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# Fathers in the Fields: Father Involvement Among Latino Migrant Farmworkers

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It is estimated that there are over 3 million migrant and seasonal farmworkers in the United States (Larson, 2000). Approximately 42% of this population has been identified as migrating and 58% of migrant labor farmworkers are seasonal. Migrant farmworkers are required to be absent from their permanent place of residence in order to seek employment in farmwork; seasonal workers also engage in farmwork but are not obligated to move from their permanent residence. The US agricultural workforce relies heavily on both kinds of farmworkers with migrant farmworkers traveling far from their homes. Their number and characteristics are difficult to determine, but most are Mexican and Central American men between the ages of 29 and 60 with an average age of 36 years (Carroll, Georges, and Saltz, 2011; United States Department of Agriculture, 2007). Two-thirds are impoverished, and between 150,000 and 250,000 are separated from their families (Carroll, Samardick, Bernard, Gabbard, and Hernandez, 2005; Holmes, 2006; Villarejo, 2003). Migrant farmworkers often work under oppressive conditions, during which time they lack access to health care (Grzywacz, Quandt, Isom, and Arcury, 2007). Migrant farmworkers are some of the most economically disadvantaged workers in the country: most are paid less than the minimum wage (Carroll et al., 2011) and are excluded from protective legislation like the *National Labor Relations Act* (NLRA) and the *Fair Labor Standards Act* (FLSA).

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Approximately 52% of all agricultural workers are parents (NCFH, 2012), suggesting that many foreign-born migrant farmworkers leave families and children behind. The demographic profile of migrant farmworkers provides some context for their life histories and evidence of cumulative disadvantage. For example, migrant farmworkers' ability to support their families is limited by their inability to garnish a living wage. Thus, poor labor conditions and poverty associated with seasonal agricultural labor impacts the whole family. The factors and conditions associated with migrant farmwork helps situate the present study, which seeks to examine farmworkers' experiences as fathers. Migrant fathers are a unique group of nonresident fathers in that their separation from their children is economically driven rather than a result of marital dissolution, relationship separation, or criminal justice involvement (as in the case of incarceration). Yet, similar to other forms of nonresident fatherhood (such as never married nonresident teen fathers, low-income minority fathers, and incarcerated fathers), migrant fathers are economically disadvantaged and arguably stigmatized by the mainstream culture in which they work and live. This marginalization is manifested by a lack of workplace protections, harsh work and living conditions, legal deprivations, and health risks stemming from their foreign-born and sometimes unauthorized legal status (Carroll et al., 2011; Larson, 2000; "Statewide AIDS", 2007).

Thus, migrant fathers must be understood in the context of their employment conditions, their nonresidence, cultural scripts regarding gender and family, and the resultant challenges. In doing so, migrant fathering is "situated"—that is, their experiences and familial involvement is "nuanced by the specifics of their situations" (Marsiglio, 2005, p. viii). We situate fatherhood to explore more fully the nature of migrant men's relationships with their children and their fathering role in the context of nonresidence, migrant farmwork, and Latino cultural values. We examine the nature of nonresidential father involvement among a sample of Latino migrant farmworkers who are primarily of Mexican origin. We refer to the farmworkers in our study as *migrant*, acknowledging that their work is in agriculture and their residence in the area is temporary.

Our descriptive study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the nature of Latino migrant farmworker fathers' involvement with their children?
2. What is the demographic and mental health profile of Latino migrant farmworkers?
3. How do Latino migrant farmworker fathers view the quality of their relationships with their children and their children's mother?
4. What are the correlates of father involvement among Latino migrant farmworkers and, specifically, are family relationships and fathering behaviors linked within this population?

## Situating Fatherhood Among Latino Migrant Farmworkers

Latino migrant farmworker fathers are unique compared to other groups of nonresidential fathers on the margins, such as prisoners or young unwed American fathers (Day et al., 2005) because their fathering behaviors are embedded within distinctive residential and sociocultural constraints resulting from agricultural migration. Latino migrant fathers'

nonresidence is based predominately on *economic need* rather than a result of relationship disruption, developmental instability, or risky behavior. The origin of nonresidence likely bears on father involvement in general and among Latino migrant fathers specifically. Nobles (2011), for example, found that Mexican children in sending homes were more likely to stay connected to their migrant fathers than those children whose fathers left the home because of relationship disruption suggesting the uniqueness of migration as a context of nonresidence. Our study provides a model for examining not only the interplay of nonresidence and fathering, but also of culture and fathering, and economic disadvantage and fathering. Further, we hope to lend insight to whether it is appropriate to apply contemporary North American ideals of responsible fatherhood to this unique and growing group of fathers.

Contemporary North American culture emphasizes father presence as a pathway to responsible fathering (Mariglio, Day, and Lamb, 2000); yet to be a responsible father, many Mexican men must initiate their *absence* by leaving their children and families to seek gainful employment in the US (Grzywacz et al., 2007). Their employment in the United States is often far from ideal. Farm work is among the most dangerous occupations, and both immigrant and migrant farmworkers are considered “vulnerable” workers (Arcury and Quandt, 2007; Villarejo, 2003). In addition to facing numerous physical health risks as a result of difficult farm labor, migrant farmworkers are often forced to navigate multiple cultures with little social support (Hovey and Magaña, 2000). Grzywacz, Arcury, Quandt, Hiott, and Davis (2008) reported that stressors affiliated with migrant farm work such as social isolation and stressful working conditions are significantly related to mental health problems like elevated depressive symptoms and anxiety. Considering the health and acculturative stressors confronted by fathers when migrating for farm work, nonresidence is but one challenge impacting fathers’ involvement with their children.

## Father Involvement in Context

Fatherhood is multidimensional comprised of men’s motivations, role identity, and behavior. We focus on migrant fathers’ behavior as they enact the paternal role also defined in the literature as *father involvement* (Day, Lewis, O’Brien, and Lamb, 2005; Schoppe-Sullivan, McBride, and Moon-Ho Ringo, 2004). Father involvement transcends traditional activities like discipline, and active fathers provide spiritual caregiving and emotional support (Campos, 2008; Day et al.; Summers, Barclay-McLaughlin, Shears, and Boller, 2006).

In the US, involved fathers are defined as responsible providers, available to their children, and engaged with them via an array of caregiving tasks (Lamb, Pleck, Charnov, and Levine, 1987). Involved fathers provide economic and psychological support, care, guidance, companionship, and supervision (Lamb, 2000). Fathering scholars view these behaviors as important to healthy child development (Lamb; Marsiglio, Day, and Lamb, 2000). While uncertainty remains about whether residential and nonresidential father involvement benefits children in the same way, the limited literature on Latino fathers suggests that engaged fathers promote school aged children’s overall social and academic well being (Behnke, Taylor, and Parra-Cardona, 2008; Campos, 2008).

Similar to the discourse on father involvement among poor nonresidential fathers, immigration research has tended to view migration as a deficit and highlights the associated stressors that undermine fathering competence (Roer-Strier, Strier, Este, Shimoni, and Clark, 2005) and transnational family life (Pribilsky, 2007). As with other groups of nonresidential fathers, this deficit perspective is likely colored by North American cultural ideals about responsible fatherhood that defines fathers as present, actively involved, and economic providers who are responsive in the care of their children (Doherty, Kouneski, and Erickson, 1998; Lamb, 2000). This model, however, is fundamentally at odds with social and cultural realities confronted by many men, especially those from Mexico and other developing economies. In the absence of a strong economy and job opportunities, how can fathers be both physically and emotionally present as well as good economic providers? Western cultural prescriptions about high levels of father involvement may not be able to accommodate the socio-cultural circumstances confronted by many men, and may contribute to pathological constructions of responsible fatherhood for men who migrate to find work (Parra-Cardona, Cordova, Holtrop, Villarruel, and Wieling, 2008; Torres, Solberg, and Carlstrom, 2002). For example, a common misconception about Latino fathers is that although they may provide financial support for their children, they are controlling, harsh disciplinarians, and not very engaged in their children's lives (Cabrera, Aldoney, and Tamis-Lemonda, 2013). These negative stereotypes depicting Latino men as authoritarian and uninvolved (Behnke et al., 2008) may further marginalize migrant farmworker fathers given their economic disadvantage and frequent nonresidential status relative to their children and intimate partners. At the very least, stereotypes obscure the multiple ways Latino migrant fathers connect to their children while they are absent (Pribilsky, 2007).

Recent evidence has suggested that Latino fathers do not necessarily epitomize traditional machismo father stereotypes (aloof and authoritarian), but rather demonstrates that Latino men are highly involved in their children's lives (see Cabrera et al., 2013 for a review). On average, Latino fathers are nurturing, companionate, present, and knowledgeable role models for their children (Bornstein, 1984; Coltrane, 2000). The dynamic roles Latino fathers have in their children's lives are characterized by high involvement, including affective involvement and participation in activities such as school meetings, therapy, and parenting groups (Behnke et al., 2008; Falicov, 2010; Ramirez, 2003). It may be that Latino fathers are more similar (i.e. on typical indices of father involvement) than different to US fathers particularly when structural variables such as SES and assimilation are taken into consideration (King, Mullan Harris, and Heard, 2004). For example, Fox and Solís-Cámara (1997) reported no differences in father involvement between European American and Latino men when controlling for SES.

Still, despite the similarities that may exist between Latino fathers and European American fathers, there is a lack of consensus as to how fathers should be involved with their children (e.g. Cabrera et al., 2013). Father involvement is multiply determined and given dominant western discourse equating father presence with good fathering, the challenges posed by migrant work may inadvertently render Latino migrant fathers to the margins. As in other contexts of paternal nonresidence whereby fathers are not physically present or interacting directly with their children, father "involvement" transcends spatial boundaries and hands-on fathering, and may be comprised of cognitive expressions (Marsiglio, Roy, and Fox,

2005) and symbolism (Arditti, Smock, and Parkman, 2005) that advance migrant men's paternal identities, such as letter-writing or remuneration. Data from qualitative in-depth interviews suggests that despite the challenges associated with agricultural migration, migrant fathers were found to be "highly present, involved, motivated, and seeking positive and creative ways to express their roles as fathers in a new country" (Roer-Strier et al., 2005, p. 324). Research on Ecuadoran fathers also confirms migrant men's attempts to stay connected with children through letter writing and pictures (Pribilsky, 2007).

It would appear that fatherhood among migrant men, as with all men, is socially constructed, but may diverge from US views of fathering in that primacy is given to the breadwinner role and providing various advantages to their children rather than day to day interaction (Roer-Strier et al., 2005). Dreby (2006) comments on the importance of Mexican fathers' economic success as migrant workers in terms of their parenting roles and how gender ideology shapes fatherhood, even transnationally. Although Mexican mothers and fathers who are separated from the children may show remarkably similar parenting activities, migrant Mexican fathers' role is much more closely tied to financial provision. Dreby argues that this focus stems from Mexican gender ideology which seems to be highly "durable" despite transnational family structure challenges among parents. More broadly, men's roles within much of Latino culture are structured around the expression of *respeto* (respect) whereby women and children are to obey husbands and fathers as long as they provide for the household (Pribilsky, 2007). In the absence of economic opportunities and upward mobility in their home countries, migration then is a likely pathway for *respeto* for transnational Latino fathers.

## Correlates of father involvement

While there is a dearth of literature that specifically addresses the correlates of father involvement among Latino migrant men, research examining correlates of nonresident father involvement and Latino father involvement augments our coverage here. Correlates of father involvement among nonresident fathers include a host of contextual and relational variables such as father education, father age, proximity to children (Falicov, 2007; Grau, Azmitia, and Quattlebaum, 2009), economic provision (Saleh and Hilton, 2011), and relationship quality with children and mothers prior to nonresidence (Gupta, Smock, and Manning, 2004; King, 2007). Among these correlates, the quality of coparenting relationships is especially significant in terms of its influence on both nonresidential father involvement (Carlson, McLanahan, and Brooks-Gunn, 2008; De Luccie ,1995; Meteyer and Perry-Jenkins, 2010) and Latino fathers' involvement (Cabrera et al., 2013). For example, Latino men who attended pregnancy appointments and prenatal education with their intimate partners reported happier couple relationships and were more involved with their children (Cabrera, Fagan, and Farrie, 2008; Cabrera, Shannon, Mitchell, and West, 2009; Shannon, Cabrera, Tamis-LeMonda, and Lamb, 2009).

The majority of research examining correlates of father involvement among Latino men has been based on samples of married fathers who live with their children (Cabrera et al., 2013). Fathers with higher education, higher income, and employment were more likely to be involved with their children (Cabrera et al., 2008). Cultural factors that contribute to Latino

fathers' engagement and close family relationships include familistic cultural values, less acculturative stress, and more positive appraisals about migration separation (Cabrera et al., 2013; Capps, Bronte-Tinkew, and Horowitz, 2010; Rusch and Reyes, 2013). For example, a father's ability to learn English well (greater acculturation) predicts how much they contact their children from afar (Behnke et al., 2008; Roer-Strier et al., 2005).

Given the correlates identified in the father involvement literature, migrant Latino men are particularly vulnerable due to their cumulative disadvantage and the conditions of their non-residence. Gupta et al. (2004) reported that father involvement among migrant fathers was negatively correlated with poor economic conditions. Similarly, the US guest worker program (i.e. H-2A program) disallows families from accompanying migrant farmworkers into the U.S. Consequently, if farmworkers have children, they are, by definition, separated from those children and partners. We speculate that such disruptions put Latino migrant farmworker fathers at risk for social isolation (e.g. Grzywacz et al., 2007), which may in fact negatively impact on their ability to father and undermine relationships with their children (Donato and Duncan, 2011).

## Summary

Although there has been research in the area of migrant Latino farmworkers' health risks, there is limited empirical research devoted to assessing the experiences of these farmworkers as nonresident fathers. There is a developed literature for nonresident fathers within the US; however, most is relegated to post-divorce and separated fathers (e.g. Arditti and Keith, 1993; Catlett, Toews, and McKenry, 2005: Laughlin, Farrie, and Fagan, 2009). More recently, research has examined the implications of nonresidential parenting for fathers on the margins such as incarcerated fathers (Arditti, Smock, and Parkman, 2005; Roy and Dyson, 2005), unmarried teen fathers (Coley, 2001; Johnson, 2001; Silverstein and Auerbach, 1999), and poor fathers (Fagan and Palkovitz, 2007; Sorensen and Zibman, 2001). There is also a growing literature on Latino fathers and their children (see for example, Cabrera et al., 2013; Cabrera and Bradley, 2012). Here we seek to bridge these literatures by considering the unique intersections of culture, economic disadvantage, and nonresidence due to migrant farmwork as a context for father involvement among Latino migrant men.

## Method

This research is based on a community-based participatory research program that began in 1996 (Arcury and Quandt, 2014; Quandt et al., 2001; Quandt and Arcury, 2014). The primary partners for this collaboration are the North Carolina Farmworkers Project, a non-profit service and advocacy organization located in Benson, North Carolina, and Wake Forest School of Medicine. In addition, advocates from the Farmworker Advocacy Network have participated in different stages of the project. Community partners serve in a variety of roles across the domains of consultation, strategic planning, implementation, and translation (Arcury et al., 1999). These roles include co-investigator, advisory committee member, student intern, data collector, coauthor, and policy advisor. Data for this analysis are from a cross-sectional survey of migrant farmworkers completed from June through August of

2009. Both the Wake Forest School of Medicine and Virginia Tech Institutional Review Boards reviewed and approved the study protocol.

## Locale

North Carolina is considered a new immigrant destination state (Massey, 2010) and provides a rich population of immigrants and migrants for research purposes. In 1990, approximately 50,000 Latino immigrants lived in North Carolina; this number has grown to over 850,000 in 2012, almost 10% of the state population (US Census Bureau State & County Quick Facts, 2014). These immigrants have been drawn by employment opportunities in work in agriculture (Arcury and Marín, 2009), construction (Arcury et al., 2012), and manufacturing, particularly meat and poultry processing (Arcury et al., 2013).

This study includes migrant farmworkers in three eastern North Carolina counties: Harnett, Johnston, and Sampson. Migrant farmworkers in these counties include those who are documented permanent residents of the United States, those who have temporary H-2A work visas, and those who are undocumented. These farmworkers are overwhelmingly from Mexico and temporarily reside in grower provided housing, referred to as camps. The agricultural production in these counties varies, but the major hand-cultivated and hand-harvested crops include tobacco, sweet potatoes, and cucumbers. During the period of data collection for this project (July through September), participants were engaged in tobacco harvesting.

## Participant Recruitment

Participant recruitment and selection involved two steps: (1) identifying and selecting camps, and (2) identifying and selecting workers within camps. The North Carolina Farmworkers Project serves the camps in the study counties. They provided their list of camps to the study team. Camps from the list were selected and visited in random order. If a randomly selected camp was not being used, interviewers went to the next camp on the randomized list. Access and participation of farmworkers in these camps was facilitated by the long term relationship and trust between the North Carolina Farmworkers Project staff members and farmworkers in these counties.

A census was completed at the selected camps in which farmworkers gave preliminary consent to participate. Farmworkers at each camp were recruited from the census list; up to six participants were recruited at each camp. Farmworkers at 62 camps were asked to participate in the study of the approximately 85 inhabited camps (the exact number of inhabited camps changes during an agricultural season, and from year to year); workers at eight camps declined to participate and growers refused to allow study personnel to recruit at two camps. The overall sample size included 300 farmworkers recruited from 52 camps. At the 52 camps included in the sample, 157 individuals refused to participate, for a participation rate of 66% (300/457). Reasons for the refusals by camps and individuals were not recorded. All participants provided signed, informed consent before data collection began. Participants received an incentive of $20 for participating in the study.

The seasonality of farm work and the movement of the farmworker population made the timing of sample selection, participant recruitment, and initiation of data collection crucial. Although farmworkers start arriving in North Carolina as early as April, the greatest numbers are present in the eastern region of North Carolina in July and August (the period for tobacco harvest). Farmworkers begin leaving the area by the beginning of September. Recruitment and data collection were therefore completed in late July, August, and early September. The characteristics of the participants in this study are similar to those of farmworkers who have participated in other research in North Carolina (see for example, Arcury, Quandt et al., 1999, 2001, Arcury, Grzywacz et al., 2009; Arcury et al., 2014). However, they would be considered "point-to-point migrants" (Carroll et al., 2005), and that highly mobile farmworkers (i.e., the stereotypical "migrant" or "follow the crop" farmworkers) are under-represented in our study. These North Carolina farmworkers differ from to the general population of Latino migrant workers in the US in that they are overwhelmingly male and a high percentage of H-2A visas. For these reasons we have chosen to create the label "post-migration" in our variable description. While we recognize that the farmworkers are currently migrants, "post-migration" highlights the significance of a transnational labor-based migration, and the impact that this move has on farmworkers and their families.

## Data Collection

Standard procedures were used for translating data collection forms and interviewer instructions (Behling and Law, 2000). Sections of the questionnaire and instructions developed in English were translated to Spanish by an experienced translator who was a native Spanish speaker familiar with Mexican Spanish and with farmworker vocabulary and slang (Cha, Kim, and Erien, 2007). The entire document was then back-translated into English by a second interpreter who was a native English speaker. The original English and back-translation English versions were compared for meaning, and differences in meaning were resolved. The prepared questionnaire and instructions was reviewed by a staff member of our partnering community-based organization.

Pre-testing was completed to ensure the quality of the data collection questionnaire and instructions. A trained member of the farmworker community administered the questionnaire to four Latino farmworkers (from non data collection camps). Pre-test participants were asked to comment on any words, questions, or instructions they do not understand. They were also asked to discuss the meanings of the questions. Based on the comments and questions from these pretest participants, the questionnaire and instructions were revised for clarity (both the English and Spanish versions). Data collection included an interviewer-administered questionnaire. Questionnaire items addressed participant demographic and background conditions, work-related factors (e.g., hours worked, method farmworker compensation, and pesticide safety and safety training), eye health, and fathering. Modifications to the questionnaire were made based on farmworker feedback. This approach to questionnaire development has been consistently used in this community-based participatory research program, and it has provided reliable and valid information.

Of the 300 participants, 202 migrant men met the current study's eligibility requirements in that they had children under the age of 18 who they were not living with at the time of the survey. These men completed the fathering portion of the questionnaire, which consisted of 26 items assessing father involvement behaviors, family relationships, and the nature of father-child contact during their employment away from their families. We excluded 10 of these participants because it was unclear from these data whether their children lived with them in U.S. or whether the respondents were adult children participating in migrant farm labor. Our final sample consisted of 192 migrant Latino fathers, primarily from Mexico, whose children did not live with them. The majority of the fathers in our sample were 30 years of age or older (see also Table 1), had less than 6 years of formal education, and had been engaged in US agriculture for 2 or more years (N=87). Fathers reported an average of 2.24 children. Three-quarters of the sample reported having an H-2A visa.

## Measurement and Operationalization

An array of fathering behaviors as well as contextual and relational correlates were assessed using the "Fathering" section of the questionnaire. We created composites for certain constructs that had highly correlated items in order to develop a more parsimonious set of variables and facilitate the interpretability of our findings (see for example, Saisana and Tarantola, 2002).

## Contextual variables

We included a selection of contextual (i.e. demographic and mental health) variables in the study such as fathers' education, age, years in agriculture, whether they had a work visa, number of children, and information pertaining to the language(s) they spoke. We also measured depressive symptomology with a 10-item version of the Center for Epidemiologic Studies *Depression* (CES-D) scale assessing depressive symptoms in the past week using a four-point Likert scale (0 = "rarely or none of the time"; 3 = "most or all of the time"). Analyses of data obtained in previous farmworker samples indicates the 10-item short form of the CESD has acceptable internal consistency ($\alpha$ = .73 [95% CI = .70 – .76) and that it accounts for 78.3% of the variance in scores from the full CES-D (Grzywacz, Hovey, Seligman, Arcury, and Quandt, 2006).

Modified CES-D items ask about the frequency of positive and negative emotions in the previous week as well as items about interpersonal relations (e.g., people were unfriendly) and somatic symptoms (e.g., I could not get "going"). Responses range from zero ("rarely or none of the time") to 3 ("most or all of the time [5 – 7 days]"), and were summed with higher values indicating greater depressive symptomatology. We set the sum of depressive symptoms to missing if any question missed a valid response. Grzywacz et al. (2006) found the ten-items used by Kohout and colleagues (1993) captured the content of the full CES-D across multiple samples of immigrant Latinos obtained from different regions of the country (Grzywacz et al., 2010). We created a dichotomous diagnostic categorical variable using a cutpoint of 10 or higher as indicative of caseness for elevated depressive symptoms (Grzywacz, et al., 2006). Caseness indicates that a participant is in the clinically significant range of depressive symptomology. Due to missing data in the CES-D, our analyses

including the depressive symptomology variable was based on a slightly smaller (n=187) sample size.

## Father involvement behaviors

Traditionally, fathers' capacity to comfort their children, contribute to childcare, and discipline their children is represented in the literature as the hallmarks of father engagement. *Father engagement* with their children prior to migration was assessed with three items asking the frequency in which the father was involved in comforting the child, contributing to childcare, and disciplining the child (Hawkins et al., 2002). The response options rated from "none," which was coded zero, to "a lot" which was coded three. We created an engagement composite based on the items' interrelatedness. We coded and summed the items such that higher values reflected greater father engagement.

*Post-migration contact* between fathers and their children was assessed by two items measuring phone contact ("how often do you call your children" and "how often do they call you"). Other forms of communication were considered but abandoned because our ongoing involvement in the farmworker community suggests that multiple barriers (e.g., time, literacy, access, and availability to necessary materials) keep men from letter writing. Men's responses for each telephone question ranged from 0 or "none" to 6 or "every day". To create a composite variable from the two measures, we selected the measure which reported the most frequent contact. Most men indicated frequent phone contact with children resulting in a skewed distribution, so the father-child phone contact variable was dichotomized and used to represent post migration father involvement. Toward this end we collapsed the 5 lowest Likert responses ("none" through "weekly") into a "less contact" group comprised of 42% of the men, and the remaining 2-Likert categories ("several times a week" and "every day") into the "more contact" group, comprised of 58% of the men.

## Relational variables

We gathered information pertaining to the quality of family relationships using two items. First, we assessed the emotional *closeness of the father-child relationship* by asking fathers to respond the following question: *Since migration, how close do you feel to your child(ren)?* Responses were assessed on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from "extremely close" to "not at all close". *Co-parenting cooperation* was assessed by five 4-point Likert Items (never to always) pertaining to discussion and agreement on major childrearing, perceptions of mothers' support, and need for advice (items adapted from Arditti and Keith, 1993). A composite co-parenting cooperation variable was created by taking the sum of the five questions. We asked men to rate the *quality of their relationship with their children's mothers* since migration using a 5-point Likert scale (from "very poor" to "excellent").

## Migration outlook

We also constructed a variable "migration outlook" to get a sense of how men appraised their migration experience. Based on literature suggesting that the separation experience associated with migration influences how fathers' conceptualize their parenting roles and the quality of relationships with their children (Cabrera et al., 2013; Rusch and Reyes, 2013),

we reasoned that that men with more positive perceptions about migrating would have closer family relationships and report higher involvement with their children. We combined response on two migration items (coded dichotomously: 0 = “no”; 1 = “yes”) that were conceptually associated with each other. The migration items assessed whether migration created (item 1) or solved problems (item 2) in terms of being a father. The constructed value had a range from −1 to 1. A positive result would mean that problems were created and none were solved; a score of 0 would mean that either no problems were created or solved (0–0) or that problems were both created and solved (1–1).

## Analytic Strategy

Univariate statistics were calculated to describe participants’ background characteristics, the nature of their fathering behaviors, and family relationships. Bivariate correlations using Spearman correlations to accommodate skewness in the data to examine the associations between men’s mental health, family relationships, and fathering behaviors. Finally, father-child phone contact (post-migration) was modeled using a Generalized Estimating Equation (GEE) approach for outcomes with a binomial distribution, adjusting for the correlation within a camp. Selected contextual factors were entered as independent variables in the first model (N=191). The second model restricted the data to participants who had children under 18 who did not live with them (N=181), and in addition to the contextual variables, we included selected family relationship variables.

## Results

### Profile of Latino Migrant Fathers

Participants reported substantial father engagement with their child(ren) prior to migrating. Sixty-eight percent of participants responded “a lot” to the item about affective involvement with the focal child (i.e., “How much did you talk to, comfort, encourage, or show affection …”). A sizeable proportion of participants reported being involved in basic childcare, and 66% indicated that they fed, dressed, or supervised the child “a lot” before migrating. The vast majority (70%) of fathers in this sample reported disciplining their child “none/a little” prior to migrating. The average score for our father engagement composite pre-migration revealed moderate levels of engagement overall, (M = 6.56, SD=1.53) on a scale from 0 to 9. Likewise, participants reported high levels of contact with their children and families post-migration. The vast majority (97%) of fathers reported talking with their child(ren) on the telephone one or more times each week, producing an average score of 4.52 (SD=0.88). Most fathers had a favorable interpretation of their relationship with their children. The average rating of 3.56 (SD=0.55) on a scale of 1 to 4 of father-child relationship quality reflected that 98% reported having a “very close” or “extremely close” relationship with their child while only 2% reported having a “somewhat close” or “not at all close” relationship with their children since migrating. Fathers reported maintaining high quality relationships with their children’s mothers following migration, with 95% having “good” or “excellent” relationships.

### Correlates of Migrant Father Involvement Variables

Depressive symptoms measured by the CES-D were associated with a negative migration outlook (i.e. migration believed to create more problems for the family rather than solve them) and relationship quality with mothers. There was a small, negative association between migration outlook and coparenting cooperation, which, based on the coding scheme, means that a negative migration outlook (more problems than it solves) connected with less cooperative coparenting. As expected, coparenting cooperation was significantly and positively correlated with father's closeness to children and relationship quality with mothers. Pre-migration father engagement was negatively associated with post migration father-child closeness. That is, the more engaged fathers were with their children prior to migrating to the U.S., the less closeness they reported after migration. Post migration closeness between fathers and children was positively correlated with contact between fathers and children.

We modeled the probability that father-child phone contact was several times a week or more in the multivariate regression analysis. In the first model, context variables (age, education, number of children speak English, migration outlook) classified 61% of the men correctly in terms of whether they had more or less phone contact. Adding fathering and family relationship variables to the second model (Father engagement pre-migration, Coparenting, Father-child closeness) modestly improved classification results to 64%. Although the variables together did a good job of correctly grouping the fathers in terms of their high or low phone contact, none of the variables were statistically significant in predicting regular father-child phone contact. This was likely due to a lack of variability in our dependent measure (since most men reported relatively high levels of phone contact).

## Discussion

The goal of this study was to, first, bridge gaps in the fathering literature brought on by a relatively European American, middle-class hegemonic view of fathering that nonresidential fathering as inherently deficient, and, second, to shed light on how migrant fathers perceive and enact the parenting role. Similarly, we set out to determine whether fathering correlates previously established in the literature were applicable to a migrant population of agricultural laborers. In these analyses, we used data from Latino migrant farmworkers to consider the unique intersections of culture, economic need, and nonresidence for father involvement. Latino farmworkers provide a good model for such analyses because nonresidence is frequently dictated by national policies (e.g., the US guest-worker program) as opposed to personal choice, and leaving family behind for job opportunities in the US may be viewed as one way of being a "good" father.

Consistent with a family stress model that specifies the role of intervening emotional and psychological processes with regard to the impact of economic pressure on families (e.g. Conger, Rueter, and Conger, 2000), men's perceptions of their depressive symptoms likely have bearing on coparenting and relationship outcomes; although our findings are a bit too preliminary to draw any causal conclusions. It would make sense to examine the potential mediating role of depression more rigorously in future research. Similarly, although previous studies report that partial-family migration is correlated with children's emotional,

academic, or behavioral problems (Heymann et al., 2009), our findings suggest some positive possibilities associated with migration—at least with respect to fathers' mental health and coparenting relationships. Whether a positive migration outlook is an antecedent or an outcome of less frequent depressive symptoms or coparenting is not explained by our correlational analysis. However, based on our migration outlook variable, we can see that many fathers believe migration solves more problems than it creates and similar to research examining Mexican parents' outlooks on their separation from children due to migration, this is associated with better mental health (Rusch and Reyes, 2013). Obviously, additional research is needed to explore more fully the meanings fathers' ascribe to their migration experience and how the family is impacted. Our study is a first step in highlighting the complexity of the issue and the need for multiple measures and methodologies to help unpack these effects.

The profile that emerged from these analyses contributes to debunking myths about nonresidential fathers as "missing." Latino migrant farmworker fathers in our study report themselves to be close to their children and involved in their children's lives (as indicated by weekly phone conversations with them). While some study participants reported being highly engaged in providing emotional and parenting support to children prior to migration, this was correlated with feeling less close to children post-migration. Perhaps this correlation suggests that those fathers who see themselves as more involved pre-migration are more vulnerable to the changes brought about by nonresidence in that they are more likely to notice a lack of closeness to their children compared to what they may have previously enjoyed. The fact that migrant fathers report high levels of engagement prior to migrating, and relatively close relationships with their children, diverges from stereotypes of Latino fathers as being purely breadwinners and disciplinarians. Further, relationships with the children's mothers are reportedly positive and cooperative. There was little evidence of estranged father-child relationships or animosity directed toward children's mothers as is common in other contexts of nonresidence such as divorce (Arditti and Allen, 1993; Kaltenborn, 2004) or incarceration (Arditti et al., 2005; Roy and Dyson, 2005). This difference points to the importance of context in understanding family relationships and dynamic fathering for men who do not live day to day with their children.

Context gives parenting activities meaning (Bornstein, 1995). Nonresidential fatherhood and migration, for example, can serve important family functions. The relatively positive and distinct nature of migrant fathers' family relationships suggests some level of flexibility on the part of migrant families. Father involvement correlates such as a close relationship with children are threaded across contexts of nonresidence. Consistent with extant literature on father involvement (Waller, 2012), the quality of fathers' intimate partner relationships and coparenting cooperation are significant correlates of father-child relationship outcomes (in this case, their closeness) within a transnational setting. Such a finding demonstrates the theoretical significance of the marital (or intimate relationship) subsystem has in terms of influencing the nature of men's relationships with their children (McBride and Rane, 1998; Pruett, Arthur, Ebling, 2007) in all kinds of family structures (nonresident or resident), contexts, and cultures. Thus, co-parenting likely transcends culture (labeled as cultural universalism by Bornstein) with respect to its role in fostering positive child father outcomes

in contexts of nonresidential fathering and specifically with respect to migration (Pribilsky, 2004).

We suspect that the positive relationship that men reported with their children and their children's mothers has three possible explanations. The first is structural in that fully three-quarters of this sample migrated with a temporary work permit (i.e., an H-2A visa), which means that most of the fathers in the sample were separated from their children for a relatively short period of time (since the beginning of the agricultural season), and they would return home at the end of the season. These fathers were not separated for long periods of time, and many had ready access to telephone communication, both of which likely enable strong familial relationships. The second possible explanation is the cultural value placed on economic provision—particularly in the face of economic adversity—within Mexican culture (Benhke et al., 2008; Dreby, 2006) and Latino culture in general (Probilsky, 2007). Migration demonstrates a willingness to do whatever it takes to care for one's family. Thus, separation is necessary, and men may enjoy the support and cooperation of their spouses and family members for leaving home to engage in migrant work. Migrant work, so long as it benefits a man's children, likely equates with *respeto*. For example, Pribilsky (2007) notes that during children's celebrations during which fathers were absent because of migrant work, "the generosity of a father in the United States was roundly praised" (by wives and other family members in Ecuador) (pg. 113). *Respeto* and the support it garners from kin, is in contrast to other nonresident father scenarios such as divorce or incarceration in which mothers are seen as a barrier to men's relationship with children. A third explanation may relate to more flexible family roles and parenting expectations. That is, migration may afford men to have close relationships with children because they can break from rigid paternal structures of *respeto* that focus on their roles as disciplinarians were they to live with their family full time. As Pribilsky points out in his discussion of migrant fathers, "distance …makes some hearts grow fonder" (2004, p. 330).

In migrant father scenarios, separation has a different function and meaning that serves a distinct and valued purpose. Migration to support one's family aligns with familistic values that emphasize commitment to the family as a unit—values which are widespread among Latino populations (Falicov, 1998, 2007; Grau, Azmitia, and Quattlebaum, 2009). Migration to support children also aligns with Mexican gender ideology of fathers as financial providers, even in transnational contexts that may or may not include mothers (Dreby, 2006). Men's sense of being supported and respected by their children's mothers may serve to buffer declines in contact and family relationship quality that are all too typical in other contexts of nonresidence. Our findings also amplify to some extent qualitative work on Mexican fathers which demonstrated that fathers' relationships with their children rested on the quality of their relationships with their wives (Dreby, 2006). Although purely speculative, our findings pertaining to men's perceptions of positive family relationships may also reflect women's increased status stemming from their role as remittance managers and more equitable power arrangements within the family (Pribilsky, 2004). In sum, study results can be interpreted to point to resilience among Latino migrant fathers. Our findings add to the literature suggesting that conjugal relationships and father-child relationships are perceived as quite strong by men in the midst of transnational family life.

## Limitations

While our study was primarily descriptive in nature, we do note certain limitations. Methodological limitations include the fact that the measures we used to gather information on fathering and family relationships were preliminary and our assessment focused primarily on Mexican fathers. More sophisticated and culturally sensitive measures of contact and relationship quality are likely necessary to capture the nuances and variability of Latino migrant fathers' experience as well as more depth regarding any heterogeneity in men's experience that may stem from various Latino subcultures. Our small sample prohibited the comparison of fathers from different Latino sending countries. A second limitation of the study was that we did not have exact information regarding the length of time that had elapsed since fathers had last seen their children, and acknowledge this factor could influence family relationships. We estimate based on typical migratory patterns of farmworkers whereby most typically arrive in June (with some arriving as early as August) and stay until October (with some staying on into November or December for the sweet potato harvest or Christmas tress) that migrant fathers would generally not see their children for 6 to 9 months. For this study, those with H-2A visas would not have seen their children for about 2 – 4 months based on the months we collected data. For workers without work visas, fathers may go even longer periods of time without seeing their children depending on whether they move to another state or are unable to return to Mexico (if their children reside there) due to more severe border conditions.

Despite study limitations, our investigation provided a "first step" in advancing the research in that it yielded a blueprint in terms of which variables warrant further consideration and inclusion in more complex multivariate models. Consistent with the literature on nonresident father involvement, migrant fathers in our study saw themselves as very close with their children and highly involved. Yet, it is possible men may have overestimated their involvement (e.g. Arditti and Keith, 1993; Coltrane, 1996; Mikelson, 2008) or we did not represent the full range of men's experience using relatively simple close ended questions. Although some evidence supports the efficiency and viability of single item measures in variable operationalization (cf. Wanous and Hudy, 2001), further research with more robust, multi-item measures is needed. In-depth qualitative research would be particularly useful revealing the meaning men apply to their migrant work and the level and type of contact they have with their family members back home. We are also missing information about economic provisions that would be meaningful to include for future research, such as the nature of the remittances men were providing to their families.

A strength of our study is that we gather information directly from fathers to learn about their fathering activities and the nature of their family relationships. A typical critique in the fathering literature involves the overreliance on mothers' or other caretakers' (i.e. grandparents) reports of father involvement (Meteyer and Perr-Jenkins, 2010). Here we were able to describe fathering from data drawn directly from a highly mobile and largely invisible group of fathers. Caution is warranted in interpreting the correlational findings, as they are non-causal and we cannot specify the direction of effects between psychological, family relationship, and fathering variables with significant associations. The lack of significance in our multivariate tests likely stems from the preliminary measures we used

and our self-report methodology. Future studies need sufficiently developed measures, sample size, and more complex study designs (e.g. longitudinal and or multi-informant) to more effectively test theoretical models of father involvement in the context of migration. Additionally, “unknown camps”, many of which are likely smaller and provide housing for undocumented workers may be under-represented in our sample design. Undocumented migrant workers are notoriously difficult to research due to their mistrust of formal institutions and tendency to avoid contact with authority figures. Future research would be improved by developing innovative and strategic ways to engage this community. We suggest that researchers engage gatekeepers such as elder members of the migrant population who speak English and are comfortable providing a safe bridge between the research and migrant communities. We also suggest that researchers include Spanish-speaking members on their research teams. Further, we suggest researchers collect information about renumeration and family location at the time of migration. Doing so would improve our understanding of how men perceive renumeration and whether they believe this to be an active form of fathering.

## Conclusion

Migrant fathering among Latino men appears to be a distinctive context of nonresidential parenting given their reports of positive relations with children and their children’s mothers. Our preliminary work also suggests a modest level of cross-cultural consistency regarding the associations between co-parenting, relationship quality, and contact. In other words, some of our findings seem to suggest that migrant Latino farmworker fathers depend highly on their spouses and partners for contact with their children, a scenario that is common in other contexts of nonresidence, but is often negatively portrayed (e.g. mothers’ as gatekeepers preventing contact re: incarcerated fathers, Arditti et al., 2005; Edin, Nelson, and Paranal, 2001; or divorced fathers: Braver and O’Connell, 1998; Fagan and Barnett, 2003). In addition, these data suggest that Latino migrant farmworker fathers may have resiliencies that were previously hidden in terms of their migration outlook. Deficit perspectives of many nonresidential father populations contraindicate this result by suggesting that nonresidence status *creates* problems. Our study finds that nonresidential migrant status may actually *solve* more problems, such as dire family economic conditions, than it creates, although more research is needed to evaluate this finding. The idea that migration is a fathering strength stems from the unique context of their nonresidence and cultural prescriptions of fatherhood that center on breadwinning (Ariza and De Oliveira, 2001, 2007; Benhke et al., 2008; Dreby, 2006). Therefore, nonresidence as a result of migrant work is likely valued and seen as a necessary aspect of responsible fathering.

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## Table 1

Participant Characteristics and context variables: Latino Migrant Fathers, Eastern North Carolina, 2009 (N=192)

| **Characteristic** | | |
|---|---|---|
| | **N** | **%** |
| Age | | |
| 18 to 24 years | 17 | 8.9 |
| 25 to 29 years | 25 | 13.0 |
| 30 to 39 years | 89 | 46.4 |
| 40+ years | 61 | 31.8 |
| Educational Attainment | | |
| 0 to 6 years | 104 | 54.2 |
| 7+ years | 88 | 45.8 |
| Years in Agriculture in the US | | |
| ≤ 1 year | 25 | 13.0 |
| 2 to 7 years | 87 | 45.3 |
| 8+ years | 80 | 41.7 |
| Work Visa | | |
| No | 42 | 21.9 |
| Yes | 150 | 78.1 |
| Language Spoken | | |
| Spanish | 191 | 99.5 |
| English | 21 | 10.9 |
| Indigenous | 34 | 17.7 |
| Depressive symptoms* | 66 | 35.3 |
| | M | SD |
| Migration Outlook | −.62 | .52 |

*N=187; caseness = % of participants scoring in the clinically significant range

**Table 2**

Spearman correlations and characteristics of fathering and family relationship variables

| **Variables** | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | **5** | **6** | **7** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Father engagement | - | | | | | | |
| 2. Father-child contact | −0.00 | - | | | | | |
| 3. Father-child closeness | −0.26** | 0.17* | - | | | | |
| 4. Migration outlook | 0.10 | −0.03 | −0.06 | - | | | |
| 5. Co-parenting cooperation | 0.04 | 0.07 | 0.24** | −0.18* | - | | |
| 6. Quality of relationship with child's mother | 0.06 | 0.15* | 0.23** | −0.09 | 0.14* | - | |
| 7. Depressive symptoms | −0.09 | −0.08 | −0.10 | 0.15* | −0.02 | −0.15* | - |
| Variables | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| N | 187 | 191 | 189 | 192 | 187 | 188 | 187 |
| Mean | 6.56 | 4.52 | 3.56 | −0.62 | 10.49 | 4.19 | 8.64 |
| SD | 1.53 | 0.88 | 0.55 | 0.52 | 1.82 | 0.56 | 2.85 |
| Scale | 0 − 9 | 1 − 6 | 1 − 4 | −1 − 1 | 0 − 15 | 1 − 5 | 0 − 30 |

* p<0.05.

** p<.01