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In regard to the legislative meetings related to revisions of the Kansas custody statues, I am providing two recent publications of mine. One is a peer-reviewed study that found long-term benefits to both parent-child relationships associated with overnight parenting time in infancy. The second is an invited, forthcoming chapter in the *Oxford Handbook of Children and the Law*, in which I review the evidence that leads to the conclusion that a rebuttable presumption of equal parenting time would be in children's best interests. I am an internationally recognized expert on this topic, with 23 publications and 29 conference and training presentations on this subject since 2000, and a 10-year NIH-funded longitudinal study of the role of fathers in adolescent development in intact and separated families. Committee members are free to contact me for copies of the other 15 peer reviewed journal articles that I have written on this topic.

Should Infants and Toddlers Have Frequent Overnight Parenting Time With Fathers? The Policy Debate and New Data
William V. Fabricius and Go Woon Suh

Abtract Whether children of separated parents 2 years of age and younger should have frequent overnight parenting time with noncustodial fathers has been the subject of much debate but little data. Contrary to some previous findings, the current study found benefits to both parent-child relationships associated with overnights (a) up to and including equal numbers of overnights at both parents' homes, (b) for both the long-term mother-child and father-child relationships, and (c) both when children were 2 years old, as well as when they were under 1 year of age. These benefits held after controlling for subsequent parenting time with fathers in childhood and adolescence, parent education and conflict up to 5 years after the separation, and children's sex and age at separation. While the findings do not establish causality they provide strong support for policies to encourage frequent overnight parenting time for infants and toddlers, because the benefits associated with overnights also held for parents who initially agreed about overnights as well as for those who disagreed and had the overnight parenting plan imposed over 1 parent's objections. The observed benefits for the long-term father-child relationship are consistent with findings from intervention studies showing that fathers who are more involved with infants and toddlers develop better parenting skills and relationships with their children.

Equal Parenting Time: The Case for a Legal Presumption

William V. Fabricius

Abstract: I review several sources of evidence bearing on the question of whether equal parenting time with both parents is in the best interests of children of divorce. First, the scientific evidence consists of correlational findings that meet four conditions necessary for a causal role of parenting time: A legal context that constrains the possibility of self-selection; a "dose-response" association between parenting time and father-child relationships; positive outcomes when parents disagree and courts impose more parenting time; and negative outcomes when relocations separate fathers and children. Second, the cultural evidence is that norms about parenting roles have changed in the last generation, and this is reflected in public endorsement of equal parenting time. Third, test-case evidence comes from the 2013 equal parenting law in Arizona, which has been evaluated positively by the state's family law professionals. Finally, examples from recent Canadian case law show courts responding to the new cultural norms by crafting individualized equal parenting time orders over one parent's objections even in cases of high parent conflict, accompanied by well-reasoned judicial opinions about how that is in children's best interests. I conclude that the overall pattern of evidence indicates that legal presumptions of equal parenting time would help protect children's emotional security with each of their divorced parents, and consequently would have a positive effect on public health in the form of reduced long-term stress-related mental and physical health problems among children of divorce.

Equal Parenting Time: The Case for a Legal Presumption

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Abstract:

I review several sources of evidence bearing on the question of whether equal parenting time with both parents is in the best interests of children of divorce. First, the scientific evidence consists of correlational findings that meet four conditions necessary for a causal role of parenting time: A legal context that constrains the possibility of self-selection; a "dose-response" association between parenting time and father-child relationships; positive outcomes when parents disagree and courts impose more parenting time; and negative outcomes when relocations separate fathers and children. Second, the cultural evidence is that norms about parenting roles have changed in the last generation, and this is reflected in public endorsement of equal parenting time. Third, test-case evidence comes from the 2013 equal parenting law in Arizona, which has been evaluated positively by the state's family law professionals. Finally, examples from recent Canadian case law show courts responding to the new cultural norms by crafting individualized equal parenting time orders over one parent's objections even in cases of high parent conflict, accompanied by well-reasoned judicial opinions about how that is in children's best interests. I conclude that the overall pattern of evidence indicates that legal presumptions of equal parenting time would help protect children's emotional security with each of their divorced parents, and consequently would have a positive effect on public health in the form of reduced long-term stress-related mental and physical health problems among children of divorce.

Keywords

equal parenting time, parent conflict, divorced fathers, parent-child relationships, legal presumptions

At the heart of the current science and policy debates about children's living arrangements after parental divorce or separation is the question of whether it is in children's best interests to live equal amounts of time with each of their parents. My colleagues and I have theorized and reviewed evidence that parenting time is an important source of children's emotional security about parent-child relationships, and that secure parent-child relationships, in turn, are an important source of protection from stress-related mental and physical health problems.[1] In this chapter, I discuss the theoretical mechanisms by which parent conflict also affects children's emotional security; review the previous correlational evidence regarding parenting time, parent conflict, and children's well-being; and conclude that the correlational evidence supports equal parenting time. The science is now entering a "second generation," in which opportunities are becoming available for stronger tests of whether equal parenting time causes benefits in parent-child relationships, while the cultural norms for parenting roles after parental separation have already evolved in the direction of equal parenting time, both of which I discuss next. Lastly, I review findings of an initial evaluation of Arizona's implementation of an equal-parenting-time presumption, the status of custody law in other states regarding presumptions of equal parenting time, and recent Canadian case law under the statutory *maximum contact principle*. I conclude that the evidence to date from all these sources converges to indicate that a legal presumption of equal parenting time is in children's best interests, because such a presumption is likely to strengthen the emotional security of children of divorced and separated parents and thereby have a widespread positive impact on public health.

In our research, we measure the amount of yearly parenting time children have with their fathers in order to test whether more parenting time, up to and including equal parenting time with both parents, is associated with increasing benefits to children. In the older literature, and

still to some extent today, researchers have instead measured frequency of visits, using scales with response options such as "2 to 6 times a year," "1 to 3 times a month," and "2 to 5 times a week." It has since been discovered that the number of days of parenting time cannot be reliably calculated from such response categories; thus, these scales are of limited use in answering modern policy questions about equal parenting time.[2] More recently, one encounters the term "shared parenting" in discussions of policy, and it is important to first consider how viable that concept is as a foundation for policy.

How useful is the term "shared parenting" for policy?

"Shared parenting" is like a "handful of pennies." At no point does adding another penny make them a handful; furthermore, a handful depends on the size of the hand. The concept of a handful is inherently vague, as is the concept of shared parenting. At no one point does increasing the number of days and nights that the child spends at the father's home become shared parenting, and what one child experiences as shared parenting, as well as any benefits that derive from it, might be different for another child. When "shared parenting" is used as a technical term in policy discussions, the vagueness is removed by arbitrarily defining it as ranging from some minimum proportion of parenting time with fathers (e.g., 35%), up to and including equal parenting time with both parents.

There are currently no United States child custody statutes with a presumption for shared parenting defined as some minimum proportion of parenting time with fathers, although some have been proposed. Several problems would arise with such a statute. The first is that the lower bound of the definition is likely to be insufficient for many children, but it is also likely to be the compromise target that attorneys, mediators, and courts will encourage parents to agree to when the father wants equal parenting time and the mother objects. For example, 35% parenting time

might seem enough to support strong father-child relationships. However, when we move from intuition to consider what 35% parenting time (128 days) actually looks like in a parenting plan, the view becomes less sanguine. There are 36 weeks of school, and 16 weeks total of school vacations and holidays; thus, if the child spends half of school vacations and holidays with the father (56 days), that leaves 72 days of parenting time during the 36 school weeks, or an average of two days per school week. Half of those will be weekends, leaving an average of one school day and night per week with the father. That makes it difficult for the father to be much of a presence in the child's school life, and makes it difficult for the child to see the father as a parent who knows about all the different aspects of the child's life. Two days per school week also means that there will be long periods of time before the child returns to dad's home, up to seven days if the parenting plan is Wednesday and Thursday with dad one week, and Friday and Saturday the next week. That makes it difficult for the father to establish consistent parenting routines, and difficult for the child to adjust before it is time to leave again.

The second problem is that a presumption for "shared parenting" does not tell courts and parents what amount of parenting time is sufficient. When such bills are proposed, they typically include language to the effect that children should have at least the minimum proportion of parenting time with fathers, and that they should have more, up to 50%, based on the individual circumstances of the family. Minimum requirements, as in "minimum daily requirements" of vitamins and minerals, usually specify the amount that is sufficient, but the above language specifies a minimum amount of parenting time that is necessary but not sufficient. Parents will rightly be uncertain about how much parenting time courts will deem to be sufficient under such a standard. Incoherence in a legal standard promotes confusion and conflict between the parties, and heterogeneity among courts in how to interpret and apply that standard.

The final problem is that a definition of shared parenting prescribes an amount of parenting time for all families, albeit as a minimum starting point, and thus it imposes a constraint on judicial discretion, which in some cases might not be in children's best interests. Thus, basing child custody statutes on a definition of shared parenting produces the worst case of both constraints and heterogeneity in judicial decision making.

The alternative presumption is that the child should have as close to equal proportions of parenting time with both parents as is possible for that family, on a schedule that is individualized for each family. As we will see below, this approach is more in line with what we know about the effects associated with different amounts of parenting time. It is also coherent and preserves judicial discretion.

The Correlational Evidence and Policy Implications

The Meaning of Parenting Time. Comprehensive reviews of the research on the various dimensions of non-resident father involvement began in 1999 with a review of the 63 extant studies by Amato and Gilbreth.[3] They concluded that the evidence showed that the *quantity* of parenting time was less important than the *quality* of the father's parenting behaviors for children's school success and mental health. Fabricius et al. have discussed the problems with that conclusion.[4] One problem is that most of the studies available to Amato and Gilbreth at the time used the frequency-of-visitation scales, which fail to accurately measure the quantity of parenting time (e.g., one visit per month could be a dinner or a whole month).

Another problem is that Amato and Gilbreth defined high-quality father parenting as including not only the traditionally recognized behaviors (e.g., providing emotional support, praising children's accomplishments, maintaining consistent discipline, and explaining the reasons for rules), but also other things such as helping with homework, and working on projects

together. Divorced fathers who are more involved in helping with homework and working on projects together necessarily have more parenting time in which to do more of those things. That means that divorced fathers who scored higher on "quality of parenting behaviors" in Amato and Gilbreth's scheme also likely had greater amounts of parenting time. Thus, the combination of an unreliable measure of quantity of time (i.e., frequency of visitation), and a confounded measure of quality of time (i.e., some items assessed quality but others assessed quantity) might have inadvertently stacked the deck toward concluding that the quality of fathers' parenting behaviors was more predictive of child outcomes than the quantity of parenting time. One current review of the literature repeats these same mistakes and thereby comes to the same unwarranted conclusion; for example, these authors counted the question, "How often does father put the child to bed?" as a measure of the quality of fathers' parenting behaviors, rather than as a measure of the number of overnights children spent with fathers.[5]

Another important aspect of Amato and Gilbreth's review is that it reflected the general tendencies at the time to overlook the connection between the amount of parenting time and the security of father-child relationships, and to overlook the security of father-child relationships as an important outcome variable on a par with the more traditional outcome variables such as depression, aggression, and school performance. These shortcomings have persisted in some quarters despite increasing evidence (discussed below) to the contrary. Part of the reason, I believe, is a lack of understanding of what parenting time means to the child.

We hypothesized that spending time doing things together such as working on projects, or going to the movies, whether the parent also engages in the traditional high-quality parenting behaviors during that time or not, communicates to the child that he or she is important.[6] We derived this hypothesis from open-ended interviews with about 400 adolescents in both intact

and non-intact families about their relationships with each of their resident and nonresident parents, in which they spontaneously talked about, among other things, whether their parents spend enough time with them.[7] Later, using standardized measures in state-of-the-art longitudinal analyses, we confirmed that the more time each parent in two-parent households spent with the adolescent child in daily activities – we asked about playing indoor and outdoor games, going to movies and sporting events, shopping, and cooking -- the more secure the child felt one to two years later that he or she mattered to that parent.[8] For divorced fathers, this requires having enough parenting time to be able to spend enough time doing things together to protect children from doubts about how much they matter.

The findings of many studies in many Western countries now clearly show that more parenting time is related to greater divorced father-child relationship security.[9] For example, Figure 1 shows the relation we found in a sample of 1,030 college students from divorced families.[10] The horizontal axis shows parenting time with father during childhood, and the vertical axis shows emotional security with father years later in young adulthood. The vertical line divides parenting time at 13 to 15 days per "month" (i.e., 28 days). This represents equal (50%) parenting time with each parent. On the left side of the vertical line, it is clear that young adults' current emotional security with their fathers improved with each increment, from 0% to 50%, of parenting time that they had spent with their fathers during childhood. Note that there is no "plateau" short of equal parenting time that might indicate a minimum amount of parenting necessary to ensure good father-child relationships. On the right side of the vertical line, from 50% to 100% time with fathers, are the few (N = 152) father-custody families, in which the zigzags are not statistically reliable and represent random variation. Fabricius and Suh have recently found the same thing for overnight parenting with the father during infancy (0 to 2 years

of age): Young adults' emotional security in the father-child relationship improved with each increment of overnights with fathers during infancy from no overnights with fathers to equal overnights with each parent.[11] Importantly, neither of these studies show any deterioration of the mother-child relationship from 0% to 50% parenting time with fathers; in fact, Fabricius and Suh found some improvement in mother-child relationships when fathers had overnight parenting time, perhaps because it helped relieve some of the stress of being a full-time, single mother.[12]

Insert Figure 1 about here

The potential public health benefits to society of improving divorced father-child relationship security could be substantial. An estimated 35% of children of divorce have poorer relationships with their fathers in adulthood than children from intact families, after controlling for 40 divorce-predisposing factors.[13] Amato and Gilbreth's review of studies revealed that children who were less close to their divorced fathers had worse behavioral adjustment, worse emotional adjustment, and lower school achievement.[14] Evidence not only from the divorce literature, but also from the general health literature going back 50 years shows that poor relationships with either parent contribute in later life to "consequent accumulating risk for *mental health disorders, major chronic diseases,* and *early mortality* [emphasis added]".[15] Weakened relationships with divorced fathers also manifest in less support given and received in the form of intergenerational transfers of time and money.[16] Our latest study in this line of work found that adolescents' perceptions of how much they mattered to their fathers were actually more important than their perceptions of how much they mattered to their mothers for predicting their later mental health.[17]

Soon after Amato and Gilbreth, other reviews of the literature began appearing that rightly sought out studies that measured the amount of parenting time rather than the frequency of visitation.[18] In contrast to the conclusion of Amato and Gilbreth, these reviews found that the quantity of parenting time was associated with a wide range of beneficial child outcomes in addition to improved father-child relationships, including academic success, mental health, behavioral adjustment, and self-esteem. However, the authors of these new reviews used definitions of shared parenting to determine how many studies found that children with at least a certain minimum amount of parenting time with fathers had better outcomes than children with less than that amount of parenting time. The first was Bausserman, who located 25 studies and used a minimum cutoff of 25% parenting time with fathers.[19] Nielsen initially found 40 studies, and later found an additional 20 studies, both times using a cutoff of 35% time with fathers.[20] These definitions of shared parenting grouped together studies that differed widely in the average amounts of parenting time with fathers, and as a result, the findings do not tell us whether there are additional benefits associated with levels of parenting time above the cutoffs. Only one review (of 19 studies) compared sole physical custody to two cutoffs for joint physical custody; i.e., 30% to 35% parenting time with fathers, versus 40% to 50%.[21] The children who had almost equal parenting time (40% to 50%) had better behavioral adjustment (e.g., aggressiveness, conduct problems) and social adjustment (e.g., social skills, social acceptance) than children in sole physical custody, whereas those with 30% to 35% parenting time did not. All the authors of these reviews used definitions of shared parenting to simply group studies together for comparison purposes, but these reviews inadvertently lend themselves to use by advocates calling for legal presumptions for shared parenting defined as at least 35% parenting time with fathers.

The Meaning of Parent Conflict. Relatively few studies of parenting time also examine levels of parent conflict. That is unfortunate because parent conflict is known to harm children, and there is long-standing concern among researchers[22] and policy makers about whether more parenting time with fathers in high conflict families would expose children to more harm from conflict.

It is important to understand how and why parent conflict works to harm children. The best theory we have is Emotional Security Theory (EST).[23] The central tenet of EST is that parent conflict, in intact as well as in divorced families, can threaten children's sense of security that their parents will be able and willing to continue to take care of them. Some children can have confidence that the conflict will be managed and regulated by the parents, or otherwise will not threaten their continued care. Other children, in response to parent conflict, experience emotional insecurity about the continued physical and emotional availability of their parents. That emotional insecurity is manifested in three ways: (a) *distress* in response to episodes of parent conflict; (b) attempts to *regulate* their exposure to the conflict in various ways such as freezing, intervening, or ingratiating themselves; and (c) negative *expectations* that the conflict will cause their parents to withdraw and will undermine family stability. Negative expectations can be revealed when children are asked to finish story stems about parents in conflict; as one child narrated, "The Mom and Dad keep blaming each other. 'You made the mess.' 'No, you did.' Then Dad leaves the house."[24]

In young children from divorced families, these negative expectations about parent conflict take the form of worries about the continuity of their living arrangements and the stability of their relationships with parents. Such worries are evocatively captured by the following items on the Fear of Abandonment subscale of the Children's Beliefs about Parental

Divorce Scale[25]: "I worry that my parents will want to live without me;" "It's possible that my parents will never want to see me again;" "I worry that I will be left all alone;" "I think that one day I might have to live with a friend or relative." In young adults from divorced families, lingering insecurity about parent conflict is still manifested in the same three ways identified by EST: (a) memories of the *distress* of experiencing parental conflict; (b) lingering feelings of *self-blame* in having failed to reduce the conflict and prevent the divorce; and (c) negative *expectations* that continuing conflict will undermine their parents' ability to cooperate in helping them meet the challenges of young adulthood. This insecurity about parent conflict is captured by four of the six subscales of the Painful Feelings About Divorce Scale (PFAD)[26:] Loss and Abandonment (e.g., "I had a harder childhood than most people." "I missed not having my father around."), Self-Blame (e.g., "I wish I had tried harder to keep my parents together."), Seeing Life Through the Filter of Divorce (e.g., "I worry about big events when both my parents will have to come." "My parents' divorce still causes struggles for me."), and Acceptance of Parental Divorce (e.g., "My parents did not eventually seem happier after they separated.")

Fabricius and Luecken studied college students and found that more parent conflict around the time of the divorce predicted more insecurity about parent conflict, as measured by the PFAD, years later in young adulthood, which in turn predicted worse current stress-related physical health.[27] However, more parenting time with fathers *mitigated* the harm from parent conflict. Specifically, more parenting time with fathers during childhood predicted greater emotional security of father-child relationships in young adulthood, which in turn predicted *better* stress-related physical health. Both findings are consistent with EST, which holds that the child's emotional security in parent-child relationships is distinct from the child's emotional security about parent conflict, and that each contributes to the child's well-being.

Importantly, Fabricius and Luecken found no indication that more parenting time in the high conflict families resulted in more insecurity about conflict. Mahrer, O'Hara, Sandler, and Wolchik recently reviewed the small group of studies of parenting time and parent conflict.[28] They concluded that the findings are mixed[29], and that more research is needed to ascertain whether more parenting time with fathers in high conflict families exposes children to more harm from parent conflict. The mixed findings might be due to older studies having too few children in high-conflict families with equal parenting time. The mixed findings might also be due to the use of analytical methods that were not designed to detect complex relations between parenting time and insecurity about parent conflict. Consequently, I re-analyzed the Fabricius and Luecken data to look for complex effects of parenting time in high conflict families.

Fabricius and Luecken assessed parenting time with the question, "Between the time your parents got divorced and now, which of the following best describes your living arrangements with each of them?" The response options were five verbal categories (from *lived entirely with mother and saw father minimally or not at all*, to *lived equal amounts of time with each parent)* that have the following approximate yearly equivalencies of proportion of parenting time with father: 5%, 15%, 25%, 35%, and 45%, respectively.[30] Among the approximately 200 college student participants who provided complete data, the percentages in each of the categories of parenting time were 22%, 25%, 22%, 17%, and 15%, respectively.

Results of the re-analysis showed that, in low-conflict families, the quality of father-child relationships improved with increased parenting time, similar to Figure 1. In high-conflict families, relationships tended to be worse overall than in low-conflict families, reflecting the typical finding that more parent conflict is associated with poorer father-child relationships.[31] Nevertheless, father-child relationships in high-conflict families also improved with increased

parenting time, but only up to 25% time, after which they leveled off. Thus, there was no evidence that more parenting time in high-conflict families was harmful to long-term father-child relationships.

Children's insecurity about parent conflict in low-conflict families did not increase with increased parenting time. In high-conflict families, insecurity spiked significantly from 25% to 35% parenting time, and at 35% it was significantly greater in high-conflict families than in low-conflict families. However, at essentially equal parenting time (45%), insecurity about parent conflict was not greater in high-conflict families than in low-conflict families.

The same pattern was evident for one of the two standardized measures that Fabricius and Luecken used to assess the young adults' stress-related physical health. This was the somatic symptoms scale (e.g., headaches, dizziness, chest pains, nausea). In low-conflict families, somatic symptoms did not increase with increased parenting time. In high-conflict families, somatic symptoms spiked significantly from 25% to 35% parenting time, and at 35% were significantly greater in high-conflict families than in low-conflict families. However, at essentially equal parenting time (45%), somatic symptoms were not greater in high-conflict families than in low-conflict families. For the other measure (i.e., global health rating), the parenting time patterns were not different for high-conflict versus low-conflict families.

These new analyses revealed that, as some have feared, increasing parenting time with fathers in high-conflict families does not appear to have the same beneficial effects as it does in low- conflict families. However, the most insecurity about parent conflict, and the most somatic symptoms both occurred at 35% parenting time not at equal parenting time (45%). EST, when applied to the context of children's living arrangements after divorce, provides a ready explanation of these findings. The central tenet of EST, that parent conflict can threaten the

child's sense of security about the parents' continued support, suggests that when parenting time is low, the father's potential withdrawal in response to parent conflict threatens the child with relatively little change in circumstances because the child already spends little time with the father. At 35% parenting time, however, the change in circumstance would be quite substantial; furthermore, insecurity about the father's continued involvement can be heightened because there are still long periods when the child is not at the father's home. In contrast, at equal parenting time, while the change in circumstance would be greater than at 35% time, there is less room for insecurity about the father's commitment to continued presence because it is concretized in his provision of an equal home for the child. Thus, equal parenting time, in and of itself, likely carries meaning to protect the child against insecurity about parent conflict.

Summary and Policy Implications. The effects of divorce on children are largely due to how much the divorce threatens their emotional security. Several lines of research suggest that reduced parenting time with fathers threatens emotional security by preventing children from having sufficient daily interactions to reassure them that they matter to their fathers. The correlational findings of many studies show that more parenting time with fathers up to and including equal parenting time is associated with improved emotional security in the father-child relationship. None of these studies found that mother-child relationship security decreased with increasing parenting time with fathers. This means that the children of divorce with the best long-term relationships with both parents are those who had equal parenting time.

High levels of parent conflict pose a different threat to emotional security. Children fear that conflict will cause parents who might otherwise be supportive and responsive to become emotionally and physically unavailable, and unable to cooperate to meet their needs. The few studies are mixed regarding whether more parenting time with fathers in high conflict families is

harmful for children. New analyses designed to detect complex relations between parenting time and conflict showed that in low conflict families, there was no indication that more parenting time was harmful. In high conflict families, both insecurity about parent conflict and stress-related somatic symptoms spiked at 35% parenting time with fathers, and were higher than in low conflict families at 35% time but not at equal parenting time. Equal parenting time appears to protect children from insecurity about parent conflict. This evidence has only recently become available because only recently have we been able to study larger samples of high conflict families with equal parenting.

Secure parent-child relationships and security about parent conflict are both important aspects of children's well-being, and both also contribute to better stress-related physical and mental health. The policy implication seems clear in low conflict families--namely, that equal parenting time is generally best for the children. In high conflict families, the little evidence we have suggests that security in relationships with fathers might plateau at 25% parenting time, while at 35% parenting time children might have more distress about parent conflict and somatic symptoms. Strictly speaking then, in high conflict families either 25% or equal parenting time might seem best; however, attempting to protect children from insecurity about parent conflict by giving them equal parenting time with their parents is preferable to giving them minimal (25%) parenting time with their fathers. For one reason, 25% parenting time is equivalent to the traditional standard of every other weekend throughout the calendar year, which is no longer the norm in the current cultural climate (see below).

Evidence for Causality of Parenting Time.

There is considerable turmoil in both the research literature and policy circles concerning the potential effects of legislation establishing a presumption in favor of equal parenting time.[32]

The issue that causes legitimate concern is the difficulty of drawing policy implications from the current correlational research based on families who selected into shared parenting under legal regimes without such presumptions. The worry is that better parents are selected into having more parenting time, so that the observed benefits are due to the type of parents rather than the amount of parenting time. While experimental studies on parenting time cannot be conducted, there are several reasons and lines of evidence to suggest that selection plays a minimal role in the observed benefits and consequently that parenting time plays a causal role.

The first reason is that better fathers are not able to choose to have more parenting time. In the classic Stanford Child Custody Study in California, Maccoby and Mnookin reported that about a third of fathers wanted joint physical custody, and another third wanted primary physical custody.[33] In Arizona, Fabricius and Hall found that similar proportions of college students reported that their fathers had wanted equal or nearly equal living arrangements, or to be their primary residential parent.[34] Yet in both studies, children's living arrangements were twice as likely to reflect the mothers' than the fathers' preferences. The amount of parenting time fathers have under current legal regimes is influenced by many factors, including the mother's preferences, the parents' perceptions of general maternal bias in the courts, advice from attorneys about likely outcomes, parents' financial resources to pursue their cases, differences in effectiveness of attorneys in arguing their clients' cases under the adversarial system, and individual biases among custody evaluators and judges.[35] This "funneling" process represents a different dynamic than the typical self-selection scenario in which people choose to engage or not in a certain behavior, and could in fact constitute a 'natural experiment' in which better fathers end up with considerably different amounts of parenting time.[36]

The second reason that parenting time is likely to play a causal role in benefits to the father-child relationship is that there is a "dose-response" pattern, which means that even small increases in parenting time across the range from 0% to 50% are significantly associated with increases in father-child relationship security.[37] Fathers are highly unlikely to have been funneled into increasing amounts of parenting time according to their increasing potential to be good fathers; thus, selection is an unlikely explanation for this dose-response pattern.

The third reason is that the beneficial effects of shared parenting do not seem to be due to better, more cooperative parents agreeing between themselves to share parenting time. We examined the publicly available data from the Stanford Child Custody Study [38] and found that the great majority of parents with shared parenting had to accept it after mediation, custody evaluation, trial, or judicial imposition.[39] Nevertheless, those with shared parenting time had the most well-adjusted children years later. In a recent study, we asked parents to report whether they had agreed about overnight parenting time when their children were 0 to 2 years of age, or whether they disagreed (i.e., "We never came to agreement, one of us got what he or she wanted mostly because the other one gave in," or "The final decision came out of either mediation, custody evaluation, attorney-led bargaining, or court hearing.").[40] If the children had equal overnights with each parent by the time they were 2 years old, it did not matter whether their parents had agreed to it or not; the two groups had equally good relationships with their fathers as well as with their mothers, and better relationships than those who had had fewer overnights. These findings could also constitute a different type of natural experiment, not one in which better fathers were distributed across different amounts of parenting time, but one in which courts imposed equal parenting over mothers' objections; in both cases, the findings suggest that

greater emotional security in parent-child relationships was due to the greater amounts of parenting time with fathers.

The fourth reason comes from studies of parental relocation after divorce. To the extent relocation is caused by external circumstances such as job opportunities, health, extended family factors, etc. that are not related to parenting ability, it could constitute another type of natural experiment. Ours are the only empirical studies of relocation, and they revealed no positive outcomes associated with parental relocation.[41] Instead, compared to non-relocating families, relocation of more than an hour's drive from the original family home was associated not only with long-term harm to children's emotional security with parents and their emotional security about parent conflict, but also with more anxiety, depression, aggression, delinquency, involvement with the juvenile justice system, associations with delinquent peers, and drug use. These associations held after controlling for parent conflict, domestic violence, and mothers' family income.[42] That is important because it eliminates the alternate explanation that conflict, violence, or financial strain caused both the relocation and the poor child outcomes. In addition, there were similar effects in the two most frequent cases – when the custodial mother relocated with the child away from the father's home, and when the non-custodial father relocated without the child away from the mother's home -- which indicates that the negative outcomes were not due to the child having to adjust to a new home environment, but rather to the separation of the child from the father.[43] When the fathers relocated, children were older at the time of the divorce and thus spent fewer years living apart than when the mothers relocated; we controlled for those factors as well, and still found similar effects for mother- and father-relocation.[44] Our relocation studies differed in methodologies and populations sampled, but nevertheless revealed similar results. Thus, as a set of studies, they provide a strong conceptual replication of the finding that

separation of the child from the father by more than an hour's drive, and the reduced parenting time that necessarily follows, is associated with a wide range of harmful consequences to the child.

Cultural Norms of Parenting Roles after Parental Separation.

Custody policies are value-laden. Their moral legitimacy comes from their connection to the prevailing, underlying cultural norms about gender roles and parenting; thus, they necessarily undergo fundamental historical change more so than other laws.[45] In connection to the long-term historical trend toward gender equality and involvement of fathers in child care, there is now consistent evidence of a strong public consensus that equal parenting time is best for children. The first indication of this consensus was found by Fabricius and Hall, who asked college students, "What do you feel is the best living arrangement for children after divorce?".[46] Regardless of how the question was phrased over the course of several semesters, whether students were male or female, or from divorced or intact families, approximately 70% to 80% answered, "equal time".[47] Subsequent surveys have found that large majorities favor equal parenting time in all the locales and among all the demographic groups in the United States and Canada in which this question has been asked, and across several variations in question format, including variations that ask respondents to consider differences in how much pre-divorce child care each parent provided, and differences in parent conflict. For example, we presented hypothetical cases to a large representative sample of Arizona adults, in which participants were asked how they would award parenting time if they were the judge.[48] Participants most commonly awarded equal parenting time even when the hypothetical case stated that one parent had provided the most child care and when there was high mutual parent conflict. There were no significant differences by gender, age, education, income, political outlook, whether the

respondents themselves were currently married, had ever divorced, had children, or had paid or received child support.

This strong cultural norm that equal parenting time is best for children would by itself provide sufficient justification that a legal presumption for equal parenting time is in children's best interests. The reason is that in this cultural milieu, those children who received the old standard, every-other-weekend visitation would be placed in the position of comparing themselves to their peers who had equal parenting time and searching for an explanation for why they are different. As a result, many children would unnecessarily worry that their own fathers' limited post-divorce involvement with them was due to their fathers' deficiencies, or their fathers' lack of caring, or their own unworthiness. A legal presumption for equal parenting time is in children's best interest because it would protect them from this source of emotional insecurity.

Evaluation of a Policy for Equal Parenting Time.

Lawmakers are often counseled to reject a presumption of equal parenting time, under the assumption that it would impose a one-size-fits-all rule and prevent judges from using discretion in individual cases to protect children. Fortunately, we have a test case to allow us to examine whether a presumption constrains judicial discretion and puts children at risk. Just such a law has been in operation in Arizona since 2013, and an initial state-wide evaluation of the law has been completed.[49]

The landmark reform of Arizona's child custody statute was a large, team effort by judges, attorneys, court staff, and mental health professionals who provide mediation and evaluation services to parents, domestic violence experts, legislators, lay mothers and fathers, and one academic researcher (Fabricius). The legislative process began several years earlier with

education about the new research findings on the benefits associated with shared parenting time, delivered by Fabricius at the annual workshops and training sessions sponsored by the state Bar Association and the state chapter of the Association of Family and Conciliation Courts. Surveys at the last of these sessions in 2008 and 2010 showed that judges were strongly in favor of equal parenting time for fit parents.

The new statute was carefully worded to promote equal parenting time while still requiring judges to weigh the traditional children's best interest factors, such as parental mental health, that might disqualify either parent. The statute states at §25-103(B): "Absent evidence to the contrary, it is in a child's best interest to have substantial, frequent, meaningful and continuing parenting time with both parents;" and at (C): "A court shall apply the provisions of this title in a manner that is consistent with this section." It further states at §25-403.02(B): "Consistent with children's best interests, the court shall adopt a parenting plan that maximizes [both parents'] respective parenting time." The traditional preference for the parent who had provided primary caretaking was removed and replaced at §25-403(A.1) with language directing courts to consider instead "the past, present and potential future relationship between the parent and the child." Thus, without citing percentages of parenting time, the law puts the focus on providing the child with as close to equal parenting time with both parents as possible for that family.

The evaluation study[50] consisted of a survey sent to all the state conciliation court staff (response rate = 82%), family court judges (response rate = 40%), private mental health providers (response rate = 50%), and private attorneys (response rate = 11%), asking for their perceptions of how the law is working. All four groups agreed that the courts are interpreting and applying the law as a presumption for equal parenting time, and that as a result, fit fathers are

highly likely to have their petitions for equal parenting time awarded. This law thus provides a strong test case of whether a parenting time presumption constrains judicial discretion or exposes children to harm.

The findings indicate that the Arizona law does neither. On average, the four groups of family law professionals rated the law positively overall, and positively in terms of children's best interests. The survey also allowed participants to express their own ideas about what is good and bad about the law. Judges seldom said anything about their discretion to individualize parenting time being constrained by the law. On the contrary, they often said that they had to correct some parents' misunderstanding that the law was a one-size-fits-all rule. Thus, Arizonans have not encountered a trade-off between equal parenting time and judicial discretion as a result of courts being directed to try to maximize children's time with both parents.

The four groups of family law professionals reported small increases after the law in allegations of domestic violence, child abuse, and substance abuse, which indicates that the law does not dissuade parents from raising these concerns, but they reported essentially no changes in parent conflict or legal conflict leading up to the final decree. There was some reported increase in post-decree filings, most likely reflecting requests to have older decrees re-adjudicated under the new law. Finally, there were two subgroups that did not evaluate the law positively. About half of the attorneys and one-third of the mental health providers evaluated the law negatively. It is not clear why they differed from the rest of their colleagues. The mental health providers who evaluated the law negatively had practiced for fewer years than their colleagues who evaluated it positively, but they did not differ by sex. The two sub-groups of attorneys did not differ by sex or number of years in practice.

United States Statutes Regarding Presumptions of Equal Parenting Time.

In addition to Arizona, just three other states have statutes with language stating a presumption for equal or maximized parenting time in a final decree. Most recently, in 2018, Kentucky amended its statutory provision governing custody following divorce, K.RS. § 403.270, to provide that "there shall be a presumption, rebuttable by a preponderance of evidence, that joint custody and equally shared parenting time is in the best interest of the child." In 2007, Wisconsin enacted Code Section 767.41 (4)(a)(2) providing that courts "shall set a placement schedule that maximizes the amount of time the child may spend with each parent, taking into account geographic separation and accommodations for different households." However, the issue of equal parenting time in Wisconsin still seems to be unresolved because the 2018 summer legislative leadership unanimously approved a bi-partisan Legislative Council Study Committee on Child Placement and Support, the scope of which states that it "may consider alternatives to current law concerning physical placement, including a rebuttable presumption that equal placement is in the child's best interest." Since 1994, Louisiana Civil Code Article 132 has dictated that courts must award "joint custody" to divorcing parents unless they agree otherwise or unless one parent shows by clear and convincing evidence that having sole custody would be in a child's best interests, and a subsequently enacted statutory provision, LSA-R.S. 9:335(A)(2)(b), clarifies that when joint custody is ordered, "to the extent it is feasible and in the best interest of the child, physical custody of the children should be shared equally." These Louisiana statutes preceded the modern research on shared parenting time and might have been enacted in response to earlier studies.[51] One other state, Alaska, has a statutory presumption of equal parenting time, but only for temporary orders.

Five other states' statutes include a presumption regarding parenting time but fall short of presuming equal parenting time. Nevada, in Code sections 125C.0015 and 125C.0035, presumes

"joint physical custody" at the temporary and final decrees but does not define it. Arkansas, in Code section 9-13-101 "favors," but does not presume, an award of "joint custody," which is defined as reasonably equal division of time between the parents. New Mexico's Code §40-4-9.1 presumes "joint physical custody" at the temporary orders stage, but states that it does *not* imply equal parenting time. The District of Columbia and Idaho both presume "joint custody" but define it as "frequent and continuing contact."[52]

Recent Canadian Case Law under the Maximum Contact Principle in Section 16(10) of the Divorce Act.

Custody policy in Canada is established at the national level, and there is currently no statutory presumption for equal parenting time. There is something called the *maximum contact principle* in section 16(10) of the Divorce Act, but it is universally considered to not be a presumption in favor of shared parenting. Nevertheless, case law in Canada has evolved toward equal parenting time. These cases are the decisions of individual trial judges and appellate courts making their own use of the maximum-contact principle and are not yet well-known. The Ontario cases have been reviewed by others.[53] I provide a brief, selective summary below.

Equal parenting time presupposes some arrangement for parents to share in decision-making about the child's life (sometimes called joint legal custody). Courts were traditionally reluctant to order shared decision-making in high conflict cases, but that has been changing since the Ontario Court of Appeal cases of *Kaplanis v. Kaplanis* (2005) and *Ladisa v. Ladisa* (2005) affirmed that shared decision-making could be ordered to preserve each parent's relationship with the child. Mostly since 2005, 70 cases have used that principle to order shared decision-making despite evidence of parent conflict and failure to communicate and cooperate.

For example, in *Brook v. Brook* (2006), Justice Quinn noted that, "The quest for joint [legal] custody must not be restricted to those who can pass the Ozzie-and-Harriet test." These cases are notable for the careful and nuanced consideration judges gave to the nature, extent, history, and motivation for the conflict, and for creative, individually-tailored provisions to avoid future conflict over decisions about the child's life.

At least 34 cases have used the maximum contact principle to order equal parenting time. For example, the Saskatchewan Court of Appeal in *Ackerman v. Ackerman* (2014) noted that, although there was no presumption in favor of shared parenting by the maximum contact principle, "maximum contact between a child and each of his or her parents is desirable," and upheld the trial judge's alternating-week equal parenting time order.

In *Fraser v. Fraser* (2016), Justice McGee noted, "Ongoing relationships with each of one's parents is a right. When a parent argues for unequal parenting time, the onus is on that parent to demonstrate why the proposed schedule is in the child's best interests." She found that, given the complexity of the family members' lives with three young, active children, an alternating-week schedule would reduce the amount of transitions, maximize contact with both parents, and ensure that each parent took responsibility for homework. Each parent would also take the children to activities while in the other parent's care to remedy the court's concern that seven days would be too long to be away from a parent. This provided the additional benefit of dividing up transportation when the children had conflicting schedules.

In C. *(M.) v.* C. *(T.)* (2010), the court applied the maximum contact principle to order equal parenting time on a three-day rotating basis despite a high level of parent conflict. Justice

Walsh eloquently expressed the psychological theories and research findings about emotional security that I have described above:

> I do not do this in an attempt to be fair to the parents, but rather because it will allow for more meaningful interaction between the children and both parents, particularly the father. It will, in my opinion, be better for the children's mental, emotional and physical health; reduce the disruption in the children's sense of continuity; foster the love, affection and ties that exist between not only the children and parents, but the children with the paternal grandmother and with the extended families of both parents; and will provide the children with a secure environment

In *Gibney v. Conahan* (2011), Associate Chief Justice O'Neil of the Nova Scotia Supreme Court noted the influence of parenting research reported in the media and the prevailing cultural norms about gender roles and parenting:

> Much is written and appears in popular magazines, on radio and TV about the need for children to have the opportunity to bond with both parents. The litigants herein espouse this view. They do not agree on how much time Mr. Conahan requires to achieve and maintain a loving and deep relationship with the children and they with him. Ms. Gibney proposes that he parent six overnights every four weeks and five hours on four evenings over this period. In keeping with the changing role of women in the work place and men in the household, as well as an increased acceptance of the parenting ability of men, the law has evolved. Age-old stereotypes about the role of men and women as parents are slowly dissipating.

The court was satisfied that each parent would maximize the parenting opportunity afforded to them, and that equal parenting time would allow continuity with friends and school and time with extended family members. The court found that a weekly equal parenting time schedule with a mid-week visit for the other parent was in the children's best interests.

Conclusions

From all the perspectives examined, the evidence suggests that a legal presumption for equal parenting time is in children's best interests. First, the correlational research reveals that children's emotional security is enhanced at equal parenting time in both low- and high-conflict families. Second, the following lines of argument converge to suggest that more parenting time with fathers actually causes enhanced emotional security in children: Good fathers are not able to self-select into having more parenting time; the relation between parenting time and security of father-child relationships shows a dose-response pattern; benefits are found when courts impose equal parenting time; and poor child-welfare outcomes result when relocation separates fathers from children. Third, cultural norms about parenting roles have changed in the last generation, and this is reflected in public endorsement of equal parenting time. Fourth, the 2013 equal parenting law in Arizona has been evaluated positively by the state's family law professionals. Finally, Canadian case law, reflecting changed cultural norms rather than any national legislative change, has evolved to often order equal parenting time over one parent's objections even in cases of high parent conflict, accompanied by well-reasoned judicial opinions about how that is in children's best interests.

The problem with not having a legal presumption of equal parenting time is that many parents are likely to make parenting time decisions under the impression that the family courts

are biased toward primary parenting time for mothers. This impression of maternal bias was universally held in Arizona before the law was passed.[54] The mere impression of bias encourages parents to settle out of court for less parenting time with fathers, and becomes a self-fulfilling prophesy.[55]

As Joan Kelly has pointed out, the current child custody statutes were written in the absence of evidence of how well they promoted children's well-being.[56] The evidence that is now available is compelling that failure to enact presumptions of equal parenting time risks unnecessary harm to children's emotional security with their parents, and consequently unnecessary harm to public health in the form of long-term stress-related mental and physical health problems among children of divorce.

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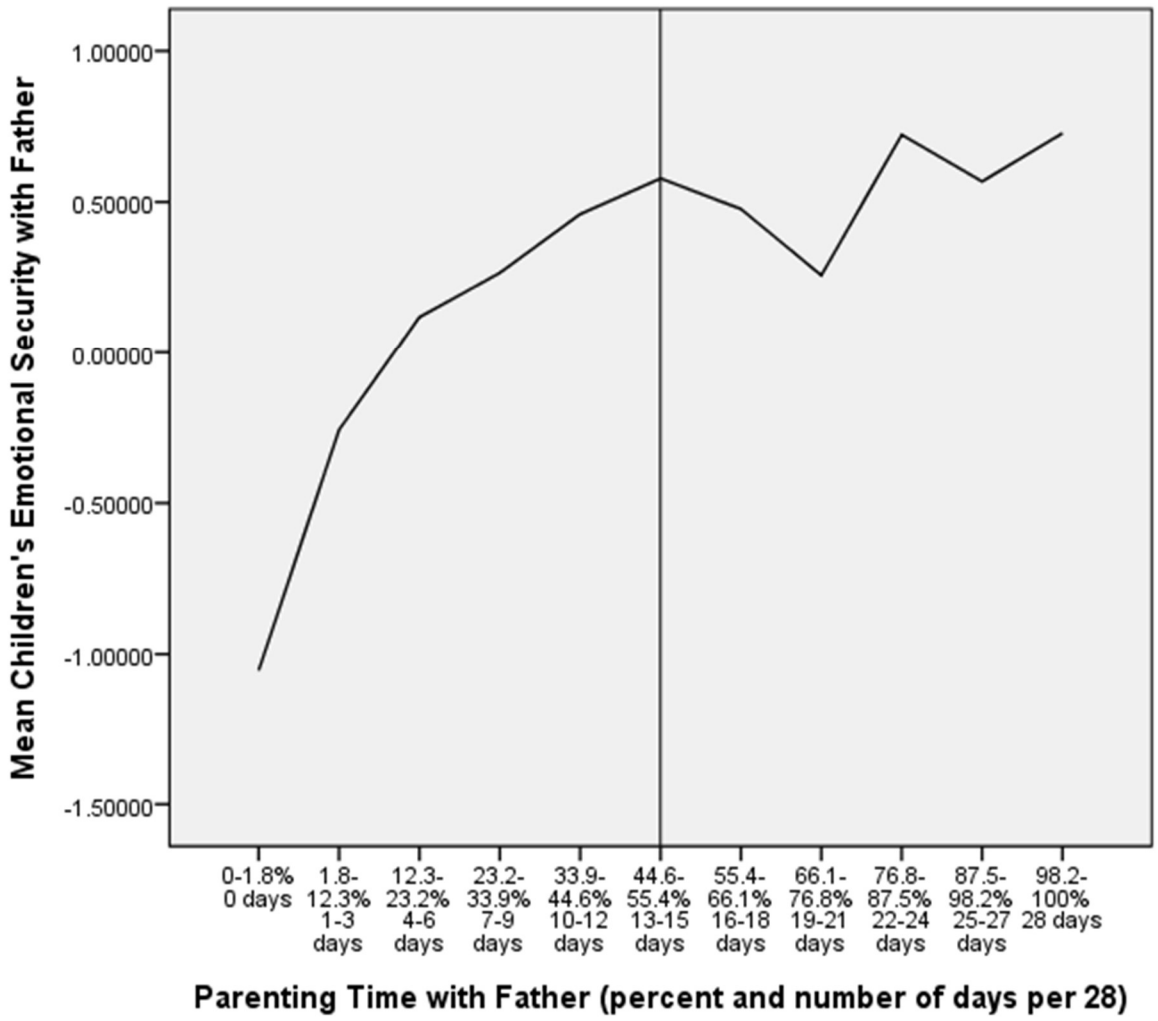

Figure 1. Relation between the amounts of parenting time per month (4 weeks) students had with their fathers and the emotional security of their relationships with their fathers in young adulthood.

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Should Infants and Toddlers Have Frequent Overnight Parenting Time With Fathers? The Policy Debate and New Data

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Whether children of separated parents 2 years of age and younger should have frequent overnight parenting time with noncustodial fathers has been the subject of much debate but little data. Contrary to some previous findings, the current study found benefits to both parent-child relationships associated with overnights (a) up to and including equal numbers of overnights at both parents' homes, (b) for both the long-term mother-child and father-child relationships, and (c) both when children were 2 years old, as well as when they were under 1 year of age. These benefits held after controlling for subsequent parenting time with fathers in childhood and adolescence, parent education and conflict up to 5 years after the separation, and children's sex and age at separation. While the findings do not establish causality they provide strong support for policies to encourage frequent overnight parenting time for infants and toddlers, because the benefits associated with overnights also held for parents who initially agreed about overnights as well as for those who disagreed and had the overnight parenting plan imposed over 1 parent's objections. The observed benefits for the long-term father-child relationship are consistent with findings from intervention studies showing that fathers who are more involved with infants and toddlers develop better parenting skills and relationships with their children.

Keywords: shared parenting time, parent-child relationships, infants, parent conflict, child custody policy

About 15 years ago, a debate arose among family policymakers, researchers, legal scholars, and mental health professionals about potential risks and benefits of infants and young children of divorced or separated parents spending overnight parenting time with their noncustodial fathers (Biringen, Howard, & Tanner, 2002; Kelly & Lamb, 2000; Lamb & Kelly, 2001; Solomon & Biringen, 2001; Warshak, 2000, 2002). Recently, a special issue on attachment and overnights appeared in July 2011 in *Family Court Review*, the journal of the international Association of Family and Conciliation Courts (AFCC), followed by several commentaries (Garber, 2012; Hynan, 2012; Lamb, 2012; Ludolph, 2012). In the special issue several prominent attachment researchers, including Carol George, Judith Solomon (George, Solomon, & McIntosh, 2011), Mary Main (Main, Hesse, & Hesse, 2011), and Alan Sroufe (Sroufe & McIntosh, 2011) offered specific policy recommendations to the professional community, and by extension to parents, against frequent overnight parenting time with fathers. Sroufe appeared to speak for the group when he concluded that:

> prior to age 18 months, overnights away from the primary carer (*sic*) should be quite rare . . . . At 3 [years], I would not recommend it to be equal time. It is easier to see that happening when the child is 6 or 8. (Sroufe & McIntosh, 2011, pp. 472–473)

Sroufe assured readers that these recommendations came with "the weight of expert attachment opinion" behind them (Sroufe & McIntosh, 2011, p. 472). The theoretical justification for the policy recommendation that overnight parenting time during infancy and toddlerhood should be "quite rare" is the notion of monotropy, originally proposed by John Bowlby in his formulation of modern attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969/1982), that the infant initially forms an attachment to only the primary caregiver. According to this reasoning, overnight separations from the primary caregiver risk damage to that first relationship, with potentially far-reaching consequences. Conversely, postponing overnights should not harm the child's relationship with the other parent because the child is initially forming an attachment with only the primary parent. The attachment relationship with the other parent should be more affected by parenting time during later years than during infancy. However, as Everett Waters, another prominent attachment researcher pointed out also in the special issue:

> Bowlby softened up on the idea of monotropy and it is not well justified in the logic of the theory that is understood today. There are people who would assert this, but there are no propositions of attachment theory that lead you to deduce that we must have this monotropic tendency. It is possible for infants and children and for adults to use a multiplicity of figures for secure-base support. (Waters & McIntosh, 2011, pp. 479–480)

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Soon after, a neutral stance was taken in a second special issue (Pruett & DiFonzo, 2014) that reported on a "think tank on shared parenting" convened by AFCC and composed of 19 social scientists and mental health practitioners, 12 legal professionals, and one activist-educator. The report concluded that research had not settled the issue and eschewed any prescriptions about the amount of overnight parenting time for young children.

At the same time, two review papers appeared in support of overnight parenting time during the child's first three years. Warshak (2014) was published with the endorsement of 110 developmental psychologists and mental health practitioners, and argued that the broader literature and theory justified frequent overnights as beneficial to the father-child relationship and not harmful to the mother-child relationship. Nielsen (2014) argued that the overnighting debate is the latest example in which advocates, in this case those opposed to overnights for young children, have promoted and misrepresented one or two studies in order to influence policy.

This issue of the effects of the *quantity* of parenting time (i.e., frequency of overnights) on parent-child *relationships* signals an important change of focus. It has been common in the research literature to find statements that "it is the quality—not the quantity—of time that matters most to children's outcomes" (Pruett et al., 2016, p. 91), and to find researchers (e.g., Adamsons & Johnson, 2013) testing the "straw man" question of whether the quantity of time *or* father-child relationships better predict child outcomes (Fabricius, Sokol, Diaz, & Braver, 2012, 2016). Research on overnights redirects us toward the more appropriate question of whether the quantity of time predicts better relationships, which, in turn, predict other outcomes. This question grounds the research on parenting time in child developmental theory, central to which is attachment theory (Fabricius, Braver, Diaz, & Velez, 2010). This will allow us to understand and test hypothesized causal mechanisms connecting the quantity of parenting time to parent-child relationships, and relationships to long-term outcomes. The shared parenting literature has been rightly criticized for being atheoretical (Irving & Benjamin, 1995; Smyth, McIntosh, Emery, & Howarth, 2016), but in this time of social change with policies at stake hypothesis-testing of well-grounded theoretical models is critical to understand how these complex processes work. However, there are, to date, only three empirical studies of parenting time and parent-child relationships for infants and toddlers (McIntosh, Smyth, & Kelaher, 2010, 2013; Solomon & George, 1999; Tornello et al., 2013). One other (Pruett, Ebling, & Insabella, 2004) did not assess parent-child relationships.

In the initial study (Solomon & George, 1999), researchers assessed 16-month-olds' attachments to each of their parents one month apart in the Strange Situation. Those with at least one overnight with father per month formed the overnight group and those with at least one daytime visit but no overnights formed the no-overnight group. The researchers also included a married group, but the meaningful comparison is the overnight group to the no-overnight group, not to the married group because that comparison confounds effects due to divorce with effects due to overnights.

Attachment classifications were not significantly different in the overnight group compared with the no-overnight group, for either mothers or fathers. Nevertheless, given a non-significant trend ($p = .10$) for overnight mothers to have fewer secure and more disorganized or unclassifiable attachments, the researchers tested whether two sets of factors were related to attachment within the overnight group. The first set tested the *linear effects hypothesis* that effects of overnights "should be more pronounced the longer and/or the more frequent the overnight separations are and the earlier such arrangements are put into place" (Solomon & George, 1999, p. 5), and included eight measures (e.g., longest number of consecutive overnights per month, total number of overnights per month). The findings did not support the linear effects hypothesis. None of the measures of length, frequency, or age of initiation of overnight separations from the mother was related to attachment classifications for either parent.

The second set tested the hypothesis that "risk [of overnights] may be potentiated and maintained by adverse conditions, or . . . may under supportive conditions, be prevented" (Solomon & George, 1999, p. 5), and included the mother's "psychological protection" (i.e., her report of how well she adapted the visitation schedule to infants' needs and responded to signs of stress during transitions), the mother's mental health, and the mother's report of the parents' communication and conflict. The authors reasoned that overnights might make mother-infant attachment security more susceptible to deficiencies in each of these factors, in which case these factors should relate to infant-mother attachment only, or especially, in the overnight group. Parent conflict showed the predicted effects. Only in the overnight group was more parent conflict associated with less mother-child security. Parent communication was not significantly related to attachment in the overnight group ($p = .09$), although the means for both groups were in the predicted directions, and there was no evidence of overnight-related attachment susceptibility to deficiencies in mother's mental health or psychological protection. For fathers, better mental health, more communication, and less conflict might have been expected to facilitate secure attachments, but these three factors did not predict attachment to fathers more so in the overnight than in the no-overnight group.

In sum, the initial study provided limited evidence for effects of overnights on infant-parent attachment. Out of 12 analyses for mothers, there was one significant finding (overnight-related susceptibility to parent conflict) and two nonsignificant trends (overnight-related susceptibility to poor parent communication, and fewer secure attachments in the overnight group). Out of 12 analyses for fathers, there were no effects associated with overnights.

Pruett, Ebling, and Insabella (2004) studied parents with either a young child (0 to 3 years) or an older child (4 to 6 years) at the time of their court filing. Testing occurred 15 to 18 months later. Both parents rated the child's behavior problems using nine subscales of the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL; Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1983). Overnights were scored dichotomously (present or absent) because analyzing frequency did not add any information; thus, as in Solomon and George (1999) there was no support for the linear effects hypothesis.

After controlling for age and sex of the child, parent conflict, and negative changes in the father-child relationship since the separation, only the Social Problems subscale of the CBCL was related to overnights. Fathers reported that children with overnights in both age groups showed fewer social problems. The Social Problems subscale was administered only to those aged 4 years or older, which meant that it probably included less than half

of the younger group (i.e., those from about 2 [1/2] through 3 years). Thus, overnights for children aged 2 and 3 years were significantly associated with one behavioral benefit 15 to 18 months later, while in Solomon and George (1999) they were significantly associated with one cost to infant-mother attachment, but both studies yielded mostly null findings.

McIntosh et al. (2010, 2013) examined infants (aged 0 to 1) and 2- to 3-year-olds in the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children, controlling for family socioeconomic status, parenting warmth, hostility toward the child, and parent cooperation and conflict. Children were divided into three ordinal groups (no overnights with some daytime-only visits, moderate number of overnights, and high number of overnights). Three groups are the minimum needed to test the linear effects hypothesis that more overnights result in more problems. If true, then as illustrated in Figure 1a, there should be an increase in problems between the no overnight group and the moderate group, and a similar increase between the moderate and high groups, resulting in a more-or-less straight line. Two types of nonlinear, threshold effects could also result from overnights, one in which only the high group showed elevated levels of problems (Figure 1b) and one in which both the moderate and high groups showed equivalent elevated levels of problems (Figure 1c). These nonlinear patterns would require special explanation. Finally, U-shaped patterns (Figure 1d), in which the no overnight and high groups show similar elevated levels of problems and the moderate group has less problems, have no clear interpretation and cannot be taken at face value as evidence for effects of overnights.

The researchers (McIntosh et al., 2010, 2013) compared the moderate group with the high group, but for reasons unexplained they did not compare the no overnight group with the moderate group. Instead they also compared the no-overnight group to the high group. That analysis plan does not allow a clear test of the linear effects hypothesis because it does not compare the no-overnight group to the moderate group; thus, the following characterizations of the patterns of their findings are based on the results of the two comparisons they did test. For consistency with their report, I follow their convention of interpreting effects with $p < .08$.

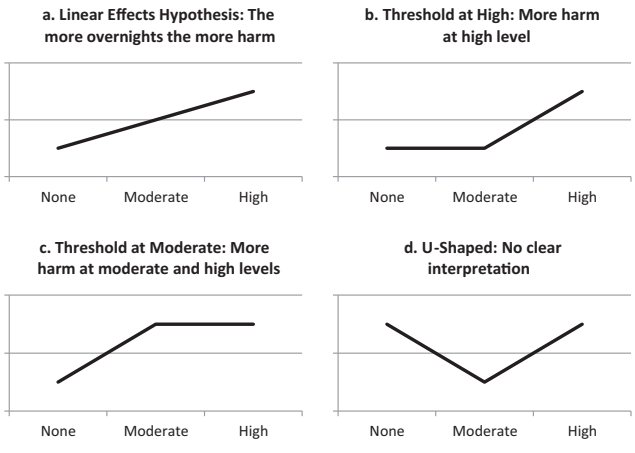

Figure 1. Four potential patterns of association between three levels of overnights (none, moderate, high) and harm to child.

For infants, there were no linear patterns. There were two U-shaped patterns similar to Figure 1d in which the no-overnight and high groups showed more problems with wheezing and irritability than the moderate group. There was one threshold pattern similar to Figure 1c for "visual monitoring of the primary caregiver," which the authors took to indicate anxiety about the primary caregiver's availability. However, this variable was composed of three selected items (e.g., "Does this child try to get you to notice interesting objects—just to get you to look at the objects, not to get you to do anything with them?") from two subscales (Eye Gaze and Communication) of the Communication and Symbolic Behavior Scales (Wetherby & Prizant, 2002). This instrument assesses infants' readiness to learn to talk. Infants who exhibit more of the behaviors measured in these two subscales are more ready to learn to talk. None of the items in these two subscales, including the selected three, ask about anxiety about the availability of the caregiver, or focus on situations likely to induce anxiety, such as an impending or potential separation. Thus these three items lack even the most basic face validity (i.e., they do not ask directly about the phenomenon under study). McIntosh et al. (2010, 2013) and McIntosh, Pruett, & Kelly, 2015 assert face validity without warrant, and offer no evidence of the other more rigorous aspects of validity required for scientific credibility. The other three outcome variables for children under two showed no relation to overnights.

For 2- to 3-year-olds, the only linear pattern was that more overnights were associated with more problems with persistence. There was one threshold pattern similar to Figure 1b for problem behaviors, indicating that only high numbers of overnights were associated with elevated problem behaviors. Conversely, overnights were associated with better health, in that the high group showed less wheezing (inverse of Figure 1b) and both the moderate and high groups were rated as having better global health (inverse of Figure 1c). The other three outcomes for 2- to 3-year-olds showed no relation to overnights.

In sum, out of 13 analyses one showed a linear relation indicating that more overnights were associated with 2- to 3-year-olds' difficulty with persistence; one showed that only high numbers of overnights were associated with more 2- to 3-year-old problem behaviors; two showed nonlinear patterns of benefits for 2- to 3-year-olds' health (less wheezing and better global health); two showed ambiguous (U-shaped) patterns for infant wheezing and irritability; six showed no associations; and the only assessment relating to mother-child relationships was not interpretable ("visual monitoring"). These are the findings that Nielsen (2014) argued have been used by advocates opposed to overnights for young children.

The most recent study (Tornello et al., 2013) used data from the Fragile Families and Child Well-Being Study, a large longitudinal data set begun in 1998 to 2000 to study the risks associated with inner-city poverty, in which deliberate oversampling produced a sample in which most parents were unmarried, racial/ethnic minority, and low income. The sample could be considered ideal for detecting negative effects of overnights according to Solomon and George's (1999) hypothesis that overnights leave children more susceptible to other family stressors, of which these fragile families had many.

Following McIntosh et al. (2010), the researchers categorized children at age 1 and again at age 3 into ordinal groups (no

overnights with some daytime-only visits, moderate, and high numbers of overnights), and also neglected to compare the no-overnight group to the moderate groups. One outcome measure at age 3 was mothers' ratings on the Toddler Attachment Q-sort (TAQ), a shortened and modified version of the Attachment Q set (AQS; Waters, 1995). This measure is designed to be administered by trained observers, not by untrained parents. A comprehensive and authoritative assessment of the validity of the AQS using data from 139 studies on 13,835 children (van IJzendoorn, Vereijken, Bakermans-Kranenburg, & Riksen-Walraven, 2004) concluded that having mothers administer the AQS is unwarranted because that method failed to meet acceptable standards of validity, making it unclear what was being measured. Doubts about the validity of the mothers' ratings in Tornello et al. (2013) are reinforced because there was an uncharacteristically low overall rate (i.e., 25%) of "insecure" ratings for a poverty sample. Mulligan and Flanagan (2006; Table 4) report that in a nationally representative study within the United States the rate of insecure mother-child attachment for families below the poverty threshold is almost twice that rate (i.e., 47%), and the rate at or above the poverty level is also higher (i.e., 36%). Other outcome measures, assessed at ages 3 and 5, were mothers' reports of children's adjustment using seven subscales of the CBCL at each age. Control variables included mothers' age, income, education, race, depression, and relationships with the fathers; fathers' parenting quality; children's age and sex; and number of adults in household.

Regarding mothers' TAQ ratings at age 3, there was a U-shaped pattern with overnights at age 1. The proportions of children rated as "insecure" in the no overnight group ($M = .25$) and in the high group (.43) were not significantly different. The proportion in the moderate group (.16) was inexplicably low, especially for this sample, and was significantly lower than the high group. There was no association with overnights between the ages of 1 and 3.

Among Tornello et al.'s (2013) 14 analyses of children's adjustment at age 3, and 14 analyses at age 5, there was one threshold pattern in which moderate and high levels of overnights between the ages of 1 and 3.were associated with more positive behaviors at age 5 (inverse of Figure 1c). As with the previous studies, the findings could be best described as contradictory (one nonlinear beneficial association at age 5 and one U-shaped pattern at age 1) and limited (28 remaining analyses showed null effects).

In sum, across the four studies there was one linear association, in which more overnights at age 2 to 3 were associated with more difficulty with persistence, and one threshold pattern, in which only high numbers of overnights at age 2 to 3 were associated with more problem behaviors (McIntosh et al., 2010, 2013). However, the latter finding is contradicted by two other findings: Children aged 2 and 3 years with any overnights showed *fewer* social problems (Pruett et al., 2004), and 3-year-olds with moderate and high levels of overnights showed more *positive* behaviors at age 5 (Tornello et al., 2013). Similarly, the U-shaped patterns regarding overnights at age 1 and wheezing and irritability are contradicted by the threshold *benefits* regarding overnights at age 2 and wheezing and health (McIntosh et al., 2010, 2013). None of these findings involved mother-child relationships, the area in which overnight separations should purportedly have had the most direct consequences. The only two indications of harm to the mother-child relationship were nonlinear associations obtained with measures that lack demonstrated validity (i.e., the threshold pattern with "visual monitoring" in McIntosh et al., 2010, 2013, and the U-shaped pattern with mother ratings of attachment behaviors in Tornello et al., 2013), and thus are not interpretable on two grounds. The only study that used the gold-standard Strange Situation attachment assessment for young children (Solomon & George, 1999) found no associations for either parent with eight measures of the length, frequency, and age of initiation of overnights. At least 39 other tests in these studies found no associations with overnights, even at the trend level (i.e., $p = .10$).

Thus, the evidence provided by the four studies is limited and contradictory, and systematic comparison of the different findings is difficult. A number of other reviews of these studies have appeared, citations to which are provided by Emery et al. (2016). It seems an understatement to say that this empirical literature does not provide an adequate foundation for evidence-based policy, and Emery et al. (2016) concur.

The current study was designed to contribute to this debate by focusing on three factors not addressed by the previous studies. First, the previous studies examined only short-term associations with overnights. That makes it difficult to distinguish temporary adjustment problems from more enduring changes in child behavior and quality of parent-child relationships. Second, apart from the first study (Solomon & George, 1999), the three subsequent studies did not maintain a focus on the father-child relationship. Proponents of overnight parenting time for infants and toddlers (e.g., Warshak, 2014) argue that it should increase father commitment to child rearing and benefit the father-child relationship. Third, none of the previous studies examined daytime-only parenting time, although proponents of postponing overnights until the child is past toddlerhood (e.g., Sroufe & McIntosh, 2011), argue that brief daytime visits should allow fathers adequate time to acquire parenting skills and lay the foundation for good father-child relationships.

To assess the quality of long-term relationships with both mothers and fathers, we recruited college students whose parents separated before they were 3 years old and asked them to report on their *current* relationships with each of their parents. To assess daytime-only and overnight parenting time at the father's home, we also recruited their parents and asked them to report the amount of both during each of the child's first three years.

Concerns have been raised (e.g., Garfinkel, McLanahan, & Wallerstein, 2004) that college students from divorced families might give an overly optimistic picture of divorce. One can imagine that they and their parents might be predisposed to shared parenting, and that they might be less affected by their parents' divorces and consequently might have better parent-child relationships than noncollege divorce samples. However, while intuitively plausible, there is little support for these two assumptions. First, college students from divorced families and the general public both overwhelmingly endorse shared parenting, and there are few demographic differences in endorsement within the general public (Braver, Ellman, Votruba, & Fabricius, 2011; Fabricius et al., 2010; Fabricius & Hall, 2000). Second, the levels of lingering painful feelings about their parents' divorces, including feelings of loss and abandonment and parental blame, are similar in elite college students and low-income community samples of adolescents and young adults, many of whom had chaotic family backgrounds including abuse and extreme poverty (Laumann-Billings & Emery, 2000). Consequently, the associations between shared

parenting time and child adjustment outcomes are the same in convenience samples (including college students) and samples obtained from court records and in-school students (Bauserman, 2002; Laumann-Billings & Emery, 2000). But the most important reason why a college sample is appropriate in the present case is that the hypothesis of harm is based on an argument about the biology of the infant and the supposed need for one consistently available primary caregiver, and none of the attachment theorists (George, Solomon, et al., 2011; Main, Hesse, & Hesse, 2011; Sroufe & McIntosh, 2011) suggested that this hypothesis should not apply equally to infants who will and will not eventually attend college. Thus, we judged that the benefit of using college students and their parents in this study (i.e., the ability to study long-term associations with early overnights without having to wait 20 years for longitudinal data) outweighed any concerns about the representativeness of the sample.

Associations between overnights and parent-child relationships could be biased by parent conflict and parent education. Parents with less conflict or more education might provide more overnights, and their relationships with their children might be enhanced by those factors rather than the higher levels of overnight parenting time. In order to control for these factors, parents also reported the frequency of parent conflict before and up to five years after the separation, and their level of education.

In order to detect effects of parenting time during the child's first three years, it is necessary to control for effects of later parenting time. Thus, parents also reported parenting time with the father when the child was 5 to 10, and 10 to 15 years old. We also controlled for age of initiation of overnights by asking parents to report whether they were separated during one, two, or all three of children's first three years.

Furthermore, we tested for differential effects of overnights when children were under 1 year old and when they were 2 years old. This allowed us to evaluate the argument (e.g., Sroufe & McIntosh, 2011) that overnights during infancy, when children lack the language and cognitive skills to understand time, recall the past, and anticipate future events, should make them most vulnerable to the stress of overnight separations, and lead to the most enduring disruptions in their relationships with their mothers.

Finally, we used an approach outlined by Fabricius, Braver, Diaz, and Velez (2010) that can yield the information needed to inform decision makers about the wisdom of imposing shared parenting time on families where only one parent wants it. This involves distinguishing the families in which both parents initially agreed to shared parenting time and thus presumably volunteered for it, from families in which the parents disagreed and shared parenting was in some way imposed upon them. If imposed shared parenting is found to be associated with benefits, it would justify a rebuttable presumption for shared parenting. Fabricius et al. (2012) used this approach on publically available data from the Stanford Child Custody Study (Maccoby & Mnookin, 1992). They found that the great majority of parents with shared parenting had to accept it after mediation, custody evaluation, trial, or judicial imposition. Nevertheless, those with shared parenting time had the most well-adjusted children years later. We employed this approach in the current study by asking parents to report whether they agreed about overnight parenting time, or whether they disagreed (i.e., "never came to agreement, one of us got what he or she wanted mostly because the other one gave in," or "the final decision came out of either mediation, custody evaluation, attorney-led bargaining, or court hearing").

Students rated the current quality of their relationships with each of their parents on five sets of indicators. We selected these indicators because they should collectively tap into feelings of security about continued parental support during the challenges and uncertainties of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2004). We assessed young adults' current attributions of parental blame for family problems (Laumann-Billings & Emery, 2000), their representations of how warm and responsive each parent had been (Parker, 1989), how much they had enjoyed spending time together, the overall closeness of their relationship, and how much they felt they mattered to each parent (Marshall, 2001; Marshall, 2004; Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981). The perception of how much one matters to one's parent is closely related to how much trust one has that the parent will be there when needed and, hence, how emotionally secure a child feels in the relationship. Greater perceived mattering to parents, especially to fathers, has been found to predict fewer internalizing and externalizing problems during adolescence (Schenck et al., 2009; Suh et al., 2016).

Method

Participants

The study was one of several projects offered at a large Southwestern university between 2012 and 2016 to fulfill the research participation requirement for introductory psychology. Students who appeared eligible based on screening questions about when their parents separated were emailed an invitation to participate in a study about "the living arrangements that parents who are divorced or separated make for their children." The invitation explained they would take an online survey and at least one of their parents would also have to respond to a different survey. Students were encouraged to ask both of their parents to respond.

Two hundred thirty students completed the survey with at least one parent reporting. There were 167 cases in which only the mother responded; 37 in which both parents responded; and 26 in which only the father responded. We selected the cases for substantive analyses ($N = 116$) which met all three of the following criteria: (a) parents reported that they permanently separated before the child was 3 years old rather than after; (b) parents reported that the child had not ever had more than 50% parenting time with the father; and (c) either the parents reported that the child had some parenting time with the father before the child was 15 years old ($N = 124$), or the parents reported that the father had lived with the mother during the child's first two years ($N = 5$), or the father had submitted a survey ($N = 2$). Criterion (b) eliminated concerns about the atypicality of families in which the child's primary residence was at the father's home. Criterion (c) filtered cases that we deemed father absence, as did Tornello et al. (2013), because these situations confound the absence of overnights with the absence of fathers. When both parents responded, we used the mothers' responses to select the cases for the substantive analyses.

The mean age of the students was 19 years. According to each parent's self-report among the cases selected for substantive analyses, 47% of mothers and 43% of fathers ranged from less than a high school education to a technical, vocational, or associate's degree; 28% of mothers and 32% of fathers had an undergraduate

degree; and 21% of mothers and 21% of fathers had a master's degree or higher. Mean level of education for both parents was at the associate's degree level.

Procedures

Students completed an online survey and emailed their parent(s) a cover letter and copy of the parent survey. Parents returned completed surveys directly to the researchers.

Measures

Parenting time in infancy and toddlerhood. For each of the child's first three years (under 1 year, 1 to 2 years old, and 2 to 3 years old), if parents responded that they were separated during all or part of that year they were asked (a) "How many different days the child spent any time at all (including overnights) at dad's home in an average 2-week period," and (b) "How many overnights the child spend at dad's home in an average 2-week period." The number of overnights (b) was subtracted from the number of days (a) to obtain the number of daytime visits. In calculating the yearly percent of parenting time in each year, an overnight was counted as a full day, and a daytime visit as a half-day (as is typically done by state family courts in determining child support). The number of daytime visits per week (D) = (a − b)/2 because parents reported for an average 2-week period, the number of overnights per week (O) = b/2, and yearly percent of time with father = (D × .5 × 52) + (O × 52)/365.

Parenting time in childhood and early adolescence. Parents and students responded to these items. For each of two age periods (5 to 10 years old, and 10 to 15 years old) participants were told to consider the most typical living arrangement that the child had during that time, and were asked the same above questions about (a) days, and (b) overnights. They were also asked (c) "Considering the 15 weeks of school vacation (Christmas, 2 weeks; spring, 1 week; summer, 12 weeks), how many weeks was the child's time with dad different from what it was during the normal school year?" and (d) "What percentage of time the child spent with dad during those vacation weeks that were different from the regular schedule?" An overnight was counted as a full day, a daytime visit as a half-day, and a vacation day as a full day. During the school year the number of daytime visits per week (D) = (a − b)/2 and overnights (O) = b/2. The number of full days per week during "different vacation" weeks (V) = d × 7. Yearly percent of time with father = [D × .5 × (52 − c)] + [O × (52 – c)] + (V × c)/365.

Parent conflict. Parents reported frequency of conflict at four time periods: (a) "Before the final separation," (b) "During the final separation," (c) "The first two years after," and (d) "The next three years after" on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 0 (*no conflict*), to 3 (*occasionally conflict*), to 6 (*almost always conflict*), with an option for "can't remember/does not apply." Because a few parents responded "can't remember/does not apply" to one or more time periods, and because conflict decreased over time, the overall conflict score in substantive analyses was the mean of the standardized scores on whichever of the four questions were answered.

Parental disagreement about overnights. Parents responded to one question about the level of disagreement between them regarding the number of overnights during infancy: "Mark the statement that best describes how you and your child's other parent decided how many overnights the child should spend at dad's home during years 0 to 3?" (response options were 0 = mostly agreed, 1 = had disagreements, but arrived at mutually agreeable solution, 2 = never came to agreement, one of us got what he or she wanted mostly because the other one gave in, 3 = final decision came out of either mediation, custody evaluation, attorney-led bargaining, or court hearing.). Because these four response options do not form an interval scale, they were dichotomized into "agreed" (response options 0 and 1) and "disagreed" (response options 2 and 3) to form the disagreement score used in substantive analyses.

Parents were also asked one question about the nature of their disagreement:

> If you disagreed, even just initially, was it because (a) father wanted child to spend more overnights at his home but mother wanted child to spend less overnights at his home, (b) father wanted child to spend less overnights at his home but mother wanted child to spend more overnights at his home.

Parent education. Parents reported their own education using a 13-item scale ranging from (0) "never attended school," to (5) "high school graduate," to (8) "Associate degree" to (9) "college degree (BS/BA)," to (13) "MD, JD, DO, DDS, or Ph.D." Education was dichotomized into parents without a bachelor's degree and those with a bachelor's degree.

Students Responded to All of the Following Measures

Parental caring. The 12-item Care subscale of the Parental Bonding Instrument (PBI) provided a measure of the quality of the parent-child relationship. The PBI is a self-report instrument with well-documented reliability and validity (Parker, 1989). Students rated how well each statement (e.g., "Spoke to me in a warm and friendly voice," "Did not help me as much as needed") described their mother and father "as you remember your [mother/father] in your first 16 years." Response options are 0 (*very unlike*), 1 (*moderately unlike*), 2 (*moderately like*), and 3 (*very like*). Negative items were reverse scored so that higher scores reflect higher parental caring. Reliabilities for mother (α = .94) and father (α = .95) were excellent.

Parent-child interaction. This scale was developed for the current study and included three items assessing mutual desire and enjoyment in spending time together. Students rated how well each statement described their mother and father "as you remember your [mother/father] in your first 16 years." Items were "Did a lot of things with me, like working together on projects, going on trips, playing games or sports," "Really enjoyed spending time with me," and "It was a lot of fun spending time with my [mom/dad]." Response options are 0 (*very unlike*), 1 (*moderately unlike*), 2 (*moderately like*), and 3 (*very like*). Reliabilities for mother (α = .86) and father (α = .88) were excellent.

Mattering. This 7-item scale assesses how much children feel they matter to each of their parents (Marshall, 2001; Marshall, 2004; Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981). The reliability and validity of the scale was demonstrated by Schenck et al. (2009) and Suh et al. (2016), who found that adolescents' perceived mattering to parents was negatively associated with internalizing and external-

izing symptoms. Items are rated on a 5-point scale, 0 (*strongly agree*) to 4 (*strongly disagree*). Sample items included: "My (dad/mom) really cares about me" and "I'm not that important to my (dad/mom). "Negative items were reverse scored so that higher scores reflect higher perceived mattering. Reliabilities for mothers ($\alpha = .90$) and for fathers ($\alpha = .96$) were excellent.

Parental blame. We used the 6-item Maternal Blame and Paternal Blame scales from the Painful Feelings About Divorce Scale, a self-report instrument with well-documented reliability and validity (Laumann-Billings & Emery, 2000). Sample items include "Sometimes I feel angry at my [mother/father] for my parents' divorce" and "I still have not forgiven my [mother/father] for the pain s/he caused my family." Response options are 0 (*strongly disagree*), 1 (*disagree*), 2 (*neutral*), 3 (*agree*), and 4 (*strongly agree*), with the additional response option "does not apply." Following Laumann-Billings and Emery (2000), "does not apply" was treated as missing data, and the scale mean was calculated on the remaining items. Reliabilities for mothers ($\alpha = .90$) and for fathers ($\alpha = .91$) were excellent.

Overall relationship. This scale included two items: "How well do you get along with your [mom/dad]?" (response options 0 [extremely well], to 2 [just okay], to 4 [not well at all], with an additional response option "not applicable/no contact"), and "What kind of relationship do you have with your [mom/dad]?" (response options 0 [the worst], to 3 [just okay], to 6 [the best], with an additional response option "not applicable/no contact"). The first item was reversed scored and the scores were recalibrated to fit the response scale of the second item. Fourteen students chose the option "not applicable/no contact" for one or both items referring to their relationship with their fathers. Because these responses indicated that the student had no relationship with their fathers they were recoded as 0. Reliabilities for mothers ($\alpha = .93$) and for fathers ($\alpha = .97$) were excellent.

Results

Reliability of Parent Reports

All cases in which both parents reported were used to determine how well parents agreed. Correlations between parents' reports on all variables were sufficiently substantial to justify using mothers' reports for the substantive analyses; when the father was the only parent reporting we used his report. Correlations between parents' reports of overnights at each of the first three ages were rs $> .84$ (Ns = 15, 17, 33, ps $< .001$), and correlations for daytime visits were rs = .46 to .90, ps $< .01$. The correlation between parents' reports of yearly parenting time at ages 5 to 10 was .72, and at ages 10 to 15 was .86 (Ns = 37), ps $< .001$. Mothers' reports of parenting time at ages 5 to 10, and 10 to 15 also agreed with students' reports (rs $> .81$, $N = 159$, ps $< .001$), as did fathers' reports (rs $> .83$, $N = 46$, ps $< .001$), replicating Fabricius and Luecken (2007). Correlations between parents' reports of the frequency of parent conflict at each of the four time periods were rs = .40, .46, .49, .69 (Ns = 35 to 36), ps $< .05$.

Regarding disagreements about overnights during the first three years, 73% of all parents reported the same response category out of the four categories of levels of disagreement, and 87% reported the same category when the categories were dichotomized into "agreed" (Categories 0 and 1) and "disagreed" (Categories 2 and 3). Among the families selected for substantive analyses, as reported by mothers when both parents reported, 64% mostly agreed on overnights; 11% had disagreements but arrived at a mutually agreeable solution; 6% never came to agreement and one parent got what he or she wanted mostly because the other one gave in; and 19% arrived at a final decision by either mediation, custody evaluation, attorney-led bargaining, or court hearing. Among the families selected for substantive analyses, 75% of mothers and 100% of fathers reported that the father had wanted more overnights.

The mean levels of parenting time tended to differ between mother- and father-reports, as is commonly found (e.g., Braver & O'Connell, 1998). At the first three ages, fathers tended to report more overnights in a typical 2-week period (Ms = 3.1, 3.4, 3.9, respectively) than mothers (2.1, 2.6, 2.5; ts(14 to 32) = 1.87 to 3.97, ps = .080 to .000). However, reports of daytime visits did not differ, ts < 1.35. Fathers reported more yearly parenting time than mothers at ages 5 to 10 (Ms = .29, .22, respectively) and 10 to 15 (.28 and .22; ts(36) = 2.44 and 2.51, ps $< .05$). Students' reports were in between their parents' reports at ages 5 to 10 (.26) but were identical to fathers' reports at ages 10 to 15 (.28).

The mean levels of conflict did not differ significantly between mothers' and fathers' reports. A 2 (parent) $\times$ 4 (time period) repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) on frequency of parent conflict revealed only an effect of time period, $F(3, 96) = 18.81$, $p < .001$), and no effect of parent or interaction between parent and time period (Fs < 1). Conflict decreased over the four time periods, Ms = 3.49, 3.96, 3.15, 2.65, respectively. The reported decrease in the above analysis came only from cases in which both parents reported, but it was similar to the decrease reported by all parents who were selected for substantive analyses (in which we used mothers' reports when both parents reported), Ms = 3.81, 3.94, 3.02, 2.53, respectively; $F(3, 321) = 41.427$, $p <$ .001). The means indicate that 3 to 5 years after the separation, parents reported that the frequency of their conflict was midway between "rarely" and "occasionally."

Substantive Analyses

Cases for substantive analyses were those in which the parents permanently separated before the child was 3 years old; and the child had at most equal parenting time with the father then and thereafter (unless specified otherwise); and there was evidence that the father had not been absent from the child's life. When only the mother or both parents responded we used the mother's reports, and when only the father responded we used his reports.

Rates of parenting time. Any day that the child had parenting time at the father's home could include spending the night (i.e., "overnight") or not (i.e., "daytime"). (Fathers with neither overnights nor daytimes could still have had parenting time elsewhere, such as at the mother's home.) Figure 2 shows the proportion of children at each of the first three age periods in each combination of simple presence or absence of daytime and overnight parenting time at the father's home in a typical 2-week period. The Ns increase with age because 52 parents reported they were separated when children were under 1 year, an additional 29 reported they were separated when children were 1 year old (raising the N to 81), and an additional 35 reported they were separated when children were 2 years old (raising the N to 116). As children got older,

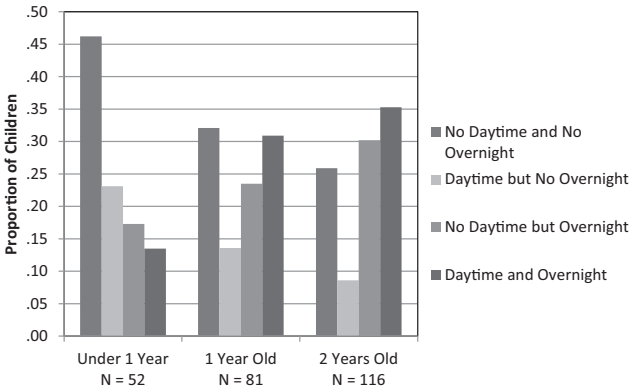

Figure 2. Proportion of children at each age in each combination of daytime and overnight parenting time at the father's home in a typical 2-week period.

proportionally fewer of them at each age were in the first two combinations (i.e., those with no overnight parenting time) and more were in the latter two combinations (i.e., those with overnights). By age 2, almost two thirds of children had some overnight parenting time.

Not only did the proportion of children with any overnights increase from year to year as shown above, but also the number of overnights per child increased. Figure 3 shows the proportion of children at each age with different numbers of overnights at the father's home in a typical 2-week period. The increase with age was due to parents who separated when the child was under 1 year of age. They increased the number of overnights during the next two years (Ms = 1.06, 1.39, and 1.73, respectively; $F(2, 102) = 8.723$, $p < .001$). Parents who separated when the child was 1 year old did not increase the number of overnights during the next year (Ms = 1.93 and 2.10, respectively; $t(28) = .895$, $p = .378$). Parents who separated when the child was 2 years old provided a mean of 2.17 overnights. By the time children were 2 years of age, the number of overnights they had did not depend on how long their parents had been separated. A three (age at separation: under 1 year, 1-year-old, 2 years old) one-way ANOVA on number of overnights at age 2 showed no significant differences, $F(2, 115) = .512$, $p = .600$.

Finally, the proportion of yearly parenting time in toddlerhood (age 2) set the upper limit on parenting time in childhood (ages 5 to 10), and early adolescence (ages 10 to 15; Ms = .20, .21, .21, respectively; $F(2, 174) = .49$, $p = .615$). This analysis was not restricted to children who had at most equal parenting time with the father, in order to include those who switched in or out of father custody at some point.

Measures of parent-child relationships. Table 1 shows the scale means and standard deviations for the five young adult self-assessments of their relationships with each of their parents. The means were all in the direction of better relationships with mothers than fathers, and the variability of scores was greater for fathers on all scales.

Also shown in Table 1 are the correlations of each scale with the number of overnights at the two endpoints of children's first three years; that is, when they were infants (under 1 year of age) and when they were toddlers (2 years of age). Correlations with daytime parenting time are not shown because none were significant. These correlations show that overnights during infancy and toddlerhood have similar associations with these aspects of long-term parent–child relationships. Regarding the father-child relationship, more overnights during infancy, as well as during toddlerhood, were associated with better father-child relationships in young adulthood on all scales, with one exception; that is, overnights during infancy were positively but not significantly ($r = .233$) associated with ratings on the overall relationship scale.

Regarding the mother-child relationship, overnights during infancy were positively but not significantly associated with better mother-child relationships, with two exceptions; that is, the association with mother-child interaction was significant ($r = 284$), and the association with maternal blame was in the direction of more blame ($r = .060$). Overnights during toddlerhood were significantly associated with better mother-child relationships on all scales, with one exception; that is, the association with maternal blame was nonsignificant and in the direction of more blame ($r = .126$). The highest level of maternal blame, at 6 to 7 overnights during toddlerhood ($M = 1.11$), indicates that on average students did not blame mothers for problems in the family because the response option "1" meant "disagree" with the scale item assigning blame. The highest maternal blame rating by any individual student who had six to seven overnights during toddlerhood was "2," which meant "neutral."

In order to provide assurance that these five scales tapped into the same common factor of security in father-child relationships and mother-child relationships, as well as to simplify substantive analyses, a principal-axis factor analysis with a promax rotation was conducted on the parent-child relationship measures. A two-factor solution (Table 2) accounted for over 67.9% of the variance with eigenvalues of 4.21 and 3.16, and the factors clearly represented the relationship with father and the relationship with mother. Students' scores on each factor (regression method) were saved, and these factor scores were used in the substantive analyses. Factor scores are calculated by standardizing each input scale, which sets the means for both the mother and father factors at 0 and the standard deviations at 1.

Parenting time and parent-child relationships. Table 3 shows the correlations, means, and standard deviations of the measures used in substantive analyses. (Questions about parent

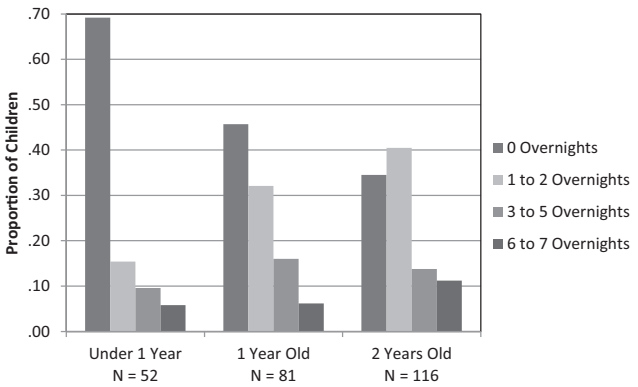

Figure 3. Proportion of children at each age with different numbers of overnights at the father's home in a typical 2-week period.

Table 1
Means and Standard Deviations for Parent-Child Relationship Scales and Correlations With the Number of Overnights at the Father's Home

Scales	Range	Mean	*SD*	Correlations with overnights: Under 1 year ($N = 52$)	Correlations with overnights: 2 years old ($N = 116$)
Father caring	0–3	1.59	.87	.295*	.457***
Mother caring		2.43	.58	.186	.202*
Father–child interaction	0–3	1.73	.97	.344*	.440**
Mother-child interaction		2.37	.66	.284*	.208*
Mattering to father	0–4	2.63	1.31	.419**	.476***
Mattering to mother		3.74	.47	.192	.176†
Paternal blame	0–4	1.84	1.07	−.389**	−.357***
Maternal blame		.64	.76	.060	.126
Overall relationship with father	0–6	3.33	1.94	.233	.446***
Overall relationship with mother		5.01	1.03	.088	.207*

† $p = .058$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

education and disagreements about overnights were inadvertently omitted from approximately 30 surveys.) Parents with less conflict, more education, or more agreement about overnights did not provide more overnights either when children were toddlers (2 years old) or when they were infants (under 1 year old). More overnights at the father's home in infancy and toddlerhood, and more parenting time with fathers in childhood and adolescence were all related to better father-child relationship factor scores in young adulthood. More overnights in toddlerhood were related to better mother-child relationships in young adulthood. Students who had more overnights when they were infants also tended to have more overnights when they were toddlers ($r = .77$). Overnights at both ages correlated highly (rs $> .66$) with the proportion of yearly parenting time in childhood and adolescence. Daytime parenting time during toddlerhood was unrelated to overnights during infancy or toddlerhood, but was positively correlated (rs $> .25$) with the proportion of yearly parenting time in childhood and adolescence. Females reported poorer relationships with fathers. More parent disagreement about overnights was associated with more parent conflict and with younger ages at separation.

We used a multiple regression to test whether overnight parenting time when children were 2 years old predicted later relationships with fathers during young adulthood while controlling for children's sex, daytime parenting time with fathers at age 2, and yearly percentage of parenting time with fathers during childhood and adolescence. The dependent variable was the father-child relationship factor scores. We also controlled for parent education, parent conflict, disagreement about overnights, and age at separation, because those correlations with father-child relationship scores, while nonsignificant, were at the level of approximately $r = .15$. Table 4 shows that more overnights at age 2 as well as more yearly parenting time at ages 10 to 15 each made independent contributions to better father-child relationships in young adulthood, beyond what is explained by the other control variables.

Table 5 shows the results for mother-child relationships. We also controlled for children's sex, daytime parenting time with fathers at age 2, and yearly percentage of parenting time with fathers during childhood and adolescence. We did not control for parent education, parent conflict, disagreement about overnights, and age at separation because those correlations with mother-child relationship scores were only $r = .10$ or lower. Results showed that more overnights at age 2 as well as more daytime parenting time with fathers at age 2 each made independent contributions (although the effect for daytimes was marginally significant, $p = .074$) to better mother-child relationships, beyond what is explained by children's sex and yearly parenting time during childhood and adolescence.

Figure 4 shows the significant relations revealed in the above analyses between overnights with father at age 2 and the quality of each parent-child relationship in young adulthood. There is a linear, "dose-response" relation between more overnights and higher quality father-child relationships; that is, each additional overnight is matched by an increase in father-child relationship quality. The relation for mothers is a "threshold" pattern, in which absence of overnights is associated with worsened mother-child relationships, and presence of any overnights, regardless of the number, is associated with better mother-child relationships. The threshold pattern for mothers is likely due to ceiling effects in the raw scores on the five mother-child relationship scales (see Table 1). Figure 4 should not be misread as indicating that relationships with fathers surpassed mothers at two overnights. The mean of the factor scores on each relationship factor is set to zero. Figure 4 reveals that the highest-level father-child relationships were achieved at equal overnights (6 to 7 overnights in a 2-week

Table 2
Factor Loadings of the Parent-Child Relationship Scales on the Two Factors

Scales	Relationship with father	Relationship with mother
Father caring	.894	.215
Mother caring	.111	.926
Father-child interaction	.906	.126
Mother-child interaction	.168	.841
Mattering to father	.912	.208
Mattering to mother	.130	.670
Paternal blame	−.656	.006
Maternal blame	.025	−.625
Overall relationship with father	.891	.079
Overall relationship with mother	.168	.815

Table 3
Correlations Among Measures, Means, and Standard Deviations

Measures	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Overnights when under 1 year												
2. Overnights when 2 years old	.768**											
3. Daytimes when 2 years old	.042	−.002										
4. PT 5–10 years	.691**	.768**	.265**									
5. PT 10–15 years	.671**	.663**	.249**	.875**								
6. F-C Rel	.356*	.500**	.156	.525**	.547**							
7. M-C Rel	.141	.199*	.106	.082	.049	.163						
8. Child sex	−.206	−.143	.033	−.120	−.158	−.211*	−.165					
9. Parent education	.085	−.114	.021	−.101	−.111	.148	.040	.062				
10. Parent conflict	−.034	.014	.021	.026	−.031	−.143	.103	−.027	−.042			
11. Parent disagreement	−.137	.021	.052	.037	.078	−.197	.080	.094	−.016	.390**		
12. Age at separation		.090	.047	.119	.105	.129	−.068	.060	−.032	−.004	−.211*	
Means	1.058	1.957	.918	.170	.142	.00	.00	1.638	.545	.010	.253	1.853
*SD*s	1.903	2.176	1.656	.166	.157	.974	.963	.483	.501	.871	.437	.857

Note. PT 5–10 years = yearly proportion of parenting time at father's home from age 5 to 10; PT 10–15 years = yearly proportion of parenting time from age 10 to 15; F-C Rel = father–child relationship factor score; M-C Rel = mother-child relationship factor score; sex: 1 = male, 2 = female; Parent education: 0 = without bachelor's degree, 1 = with bachelor's degree; Parent conflict = mean of the standardized scores of frequency of parent conflict from before to 5 years after the final separation; Parent disagreement = parental disagreement on the number of overnights at father's home: 0 = agree, 1 = disagree; Age at separation: 0 = under 1 year, 1 = 1 year old, 2 = 2 years old.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

period), at which point mother-child relationships remained at their highest level. The overall raw means (converted to percentages) across the five parent-child relationship scales at six to seven overnights are 87% for mother-child relationships, and 83% for father-child relationships. Thus, only in the case of essentially equal overnights at age 2 did children grow up to have essentially equally strong, and optimal, relationships with both of their parents.

We next tested whether the positive associations between overnights at age 2 and parent-child relationships differed depending on whether parents (a) were in high conflict, (b) had substantial disagreements about overnights, (c) were more educated, or (d) separated when children were under 1 year old, 1 year old, or 2 years old. We tested for moderation by each of these four variables separately, by adding the interaction between that variable and overnights at age 2 to the father-child relationship and mother-child relationship regressions reported above. We created the interaction terms after centering the variables to reduce multicollinearity (Aiken & West, 1991). None of the interaction terms approached significance for father-child relationship or mother-child relationships ($05 < ts < 1.04$; $.958 > ps > .300$). Figures 5 and 6 illustrate the absence of moderation by conflict and disagreement. (Figures for education and age at separation are similar and available upon request.) Figure 5A shows that the positive linear relation between number of overnights at age 2 and father-child relationships is clearly preserved for parents with low as well as for those with high levels of parent conflict, and Figure 6A shows that it is also preserved for parents who agreed as well as for those who disagreed about overnights. It is evident that when there was high conflict or disagreement, more overnights were required for father-child relationships to attain the same level as when there was low conflict or agreement. (The same applies for education and age at separation: Less education and earlier separation required more overnights at age 2 to attain the same level of

Table 4
Regression of Overnights When Children Were 2 Years Old and Control Variables on Father-Child Relationships

Variables entered	β	*t*	*p*
Daytimes when 2 years old	.13	1.16	.250
PT 5 to 10 years	−.37	−1.33	.188
PT 10 to 15 years	.55	2.67	.010
Sex	−.15	−1.42	.162
Parent education	.18	1.81	.076
Parent conflict	−.06	−.55	.581
Parent disagreement	−.17	−1.51	.136
Age at separation	−.09	−.92	.359
Overnights at age 2	.38	2.05	.045

Note. Dependent variable is father-child relationship factor scores. Standardized β reported. Sex: 1 = male, 2 = female; PT 5–10 years = yearly proportion of parenting time at father's home from age 5 to 10; PT 10–15 years = yearly proportion of parenting time from age 10 to 15; Parent disagreement = parental disagreement on the number of overnights at father's home: 0 = agree, 1 = disagree; Parent education: 0 = without bachelor's degree, 1 = with bachelor's degree; Age at separation: 0 = under 1 year; 1 = 1 year old; 2 = 2 years old.

Table 5
Regression of Overnights When Children Were 2 Years Old and Control Variables on Mother-Child Relationships

Variables entered	β	*t*	*p*
Daytimes when 2 years old	.18	1.81	.074
PT 5 to 10 years	−.21	−.91	.365
PT 10 to 15 years	−.08	−.43	.667
Sex	−.16	−1.65	.102
Overnights at age 2	.42	2.73	.007

Note. Dependent variable is mother-child relationship factor scores. Standardized β reported. PT 5–10 years = yearly proportion of parenting time at father's home from age 5 to 10; PT 10–15 years = yearly proportion of parenting time from age 10 to 15.

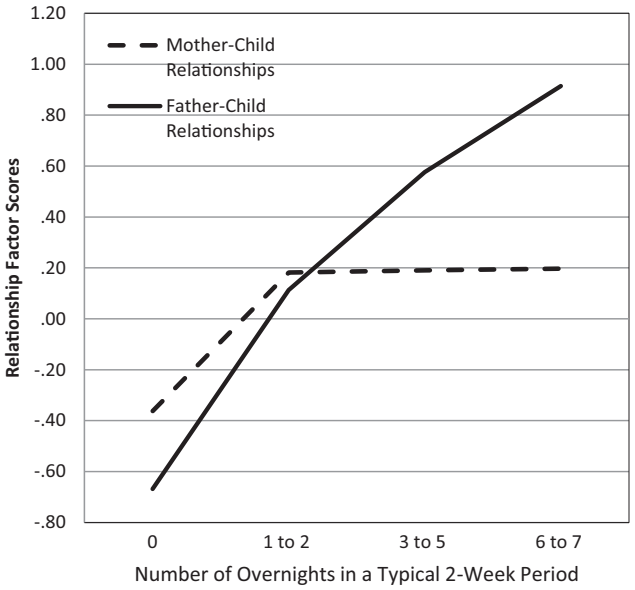

Figure 4. The relation between overnights at the father's home when children were 2 years old and the quality of parent-child relationships when children were young adults.

father-child relationships as when there was more education and later separation.) The threshold pattern for mother-child relationships is likewise clearly preserved for parents with low as well as for those with high levels of parent conflict (Figure 5B), and for parents who agreed as well as for those who disagreed about overnights (Figure 6B).

Finally, we tested whether overnights during infancy (under 1 year old) showed the same relation to parent-child relationships as overnights during toddlerhood (2 years old). We divided children into two groups based on their age at parents' separation; that is, those whose parents were separated during infancy, and those whose parents separated when they were either 1 or 2 years old. For the infancy group we used the number of overnights they had during infancy. For the 1- and 2-year-old groups, we used the number of overnights they had at age 2. We tested whether overnights during infancy showed the same relation to parent-child relationships as overnights during toddlerhood by adding the main effect of this new age at separation variable and the interaction between that variable and the number of overnights at each age to the father-child relationship and mother-child relationship regressions reported above. The interaction was not significant for father-child relationships, $t = .60$, $p = .549$, or for mother-child relationships, $t = .31$, $p = .756$. Figure 7 illustrates the absence of moderation by infant versus toddler overnights. (The "3 to 5" and "6 to 7" categories of overnights are collapsed in Figure 7 because of the smaller *N*s for parents who separated when children were under 1 year old.) Figure 7A shows that the positive linear relation between overnights and father-child relationships is clearly preserved for infant and toddler overnights, and Figure 7B shows that the threshold pattern for mother-child relationships is likewise clearly preserved for infant and toddler overnights.

Discussion

The current study showed that more overnight parenting time with fathers, up to and including equal numbers of overnights with both parents, when children were toddlers (2 years of age), as well as when they were infants (under 1 year of age), were associated with more secure relationships with each of their parents during the challenges and uncertainties of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2004). Those young adults who had more overnights felt closer to their parents, were more likely to remember their parents as having been warm and responsive during their childhood and as having enjoyed spending time together, blamed their parents less for family problems, and now were more certain that they were important and mattered to their parents.

Overnights at age 2 made an independent contribution to better parent-child relationships over and above the subsequent parenting time in childhood and adolescence. This means that "lost" overnight parenting time at age 2 was not made up by parenting time later. Overnights at age 2 also made an independent contribution to better parent-child relationships over and above any other benefits conferred by more parent education, less parent conflict up to five years postseparation, more parent agreement about overnights, later parent separations (in the child's third rather than first or second year), or child sex. Importantly, the same strength and patterns of associations between overnights at age 2 and parent-child relationships occurred regardless of conflict, disagreement

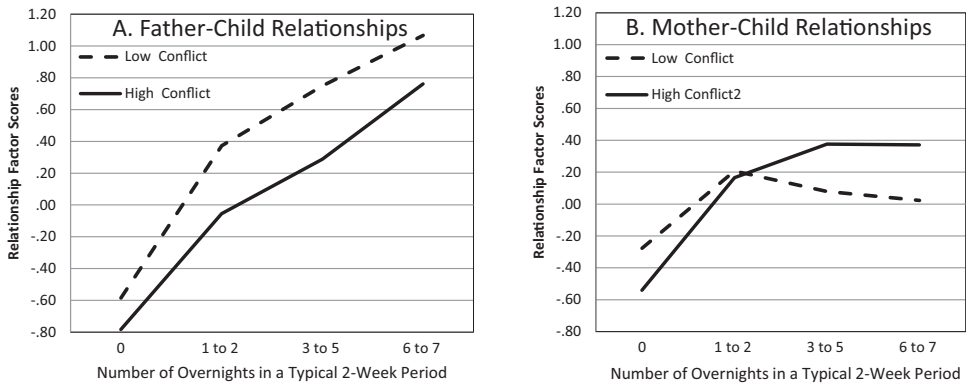

Figure 5. The relation between overnights at the father's home when children were 2 years old and the quality of parent-child relationships when children were young adults for parents with low or high parent conflict.

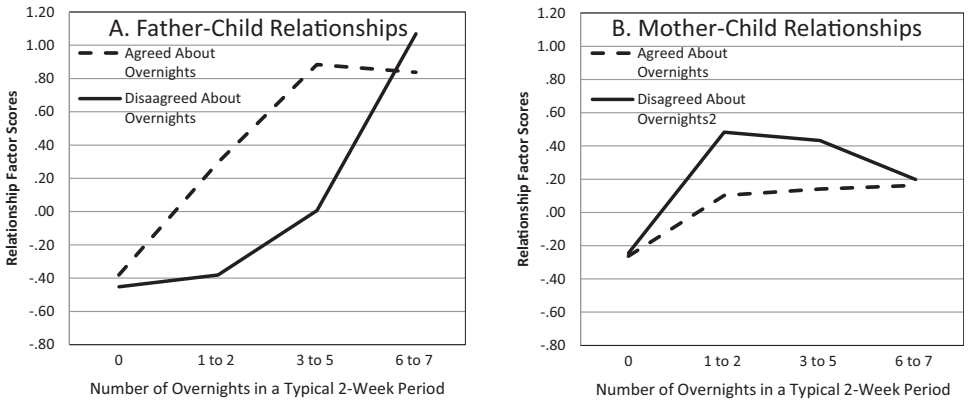

Figure 6. The relation between overnights at the father's home when children were 2 years old and the quality of parent-child relationships when children were young adults for parents who agreed or disagreed about the number of overnights.

about overnights, college education, and age at separation. This means that it is not true that overnights "worked" only for parents who had less conflict, or more agreement about overnights, or were more educated. There were no benefits to the father-child relationship associated with daytime visits. This means that more daytime visits did not make up for fewer overnights. Finally there was a marginally significant association between more daytime visits when children were toddlers and better mother-child relationships.

The question arises why the current study showed benefits of overnights for mothers and fathers during infancy and toddlerhood while each of the previous studies included mostly ambiguous, null, or contradictory findings. The only two indications of harm to the mother-child relationship were ambiguous because they were obtained with measures that lack demonstrated validity (i.e., "visual monitoring" in McIntosh et al., 2010, 2013, and mother ratings of attachment behaviors in Tornello et al., 2013). In the current study, three of the five parent-child relationship measures have previously demonstrated validity (Laumann-Billings & Emery, 2000; Parker, 1989; Schenck et al., 2009; Suh et al., 2016); the validity of the other two for both parents is established by their correlations with the first three, as revealed by the factor analysis (see Table 2).

An explanation for some of the null and contradictory findings appears to be that the previous studies assessed short-term rather than long-term associations with overnights. Solomon and George (1999) found no association between attachment and overnights but they assessed both contemporaneously, which might not allow time for overnight parenting time to contribute to a history of responsive parenting and more secure attachments. The assessments of child behaviors (i.e., social problems, irritability, wheezing, persistence, problem behaviors, and positive behaviors) produced mostly contradictory findings, suggesting that the short-term assessments of those variables might have picked up temporary and inconsistent child behavioral adjustment difficulties in response to overnights.

The findings disconfirm the hypothesis (George, Solomon, et al., 2011; Main et al., 2011; Sroufe & McIntosh, 2011) that more overnights away from mothers should harm the mother-child relationship. The current findings provided a strong disconfirmation,

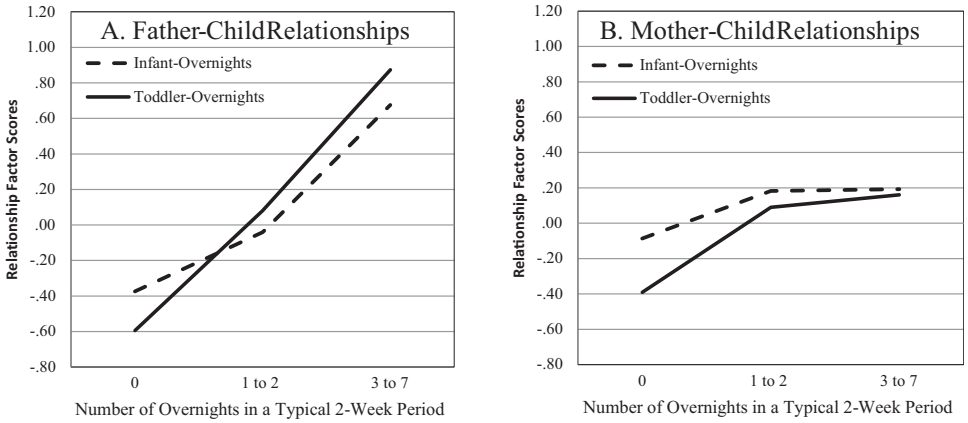

Figure 7. The relation between overnights at the father's home and the quality of parent-child relationships when children were young adults for children for whom the overnights occurred during infancy or during toddlerhood.

not only because *benefits* accrued to the mother-child relationship, but also because they were associated with overnights specifically during *infancy*. Overnights during infancy should have been the most harmful because infants lack the language and cognitive skills to understand time, recall the past, and anticipate future events. The finding that overnights during infancy were also associated with the quality of father-child relationships is contrary to the monotropy hypothesis for the following reason: in our sample mothers were most often the primary caregivers, and according to monotropy, infants should not have been developing simultaneous attachment relationships with fathers; however, the associations of overnights during infancy with the quality of both parent–child relationships suggests that infants were developing attachment relationships with both parents. This is consistent with other theoretical (e.g., Waters & McIntosh, 2011) and empirical (e.g., Kochanska & Kim, 2013; Main & Weston, 1981) evidence that infants form attachment relationships with mothers and fathers simultaneously.

There are developmentally plausible processes by which overnights could lead to long-term benefits. Overnights allow the father to learn about the child by assuming the role of caregiver. In support of this, a review of 14 papers describing the effectiveness of 12 interventions for fathers of infants and toddlers (Magill-Evans, Harrison, Rempel, & Slater, 2006) revealed that active participation with or observation of his child enhanced the father's interactions with and positive perceptions of the child. Brazelton (e.g., Worobey & Brazelton, 1986) has long argued, consistent with modern transactional models of development (Sameroff, 2010), that how well parents learn about the child in the early years can alter the trajectory of their future relationships because it provides the foundation for coping with changes in the years to come. In support of this, Boyce et al. (2006) found that high father involvement during infancy helped protect children from the development of mental health problems at age 9. Regarding benefits to the mother-child relationship, overnights provide respite from caring for an infant alone, which could help the mother maintain a higher level of responsive parenting.

Finally, the finding that the association between overnights and parent-child relationships was the same for parents with low versus high conflict replicates Fabricius and Luecken's (2007) findings for father-child relationships when parents separated before children were 16 years old. Both studies suggest that more parenting time is needed to overcome the harmful effects of parent conflict on father-child relationships, as illustrated in Figure 5A (e.g., in low-conflict families a father-child relationship score of .80 was achieved at "3 to 5" overnights, but in high conflict families it took "6 to 7" overnights to achieve that score). The same principle applies to parent disagreement about overnights (Figure 6A), as well as to parent education and age at separation (figures available upon request). We did not find statistically significant evidence of stronger negative associations between parent conflict and father-child relationships, $r = -.143$, $p = .13$ than mother-child relationships, $r = .103$, $p = .28$, and so did not replicate the so-called "father vulnerability" effect (Cummings, Goeke-Morey, & Raymond, 2004). However, the conflict measured here occurred many years before we assessed relationships, and had largely dissipated by five years after the parents' separation.

Implications for Policy and Practice

McIntosh, Smyth, and Kelaher (2015) rightly state, "The question at the heart of the debate is whether adequate evidence of the reverse exists: that spending regular and frequent overnights with both parents *is* beneficial to early development, and *should* occur at any age" (p. 111, emphasis in original). The current study provides that evidence by revealing long-term benefits to both parent-child relationships.

We used the approach recommended by Fabricius et al. (2010) of distinguishing parents who agreed about overnight parenting time and thus presumably volunteered for it, from parents who disagreed and had an arrangement imposed unwillingly upon one of them. This approach is not equivalent to a randomized experiment because courts would have presumably exercised some discretion in deciding the number of overnights for different families. However, that actually makes this approach more realistically informative because under any policy of rebuttable presumption for frequent overnights courts would always retain discretion. Thus, this approach can yield the information needed to inform decision makers about the wisdom of imposing overnight parenting time when the parents disagree.

When parents disagreed, those who had more overnights imposed upon them, up to and including equal overnights, had better parent-child relationships (see Figure 6). Overall, they had slightly but nonsignificantly more overnights at age 2 than parents who agreed (see Table 3), and in both groups 14% of children had equal overnights with each parent at age 2. These findings provide evidential support for policies to encourage frequent overnight parenting time for infants and toddlers, even when one parent disagrees. Two other findings strengthen that support: first, the overall "dose response" relation that we observed for father-child relationships (see Figure 4) is often indicative of causal processes. Second, the plausible explanatory mechanisms discussed above can account for how overnight parenting time could work to improve both long-term parent-child relationships. The consensus (Emery et al., 2016; Pruett & DiFonzo, 2014) that the four previous studies fail to provide sufficient evidence of harm due to overnights further strengthens the support for policies to encourage frequent overnights. The findings do not support policies that would urge parents and courts to generally be cautious about frequent overnights, or to begin with few overnights and gradually "step up" to frequent overnights, when there are no extenuating circumstances such as parent mental illness, previous absence from the child's life, and so forth The findings also indicate that normal parent conflict, disagreements about overnights, and children under 1 year of age are not circumstances that should require caution; on the contrary, more overnight parenting time appears to be needed in those cases.

The current findings provide guidance for professional practice even in the absence of new policies to encourage frequent overnight parenting time for infants and toddlers. The findings showed that the family characteristics that many divorce professionals and courts would assume to contraindicate overnights (i.e., high conflict, disagreement about overnights, child under 1 year old) were, in fact, not contraindicative (Figures 5, 6, and 7). Thus, even when parents present with high conflict, intractable disagreement about overnights, and a child under 1 year old, both parent-child relationships are likely to benefit in the long term from overnight

parenting time up to and including equally shared overnights at both parents' homes. Other factors, such as parents' mental health, could take precedence and override such orders or recommendations. If not, then strategies are available for mitigating parent conflict and educating parents to help ensure that they successfully adapt to overnight parenting time. To illustrate, one mother in our sample spontaneously added a narrative to her survey in which she described the approach and strategies used by the court and her divorce professional. Her survey indicated that she and the child's father had the highest level of conflict before and during the separation, that they had disagreed because the father wanted more overnights, and that the court nevertheless had imposed four overnights per 2-week period starting when the child was under 1 year old. She then added,

> Parents never talked again after court decision. Judge made sure that father picked up children from school and returned children to school. It worked and children grew up and did well. Children developed good relationships with both parents. *Mother's counselor gave great advice: Stay out of children's relationship with father. They must figure it out. Mother was told that if she did well, her children would do well.* Children never knew any different and dealt with difficult issues better than their peers (emphasis in original).

Limitations

The current data are silent about what happened in the intervening years. Thus we do not know whether more overnight separations from the mother produced any stress in the mother-child relationship in the younger years, but if it did it did not carry over into the young adult years. We also have no information about any processes by which overnight parenting time might have led to more responsive paternal and maternal parenting, and to more secure relationships, and thus we are unable to test hypotheses about those processes. Those tests await future studies.

The relationship variables were reported by students, and the parenting time and control variables were reported by parents, which is a strength of the study design because the measures are independent and thus the associations between parenting time and relationships cannot be attributed to any implicit theory or bias on the part of the respondents. However, the parents' reports of parenting time, parent conflict, and disagreements about overnights were retrospective, raising the possibility of biased recall. This appears to be of minimal concern because the correlations between mothers' and fathers' independent reports were all significant, almost all are considered large ($r \geq .50$; Cohen, 1988), and many were quite substantial ($r > .80$). In addition, the parents' reports of parenting time in childhood and adolescence correlated highly with students' reports, replicating Fabricius and Luecken (2007). Parenting time arrangements are likely to be recalled well because they are salient features of parents' daily lives, the arrangements are ordered by the court, they are the basis for calculating child support awards, and they typically cannot be altered without demonstrating material change in circumstances. In sum, only the parents', and not the students', reports were retrospective, and there is evidence that parents' reports were not affected by self-serving or recall biases to any practical degree.

Concerns (e.g., Garfinkel, McLanahan, & Wallerstein, 2004) that college students might give an overly optimistic picture of divorce are generally mitigated by the fact that the associations between parenting time and child adjustment outcomes do not differ for college and community samples (Bauserman, 2002; Laumann-Billings & Emery, 2000). Furthermore, the ability of the current study to test the hypothesis of harm stemming from frequent overnight separations is substantially immune to threats to sample representativeness because that hypothesis is based on the biology of the infant's response to separation stress.

Developmental Science and Family Policy

Translating developmental findings and theory into family policy is a serious endeavor that requires careful consideration not only of data, but also of theoretical assumptions and social, legal, and historical contexts. We briefly comment below on how the policy recommendations by some attachment researchers in the 2011 special issue on attachment and overnights in *Family Court Review* (George, Solomon, et al., 2011; Main et al., 2011; Sroufe & McIntosh, 2011) fare in each of these respects.

Theoretical assumptions. While the basic tenets of modern attachment theory are well-supported, the specific assumption of monotropy—that the young child has only one primary attachment figure—is unwarranted. It persists in some quarters because of the absence of a good understanding of the simultaneous development of multiple attachments. The reason we lack such understanding is that we have few studies of children's attachment to fathers. Main et al. (2011, p. 457) rightly advise that "attachment researchers . . . should increase their understanding of the father's role in child development and security."

Social context. Policy recommendations apply to specific social contexts. That requires considering factors that might alter developmental processes and lead to unintended consequences. In the present case, a critical factor is that the parents live in different households. In intact households a "primary" parent might do most of the childcare but the "secondary" parent remains available for an attachment relation to develop. In two households, primary caretaking by one parent necessitates proportionate absence of the other. The attachment researchers did not consider how attempting to maintain "primary" and "secondary" roles in the context of separated parents by allotting only a few brief daytime visits per week with fathers might alter attachment processes.

Legal context. Policy is implemented by existing legal institutions. Recommendations based on a naïve understanding of those realities can also have unintended consequences. The attachment researchers recommend that overnights with the father be gradually extended on a schedule that is responsive to each individual child's developing needs and competencies, and monitored by valid, ongoing, assessments of parent-child attachment relationships. These envisioned services by courts and mental health professionals to craft, reevaluate, and enforce evolving parenting plans are far removed from reality. Perhaps only 5% of parents have their parenting plans decided by a judge (Maccoby & Mnookin, 1992). Even so, family courts are overburdened and unequipped to routinely revisit parenting plans. Mental health professionals are unequipped to offer state-of-the-art attachment assessments (Braver, 2014; George, Isaacs, & Marvin, 2011) even if most parents could afford them. In the current study, there was no overall increase in parenting time with fathers after age 3 despite the fact that many fathers initially wanted more parenting time. Thus, a policy of infrequent overnights for infants and

toddlers is unlikely to be accompanied by widespread evolving "craft" parenting plans, and consequently is likely to set in stone less parenting time with fathers for those children than their peers whose parents divorce later.

Historical context. Recommendations for family policy must consider historically evolving social norms of parenting, because the legitimacy and effectiveness of custody policy derive from congruence with social norms of parenting (Fabricius et al., 2010; Maldonado, 2005). A policy of postponing overnights would conflict with historically developing social norms. In the 1980s one third of children under 2 spent overnights with their separated and divorced fathers (Maccoby, Charlene, Depner, & Mnookin, 1988; Seltzer, 1991). The current data reveal that in the mid-1990s over half of parents of future college students provided overnights when the child was 1, almost two thirds did so when the child was 2, and they increased rather than decreased overnights during the child's first three years suggesting that they found them workable. This historical trend toward overnight parenting time for infants and toddlers is reflected in the consensus of 110 child and family researchers, practitioners, and legal scholars (Warshak, 2014), and is part of a larger evolving social norm toward shared parenting time, which is documented in public opinion research (Braver et al., 2011; Fabricius et al., 2012; Votruba, Ellman, Braver, & Fabricius, 2014). Custody policy that conflicts with social norms of parenting will not have public support, and if imposed on unwilling parents will likely have unintended negative consequences. An argument could be made for a contrary policy if it was backed by compelling evidence, but that is not the case here.

Conclusions

A systems perspective needs to be applied to translating developmental findings and theory into family policy. This has not happened in the current policy debate about overnight parenting time for infants and toddlers. Recommendations by developmental scientists that are based on unwarranted theoretical assumptions, that overlook effects of social context in which policy is implemented, that make naïve assumptions about legal realities, and that ignore historically evolving social norms of parenting are not only unwise, but irresponsible.

The practitioners (McIntosh, Pruett, & Kelly, 2014) who initially drew the policy implications from the AFCC think tank on shared parenting stated, "We resist the urge to prescribe fixed formulas about numbers of overnights or age of commencement" (p. 256). Since then, however, policies that are being drafted in some state courts appear to be drifting instead toward Sroufe's (Sroufe & McIntosh, 2011) formula that "prior to age 18 months, overnights away from the primary carer (*sic*) should be quite rare" (p. 472). For example, McIntosh, Pruett, et al. (2015) write, in a document entitled "Charting Overnight Decisions for Infants and Toddlers (CODIT)" on the Oregon state court web page, "Even when all parenting conditions are met, high numbers of overnights (more than weekly) are not generally indicated for young infants 0–18 months subject to family law disputes." Some of the drift is due to overstatement of the previous findings. For example, Adam, Gray, Lysne, and Stahl (2016) misrepresent the Australian findings on the AFCC web page when they state that "multiple overnights with a non-primary parent are disruptive to the long-term development of very young children" (p. 15). In addition, it is difficult to discount the role that Sroufe and the other attachment researchers' reputations likely play in this drift toward a fixed formula eschewing frequent overnight parenting time for infants and toddlers. A prescription against frequent overnights for children under 18 months of age is, of course, contradicted by the current findings, and policymakers should note that Sroufe has recently acknowledged this fact: "Your results would of course lead me to temper my conclusions" (personal communication, September 21, 2016).

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