver & Stockburger, in press; Weitzman, 1985). Previous studies of divorced fathers' financial condition have not taken into account money fathers spend on children in their homes. These findings are also relevant to policy makers charged with quadrennially revising state child support guidelines, the great majority of which do not include reductions for expenditures that accompany the amount of time the child spends in the noncustodial parent's home. The current data suggest that at lower levels of contact than the cliff cutoff, substantial percentages of noncustodial fathers made nontrivial direct outlays for their children. We did not find that all fathers did so; but it must be remembered that the percentages in Figures 2 through 7 were averages for fathers with

higher and lower standards of living. Higher percentages of fathers made these outlays among those who could more easily afford to do so.

Granting credit for these outlays seems justified because fathers are assuming them already without any help or explicit responsibility to do so. Furthermore, in each analysis except for clothes, fathers who could afford to spend more did spend more, and this was independent of how much time they had with their children. This suggests, although of course it does not prove, that their expenditures for their children at their homes were constrained by their financial resources. Granting credit would be an effective endorsement of the proposition that children have two homes after divorce because it would redistribute finite financial resources between the two homes. This also seems justified because the adult children of divorced parents tell us that they believe shared residential custody is best for them (Fabricius & Hall, 2000), and the preponderance of research shows that children from joint custody arrangements are better adjusted (Bauserman, 2002). The fact that noncustodial fathers are already making sacrifices to assume custodial financial responsibilities at their homes (and are continuing those custodial financial responsibilities through voluntary college support) weakens the argument that fathers would negotiate in bad faith for more time just to reduce child support. On the contrary, it would seem to justify giving more fathers the explicit responsibility of being custodial parents by granting them joint legal custody and more time with their children when they seek it (Braver & O'Connell, 1998; Fabricius & Hall, 2000; Gunnoe & Braver, 2001).

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