Taking Off the Rose-Colored Glasses? Comparing Mothers' and Children's Reports About Father Involvement

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ABSTRACT

Findings about fathering often rely on mothers’ reports and give a one-sided perspective of father involvement. This single-informant approach neglects the experience of children themselves, and overlooks the potentially informative level of disagreement within the mother-child pair. Using data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study, we compare mothers’ and children’s own reports about fathers to better understand their shared and individual perceptions of family dynamics involving the father. We conduct latent class analysis to examine patterns of (dis)agreement in mothers’ and children’s reports of father involvement. We then conduct latent class regression analysis to examine whether father type (biological versus social), relationship quality, and sociodemographic characteristics predict the pattern of mother-child agreement. The study’s findings have implications for our understanding of the extent of father involvement in social- and biological- father families, and provide information about the potential pitfalls of estimating father involvement using solely the mother’s perspective.