

**The Stability of Shared Child Physical Placements in Recent
Cohorts of Divorced Wisconsin Families**

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Abstract

This paper describes the living arrangements of children in Wisconsin families with sole mother and shared child physical placements following parental divorce and explores the stability of these arrangements during (approximately) the next three years. Contrary to prior research in this area, results provide little evidence that children in shared placement spend less time in their father's care about three years after a divorce than they did at the time of the divorce. In contrast, children with sole mother placement appear to progressively spend less time in their father's care in the years following a divorce, and a considerable proportion of these children spend little or no time in their father's care about three years after divorce.

The Stability of Shared Child Physical Placements in Recent Cohorts of Divorced Wisconsin Families

The growth of single-parent families and increases in maternal employment over the latter half of the twentieth century have generated interest in whether there have been concomitant changes in parental roles and the division of labor across mothers and fathers in regard to child rearing (see, e.g., Bianchi, Robinson, and Milkie, 2006). For divorced families, these factors may be influenced by public policies that guide child physical placement (i.e., children's living arrangements) and the amount of time children spend in the physical custody of each of their parents. Over the last two decades, the likelihood that divorcing families will have custody orders stipulating that they engage in shared child physical placement, as opposed to the sole mother placement orders that have traditionally dominated divorce cases, has increased considerably (Bauserman, 2002; Bender, 1994). Yet, we know surprisingly little about how this may have affected the stability of children's living arrangements, as well as the division of labor for child rearing, in recent years.

Almost a decade and a half has passed since the completion of Maccoby and Mnookin's (1992) landmark study, *Dividing the Child: Social and Legal Dilemmas of Custody*, which found that children experiencing shared physical placement in divorcing families in California progressively spent less time in the physical custody of their father and more time in the physical custody of their mother in the first two years following the breakup. This discovery led the authors to conclude that "the label of joint physical custody often does not reflect the social reality" (p. 159) of children's living arrangements during their parents' separation and divorce. Although not an explicit focus of Maccoby and Mnookin's work, an important implication of this finding is that, unless they return to court to have their child support orders adjusted accordingly, mothers whose children have shared physical placement may be compelled to effectively provide the majority of care for these children without being afforded access to the economic resources that would have been assigned to them had the court ordered an alternative child placement (e.g., sole mother placement). Indeed, Maccoby and Mnookin (p. 160) write that "advocates for women's rights would suggest that since these women receive less support than they would have received had the

[physical placement] decree reflected the reality of the residential arrangement, both they and the children ‘lose’.”

In the years since publication of *Dividing the Child*, both joint legal custody and shared physical placement orders have become increasingly common (Bauserman, 2002; Bender, 1994). Yet research has not examined whether Maccoby and Mnookin’s major finding—that children in shared physical placements tend progressively to spend less time in the custody of their fathers and more time in the custody of their mothers—a phenomenon that we refer to as “maternal drift,” can be replicated in other samples, nor whether it continues to characterize shared placement experiences for children two decades later. Maccoby and Mnookin utilized a sample of approximately 1,100 post-separation divorcing families in two California counties in 1984 and 1985. To our knowledge, there have been no significant follow-up studies exploring the stability of shared physical placement over time in the United States, and the existing literature has yet to explore whether associations between shared physical placement and maternal drift are present in other or more recent samples, or among children in post-divorce (as opposed to post-separation) families. Additional work in this area may be particularly warranted in light of a growing body of evidence that father involvement at the time of separation is positively correlated with father involvement at later points in time (Manning and Smock, 1999), that greater levels of father-child contact are associated with greater financial contributions to children’s care by nonresident fathers (see, e.g., Nepomnyaschy, in press; Peters et al., 2004; Seltzer, Schaeffer, and Charng, 1989),¹ and that, compared to children with sole legal and physical custody orders, children with joint legal or shared physical custody arrangements score better on measures of the quality of their family relationships, self-esteem, and emotional and behavioral adjustment (Bauserman, 2002).

To begin to address these gaps in the research literature, we utilize data from two cohorts of divorcing Wisconsin families, those that entered the Wisconsin court system between 1996 and 1998, and

¹Note, however, that the causal direction of associations between father-involvement with children and formal and informal economic support has not been established.

those that entered between 2000 and 2001, to describe the de facto living arrangements of children with various physical placement court orders following their parents' divorce, as well as the stability of those arrangements over (approximately) the next three years. Specifically, we (1) examine the likelihood that families with different child physical placement orders, including sole mother, unequal shared (mother primary and father primary), and equal shared placement at the time of divorce return to court to revise their placement order; (2) investigate changes in the amount of time children with various placement orders spend in their father's care over the period of study; (3) explore whether the de facto living arrangements (i.e., time in the physical care of each parent) of children with different physical placement orders comply with those orders approximately three years later; and (4) estimate associations between physical placement orders at divorce and the probability that children are spending less time with their fathers approximately three years later, net of a host of background characteristics. One important contribution of these analyses is documenting the extent to which various placement orders are associated with stable living arrangements for children, as well as intended levels of father-child contact, over time. Another dimension of interest is examining the role of public policy vis-à-vis child physical placement in shaping the division of labor in regard to child rearing among divorced parents. As with prior research in this area, our analyses of the relationship between initial placement orders and subsequent living arrangements are primarily descriptive and cannot be interpreted causally given that families are likely to self-select into physical placement types based upon factors that may be correlated with father-child contact over time, but for which we may not be able to fully account. Nonetheless, this study provides unique evidence regarding associations between physical placement type and children's living arrangements following parental divorce in a large and recent sample of families.

BACKGROUND

Joint legal custody and shared physical placement (sometimes referred to as joint or shared physical custody) are two distinct legal arrangements. Joint legal custody provides parents shared responsibility in major decision-making in areas such as their children's education, religion, and medical

care, but does not presume shared residential care. Shared physical placement stipulates that mothers and fathers are each responsible for the residential care of their children for some substantial proportion of time. The overwhelming majority of parents whose children are in shared physical placement also share legal custody for their children.

Over the past three decades, both joint legal custody and joint physical placement have become increasingly common in the United States as proponents have argued that such arrangements benefit children by allowing them to maintain substantial relationships with both parents. Critics assert that such arrangements may expose children to unstable living situations and continued parental conflict; see Bauserman (2002) for a further discussion of these issues. By 1994, policies in 20 states stipulated a preference for, or presumption of, joint legal custody in divorce cases (Bender, 1994).²

There are no recent national figures to indicate the level or distribution of shared physical placement as a proportion of divorce judgments in the United States.³ However, legislative trends suggest that such placement has become more common over the past decade and a half, as a growing number of states have revised their child support guidelines to address shared placement (sometimes referred to as extended visitation, joint physical custody, or shared parenting) arrangements. In the early 1990s, only 17

²Unfortunately, we have been unable to locate more recent national statistics regarding joint legal custody policies for divorce cases.

³Several authors have noted the dearth of national data regarding joint legal custody and shared physical placement (see, e.g., Pruett and Santangelo, 1999; Juby, LeBourdais, and Marcil-Gratton, 2005). Though dated, the only national figures we are aware of are presented in a 1995 National Center for Health Statistics Report which suggests that, based on data from 19 states, 15.7 percent of divorce cases culminated in shared physical placements in 1989 and 1990 (Clarke, 1995). However, it is unclear whether this figure was derived from shared physical placement rates, joint legal custody rates, or some combination of the two for each state. For example, the 1989 data used in this report indicate that Wisconsin had a 33.7 percent shared placement rate in that year. This figure most likely reflects some combination of joint legal custody and shared physical placement cases. Wisconsin data were not included in the statistics for 1990 and these statistics were completely discontinued after 1990. Additional estimates of shared physical placement rates have been based on smaller samples. Maccoby and Mnookin's (1992) sample of cases from two California counties petitioning for divorce in 1984 or 1985 revealed a shared physical placement rate of 20 percent. In a small national sample from a random-digit-dialed telephone survey in 1988 and 1989, Donnelly and Finkelhor (1993) found that 13 percent of 320 divorced, separated, or never-married caregivers of minor children, who had either informal custody agreements or court orders regarding custody, reported that they shared equal custody with these children's other caregiver. Most recently, Brinig (2005), using data from a sample of just under 500 divorce cases per year from 1995 through 2002 in the state of Oregon, reports an average joint physical custody rate of 24 percent for the years 1995 through 1997 and 30 percent in the years 1998 through 2002.

states had child support guidelines that both included an explicit threshold for determining the amount of time a child must spend with each parent in order for the arrangement to constitute a shared placement and offered a formula or guideline for calculating child support orders in such cases. Child support guidelines in 11 states offered no guidance for, and made no reference to, shared physical placement (see Melli and Brown, 1994, Appendix A). In 2002, however, the American Law Institute published its recommended guidelines for child support awards in shared physical placement cases (American Law Institute, 2002, §3.08, pp. 481–491) and by the end of 2004 child support guidelines in only five states did not acknowledge shared physical placement cases, whereas guidelines in 28 states provided both a threshold for determining shared physical placement and a formula for calculating child support in such cases.⁴ Among those states with child support guidelines that address shared physical placement, the minimum proportion of time that a child must spend with each parent in order for a placement to be considered shared, as opposed to being a sole placement with visitation, varies considerably. Thresholds range from a low of 14 percent of the child’s time (i.e., 52 overnights per year) in Indiana to a high of 45 percent of the child’s time (i.e., 164 overnights) in North Dakota (Brown and Brito, 2006).

We examine links between child physical placement type following divorce and the stability of children’s living arrangements and father-child contact approximately three years later among a sample of Wisconsin families. Wisconsin policy defines shared physical placements as those in which a child annually spends more than 30 percent of his or her time with each parent. Administrative data from the Wisconsin Court Record Database (described below), which contains information drawn from court documents, suggest that between 1980 and 2001 both joint legal custody and shared physical placement became increasingly common. In 1980, approximately 18 percent of families had divorce orders

⁴States with no child support guidance for shared placement cases (KY, MO, MS, NY, TX) and states with both a threshold and a child support guideline (AK, AZ, CA, CO, DE, FL, HI, IA, ID, IN, LA, MD, MI, MT, NC, ND, NJ, NM, OK, OR, PA, SC, SD, VA, VT, WI, WV, WY).

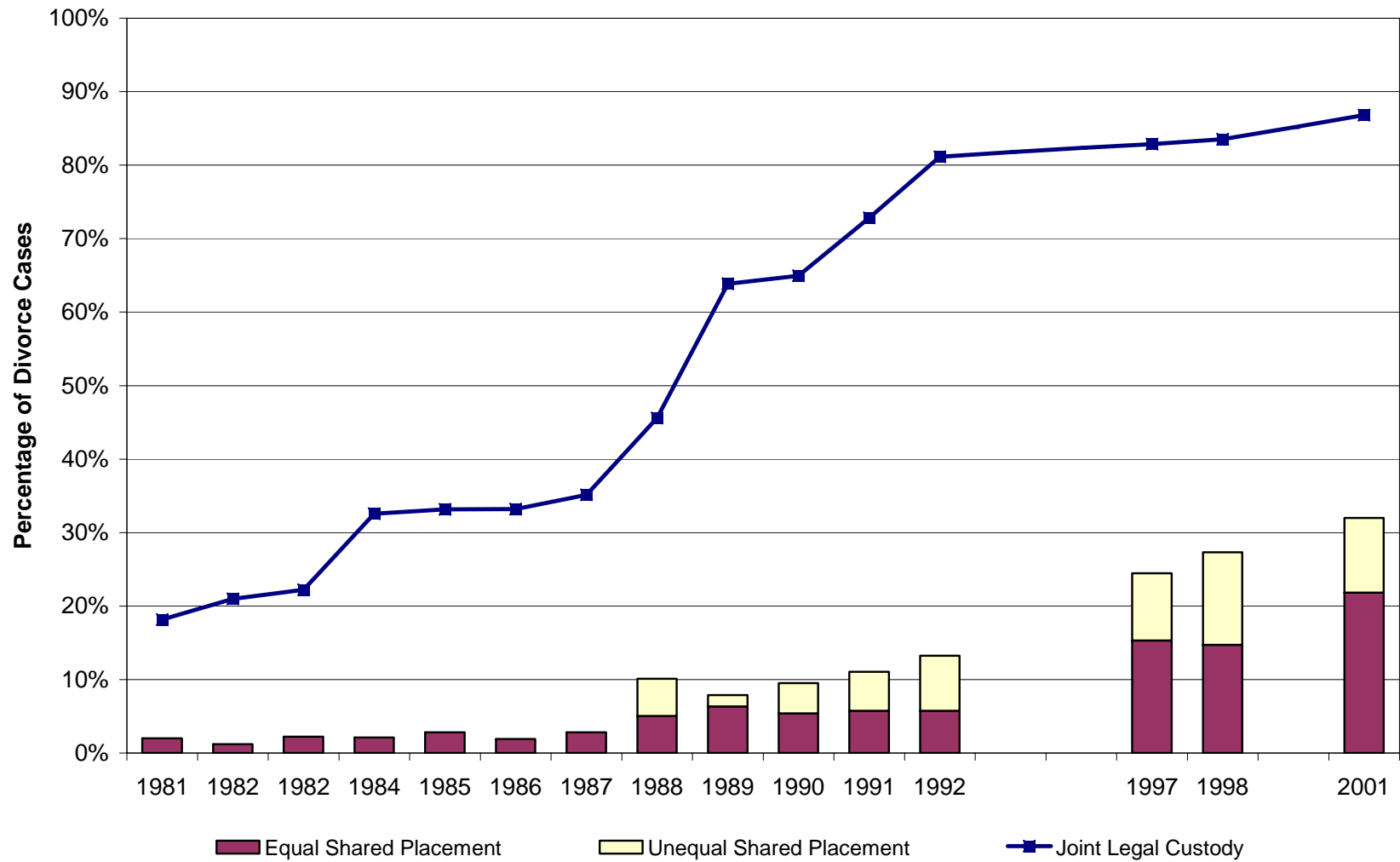
specifying joint legal custody. As shown in Figure 1, this rate increased throughout the next two decades. By 2001, 87 percent of Wisconsin divorce decrees provided for joint legal custody.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s Wisconsin also began to experience an increase in shared physical placement (often referred to as shared residential care or joint physical custody). Until the late 1980s, it was assumed that children with such placement would spend roughly equal time with each parent and, as shown by the bars in Figure 1, the proportion of children with shared physical placement was less than 3 percent. In 1987, however, Wisconsin child support guidelines were revised to include a child support formula for shared physical placement cases in which a child spent more than 30 percent of his or her time with each parent. Beginning in 1988, the Wisconsin Court Record Database began to collect data on two types of shared placement cases: those with equal shared placement in which children spent approximately 50 percent of their time with each parent, and those with unequal shared placement in which children spent more than 30 percent of their time with each parent, but in which one parent was responsible for child custody for more than 50 percent of the time. Figure 1 shows rates of both equal and unequal shared physical placement beginning in 1988. The addition of unequal shared cases to Wisconsin's definition of shared placement contributed to a considerable increase in the proportion of divorce cases with shared physical placement. By 1992, the shared physical placement rate had increased to more than 11 percent; by 2001, the rate was over 32 percent, and more than two-thirds of these families had equal shared placement. In view of this substantial growth in shared physical placement it is important to understand how the trend has affected children and families.

PRIOR RESEARCH

Maccoby and Mnookin (1992) present findings from a longitudinal study of 1,124 families who petitioned for divorce in two California counties (Santa Clara and San Mateo) in 1984 and 1985. The authors compared the stability of living arrangements of children residing primarily with their mothers, primarily with their fathers, and in dual residence, at the time of the divorce petition. Only 54 percent of families with dual residence at the time of the first interview maintained this arrangement over the

Figure 1
Joint Legal Custody and Shared Physical Placement in a Sample of Wisconsin Divorce Cases



observation period (Figure 8.2, p. 169), and only 45 percent of families with dual residence court orders at the final divorce judgment were engaging in de facto dual residence placement arrangements at the time of the final interview, one to two years later (Table 8.1, p. 166).⁵ Children in 38 percent of families with shared placement orders were living primarily with their mothers, and 12 percent were living primarily with their fathers, at the end of the study. These findings prompted the authors to conclude that, in many cases, the label joint physical custody was a misnomer, as it did not represent the actual living arrangements that children were experiencing.

Four additional studies have reported on associations between shared physical placement, the amount of time children spend in their father's care, and children's living arrangements after their parents' divorce. All utilized small, nonrandom samples of divorce cases from the early to mid-1980s, so the generalizability of their results is limited, even though they provide a useful context for this study. Luepnitz (1982), studied 50 families with either sole-mother, sole-father, or shared placement arrangements and found that those with shared placement were more likely to change placement arrangements than those with sole placement. However, approximately three and a half years after parental separation, fathers of children with shared placement were more likely to remain physically, emotionally, and financially involved with their children than fathers of children with sole mother placement. Kline, Tschann, Johnston, and Wallerstein (1989), studied 93 divorcing California families in the early 1980s, and found that about 80 percent of children in both sole mother and shared placements remained in those placements three years after the separation. They also found that about 9 percent of fathers whose children had sole mother placement stopped spending any time with their children, but none of the fathers of children with shared placement did so.

Pearson and Thoennes (1990), using a sample of 418 divorcing families, 64 of which had shared physical placement, found that families with shared placement were more likely to modify their

⁵It is important to note that about a fifth of the families reporting dual residence arrangements at the divorce petition had orders for other types of physical placement in the final divorce decree (p. 166).

placement arrangements than families with sole placement, but most of these families continued to share custody. They also found that fathers in sole mother placement families were considerably more likely to cancel or miss visits and less likely to have overnight or weekend visits than those in shared placement families. Finally, Cloutier and Jacques (1997), using a French-Canadian sample of 225 families, explored differences in the stability of residential custody arrangements over a two-year period in the 1980s. They found that children with shared placement were considerably more likely than children with sole placement to change living arrangements during the study period, and the majority of these changes resulted in de facto sole mother placement. However, over the study's observation period children with shared placement continued to spend more time with their fathers than children with sole mother placement.⁶

This body of research suggests that families with shared physical placement are more likely to change placement arrangements than those with sole placement. What is less clear is whether such changes represent shifts in children's de facto living arrangements or result from returns to court to modify placement orders. There is also mixed evidence as to whether families with shared placement are

⁶There is also a group of related studies that focus on joint legal custody (i.e., parents sharing the authority to make decisions for their joint children following divorce). Joint legal custody may, but does not necessarily, include shared physical placement. To the best of our knowledge, the studies reviewed below focus only on joint legal custody cases and not on cases that also have joint physical placements. On the whole, these studies find somewhat inconsistent patterns of results. Stephens (1996), for example, uses data from the National Survey of Families and Households to explore non-resident father involvement among a sample of 369 families in which the focal child lived primarily with his or her mother. She finds that father involvement is relatively limited following divorce and that it decreases over time. However, she also reports small positive effects of joint legal custody, as compared to sole mother legal custody, on father involvement in some, but not all, of her models. Arditti and Madden-Derdich (1997), using survey data on a sample of custodial mothers who divorced between 1988 and 1992 in southwest Virginia, compare 176 sole and 35 joint legal custody mothers. They do not find any evidence of associations between custody type and father involvement. Given the cross-sectional nature of their data, however, they are unable to explore such associations over time. Gunnoe and Braver (2001) investigate the effects of sole versus joint legal custody among a sample of 254 families undergoing divorces in the Phoenix metropolitan area in 1986 and find that, two years after a divorce, children in families with joint legal custody have more contact with their fathers and fewer adjustment problems than children in sole mother legal custody arrangements. Seltzer (1998), in perhaps the most methodologically rigorous study to date, uses data on 160 families that divorced between the first two waves of the National Survey of Families and Households (spanning from 1987 to 1994) to explore associations between joint legal custody and father involvement. In analyses that control for socioeconomic characteristics and measures of relationship quality prior to separation, as well as those accounting for unobserved differences that may be associated with both legal custody arrangements and father involvement among families, she finds that joint legal custody arrangements are positively associated with father involvement post-divorce.

abandoning these arrangements for sole placement or just adjusting the time spent in the care of each parent while maintaining substantial levels of time-share with both. Although there is some evidence of “maternal drift” it also appears that, over time, children with shared placement have more consistent contact with their fathers than those with sole mother placement. Thus, the existing literature suggests that there are more questions to be answered regarding the stability of living arrangements of children with shared physical placement.

Despite limited evidence, many policymakers, researchers, and advocates have argued that placement provisions requiring children to spend substantial amounts of time with both parents have potentially beneficial effects for family and child well-being (see, e.g., Bauserman, 2002). Yet, if shared placement families are likely to drift toward sole mother residence or, less often, toward sole father residence, then one parent may experience disproportionate child-rearing responsibilities and costs. Without a return to court for a revised placement order and a corresponding modification in the child support order, this parent may be left with inadequate financial support for raising the children. To date, few studies have focused on whether changes over time in the living arrangements of children with shared physical placements following divorce have been accompanied by revised placement court orders. Our study explicitly tracks whether changes in children’s living arrangements over approximately three years following a divorce are due to revised court orders or occur without court approval.

A common concern in observational studies is that families with joint physical placement may differ from those with other placement arrangements on a range of observable or unobservable characteristics and that these characteristics may partially or fully explain associations between physical placement type and the stability of children’s living arrangements and father-child contact. Indeed, prior research has identified a set of observable family characteristics that are associated with shared physical placement orders, as well as with equal (as compared to unequal) shared placements. For example, the likelihood that families receive shared (as compared to sole) and equal shared (as compared to unequal shared) placement orders is associated with factors such as family income and earnings (and the relative

income and earnings of each parent), maternal and paternal education (and the relative education of each parent), parental employment, each parent's legal representation status at the divorce, each parent's prior marital history, parents' ages, the distance between parents' homes, and children's genders and ages (Donnelly and Finkelhor, 1993; Melli, Brown, and Cancian, 1997; Cancian and Meyer, 1998; Gunnoe and Braver, 2001; Cancian, Cassetty, Cook, and Meyer, 2002; Juby, LeBourdais, and Marcil-Gratton, 2005). If these or other relevant characteristics are omitted from models that estimate associations between placement type and the amount of time children spend in their father's care, placement coefficients are likely to be upwardly biased. We therefore control for these factors in regression models that estimate associations between physical placement types and whether children spend less time in their father's care approximately three years after their parents' divorce than they did at the time of the divorce. However, we caution that, because many of the families in our study are likely to have self-selected into physical placement types in ways for which we cannot account in our models, the associations estimated here should not be interpreted as causal effects of placement type. Like prior work in this area, we provide a descriptive picture of the actual living arrangements, and changes in these arrangements over time, for children with different physical placement orders at the time of their parents' divorce. We document interactions between legal placement orders and actual living arrangements over the first years after a divorce, and provide these estimates for a larger and more recent sample of divorced families than has been utilized in prior work.

DATA

We use administrative data from the Wisconsin Court Record Database (WCRD) that have been linked to survey data collected from a subsample of WCRD divorce cases that came to court between 1996 and 2001. The WCRD consists of a sample of cases that entered the Wisconsin court system over a 21-year period, from 1980 to 2001. Cases were randomly selected from 21 counties and are fairly representative of the statewide divorce caseload in the relevant years. (Detailed descriptions of the design and methodology of the WCRD are provided in Brown and Marshall, 1992; Brown and Roan, 1997;

Brown and Wimer, 2002; Brown, 2005.) For each divorce case, the WCRD includes a two- to five-year history of court data regarding physical placement and child access (e.g., visitation) arrangements, as well as a host of child-support related data, such as whether and how much child support was ordered, whether the order was enforced, and information regarding child support payments.

We combine information from the WCRD administrative data with self-reported information drawn from telephone surveys administered to a subsample of mothers from the most recent cohorts of the WCRD. All cases selected to be interviewed by telephone had final divorce decrees granted between 1 and 4.5 years (on average, about three years) prior. The survey sample included divorce cases with shared placement orders at the time of the final divorce decree, as well as a comparison group of cases with sole mother placement orders. Sole father, split (some children in sole father placement, other children in sole mother placement), and third-party placements, as well as those involving multiple children with a mixture of sole and shared placements, were excluded from the survey sample. This resulted in 1,193 cases (598 shared cases and 595 sole mother cases) that were selected for telephone interviews. One-half of these cases came to court between 1996 and 1998; these mothers were interviewed by telephone in the summer of 2001. The other half came to court between 2000 and 2001; these mothers were interviewed in the summer of 2004. In all, 793 mothers completed telephone interviews; 402 had shared placement and 391 had sole mother placement, for response rates of 67.2 and 65.6 percent. The earlier cohort consisted of 196 shared placement and 210 sole placement cases, the later cohort of 206 shared placement and 181 sole mother placement cases. We combine data from both cohorts for our analyses, but exclude 21 cases in which the father of the focal child had died, the parents had reconciled, or data were missing on the primary variables of interest. Our final analysis sample consists of 772 observations.

For each case, a focal child was randomly selected from the children of the divorcing couple who were under age 18 on the June 1 prior to the telephone interview. The survey instrument included detailed questions about the focal child's living arrangements and the amount of time he or she spent in each parent's care during the 12 months preceding the survey. The survey also collected data on each parent's

demographic characteristics, economic resources, employment, and household composition, as well as on levels of contact and conflict between the parents. The surveys administered to each cohort were identical in content.

As noted above, the WCRD administrative data provide a history of the child's physical placement from the final judgment at divorce to the time of the survey. We use this information to examine changes in legal orders regarding the focal child's physical placement over time. Responses to the telephone survey provide information about the focal child's actual living arrangements over the 12 months preceding the survey. This allows us to compare mothers' reports of children's living arrangements to the physical placement orders in effect over the period of interest, and thus to measure consistency with, or deviation from, legal physical placement orders.

MEASURES

Placement Type

The threshold used to define shared placement for child support purposes in the state of Wisconsin during the time period in which our data were collected was whether a child spent more than 30 percent (or 109.5 out of 365 days) of his or her time with each parent during the course of a year (Wisconsin Administrative Code, 40.02(28), July 1999). The Wisconsin Administrative Code defines time spent with each parent to include both overnight child care and daytime equivalent care, as it is possible that some parents with shared physical placement do not provide overnight care for their children. Consistent with this definition, we define sole mother placement cases as those in which the placement order stipulates that the mother has physical custody of the child for 70 to 100 percent of the year. We define shared physical placement cases as those in which each parent is responsible for overnight or equivalent care for the child for more than 30 percent of the year.

We divide shared physical placement cases into three groups: equal shared placement, unequal shared placement-mother primary, and unequal shared placement-father primary. Equal shared placement

cases are those in which each parent has physical placement of the child 50 percent of the year (i.e., approximately 183 days per year). Unequal shared placement refers to physical placement orders in which each parent cares for the child more than 30 percent but less than 70 percent of the year. In unequal shared placement cases, we identify whether it is the mother (mother primary) or the father (father primary) who has physical placement of the child for the larger amount of time. In most of our analyses, we differentiate families with equal shared placement from those with unequal shared placement both because previous research suggests that there are differences in the characteristics of families with each placement type (Melli, Brown, and Cancian, 1997; Cancian and Meyer, 1998) and because children with various placement arrangements are, by definition, expected to have different amounts of father-child contact. We use WCRD administrative data containing a history of court appearances, including detailed information regarding the physical placement arrangement ordered (or agreed to) by the court, to assess children's placement arrangements at two points: at the time of divorce and at the time of the telephone survey.

Time Spent in Father's Care

We used survey data to construct a measure of the proportion of time that the focal child spent in the direct physical care of each parent in the year prior to the survey (approximately three years post-divorce). Mothers were asked to indicate how many overnights and how many days, including weekdays, weekends, summer days, summer holidays, school days, and school year holidays the focal child spent in the father's physical custody in the 12 months prior to the survey. Our measure includes an account of substantial number of days that children spent in daytime care with their father for families in which overnights with fathers were rare (referred to as equivalent care). This information allowed us to assess each child's living arrangement vis-à-vis his or her father at the time of the survey. We converted these counts to percentage form by dividing by 365 the number of overnights or equivalent care days that the focal child spent with the father during the 12-month period prior to the survey. Without adjusting for substantial daytime, or equivalent care, children in sole mother placement spent a mean of 12.5 percent of

their time, and children in shared placement spent a mean of 44.2 percent of their time, in their father's care. After adjusting for equivalent care, these mean values were 15.2 and 44.8 percent.

Our measure of time spent in the father's care is somewhat different from that used by Maccoby and Mnookin (1992). Their measure of time is based on a two-week period of the school year. Their interviews with California parents were conducted two or three times over a three-year period during the process of divorce in order to study the *decision-making process* for child placement. The Wisconsin telephone survey data were collected at one point in time, about three years post-divorce, in order to compare children's actual living situations with their legal physical placement orders both at that time and at the time of divorce. The points of comparison are, therefore, also different in the two studies. Maccoby and Mnookin compare the children's living situations reported just after the parents filed for divorce (but before a divorce decree was granted) to those reported about three years later (but not necessarily after the final divorce judgment). We compare children's (mother-reported) living situations at the time of the telephone survey (on average, about three years post-divorce) to the legal physical placement order in effect at the same point in time, taking into account whether a family had returned to court after the divorce in order to change its placement order.

Control Variable

We control for a set of variables that may be correlated with both the physical placement order at divorce and whether children spent less time in their father's care in the 12 months preceding the survey than at the time of the divorce. As discussed above, omission of these variables may result in biased estimates of associations between placement orders and the amount of time children spend in their father's care. The control variables can roughly be grouped into three categories: characteristics of the divorce, basic family characteristics, and extended family characteristics. Characteristics of the divorce include indicators for whether the parents were awarded joint legal custody and whether each parent had legal representation at the divorce. Basic family characteristics include indicators of whether the mother and father had experienced the separation of their own parents during childhood, whether either was

previously married, whether they were married to each other for 10 or more years, whether either had more than a high school education, whether they had only one joint child, whether they had any boys, and whether the youngest child in the family was under age 6 or between ages 6 and 12 (youngest child over 12 is the reference category) at the time of the survey. Extended family characteristics, measured at the time of the survey, include the logarithm of the distance (number of miles) between the mother's and father's homes, whether the mother and father were working in the year prior to the survey, the logarithm of maternal and paternal earnings in the year prior to the survey, whether either parent owed (but had not paid) the other parent child support in the year prior to the survey, whether each parent had remarried, whether each parent had new children, and whether the family had returned to court and had the child's time in the father's custody increased or decreased between the divorce and survey. We also control for cohort, county, and time between the final divorce judgment and survey (number of months), as well as a set of indicators for missing information on father's earnings and whether the father's parents separated during his childhood. Descriptive statistics for these variables, by placement type, are presented in Appendix 1.

METHODS

Our first set of analyses provide basic descriptive statistics that compare legal physical placement orders at the time of divorce to legal physical placement orders at the time of the survey to explore the extent to which families returned to court to change their placement orders after the divorce decree was granted (see Table 1). For those families that had not returned to court to change their placement orders, we then present t-test statistics that assess the extent to which the amount of time children were spending in their father's care changed between the divorce and survey, conditional on the legal physical placement order remaining unchanged (Table 2). Next, we show descriptive statistics on the proportion of time that children with each type of physical placement actually spent in their father's care in the year before the survey (Table 3). Finally, we present results from probit regressions used to estimate associations between child physical placement type and whether children spent less time with their fathers approximately three

TABLE 1
Distribution of Child Placement Orders at Divorce Judgment and at Time of Survey

Placement Order at Divorce	Placement Order at Survey					
	Sole Mother (N = 596)	Unequal Shared-Mother Primary (N = 116)	Equal Shared (N = 420)	Unequal Shared-Father Primary (N = 21)	Sole Father (N = 24)	Other Arrangement ^a (N = 16)
Sole mother placement (N = 595)	94.9%	0.2%	1.3%	0.0%	1.2%	2.4%
Unequal shared-mother primary (N = 127)	2.8	85.0	8.6	0.0	2.8	0.8
Equal shared placement (N = 449)	5.9	2.2	88.7	0.3	2.6	0.3
Unequal shared-father primary (N = 22)	0.9	0.0	1.0	98.1	0.0	0.0

Note: Based on administrative data for 1,193 divorce cases entering the Wisconsin court system between either 1996 and 1998 or 2000 and 2001. This constitutes the full sample of families selected to participate in the telephone survey (both respondents and nonrespondents). Data are weighted to correct for sample selection bias. Figures in bold indicate the percentage of cases that did not return to court for a change in physical placement order type between the divorce and survey.

^aConsists of split placement (where each parent has sole physical placement of one or more children), third party placements, and cases in which the mother, father, and child are coresiding.

Table 2
Changes in Time Children Spend in Their Father's Care between Divorce and Survey

	Sole	Shared		t-test		
	(1)	(2)	(3)			
	Sole Mother N=371	Unequal Shared- Mother Primary N=71	Equal Shared N=266	(1)=(2)	(1)=(3)	(2)=(3)
	Percent	Percent	Percent	p-value	p-value	p-value
Change in time spent in father's care without a return to court:						
Child spent no time in father's care in year prior to survey	15.9	0.0	0.2	—	—	—
Child spent less time in father's care at survey than at divorce	28.4	15.4	17.4	0.1131	0.0131	0.6666
Child spent same amount of time at survey as at divorce ^a	32.8	43.7	58.3	0.2113	0.0001	0.0203
Child spent more time in father's care at survey than at divorce	22.5	40.2	22.8	0.0239	0.9413	0.0019
Parents reconciled at time of the survey	0.4	0.7	1.3	—	—	—
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0			

Note: Based on administrative and survey data on 708 cases. These analyses exclude cases that returned to court to change their physical placement orders, sole father cases, cases in which the father had died, and those with missing data on the items of interest. Data are weighted to correct for sample selection and nonresponse bias. Figures in bold indicate $p < 0.05$.

^aIncludes cases in which the mother reported the father's amount of time with child was "not more or less but different."

Table 3
Physical Placement at Divorce and Child's Time in Father's Care at Survey

Child's Time in Father's Care at Survey (Mother-Reported)	Physical Placement at the Time of Divorce and Survey					
	A Equal Shared Only N = 258		B All Shared Placements N = 362		C Sole Mother Only N = 365	
	Percent	Cumulative Percent	Percent	Cumulative Percent	Percent	Cumulative Percent
0 percent	0.23	0.23	0.16	0.16	16.59	16.59
1 to 30 percent	14.49	14.72	19.33	19.49	69.19	85.78
31 to 45 percent	4.31	19.03	17.97	37.46	9.11	94.89
46 to 54 percent	69.17	88.20	51.47	88.93	3.71	98.60
54 to 69 percent	4.21	92.41	4.27	93.20	0.70	99.30
70 percent or more	7.59	100.00	6.80	100.00	0.70	100.00

Note: Based on administrative and survey data on 727 cases. These analyses exclude cases with missing data on the details of the time the focal child spent in the father's care and those in which the family returned to court to change its physical placement. Data are weighted to correct for sample selection and nonresponse bias.

years after the divorce than at the time of the divorce, net of an array of family characteristics (Table 4). Unless otherwise noted, data in all analyses were weighted to adjust for sampling and nonresponse bias.⁷

RESULTS

Court-Ordered Changes in Physical Placement

We first examined the prevalence of court-ordered changes in child physical placement that occurred between the final divorce decree and the time of the survey by comparing the placement orders in effect at each point in time. Table 1 presents the distribution of physical placement orders in effect at the time of divorce (in the rows) and at the end of the year prior to the survey (in the columns). These estimates are based on administrative data for the full sample selected for the telephone survey (1,193 observations), irrespective of actual participation in the survey. Physical placement orders remained unchanged for the majority of cases in each placement category. Families with sole mother placement maintained their placement arrangements in 95 percent of cases. Almost 89 percent of the equal shared placement cases also maintained that placement type at the time of the survey, while this was true of 85 percent of unequal shared-mother primary and 98 percent of unequal shared-father primary cases (note, though, that this latter category consisted of only twenty-one cases at the time of divorce). Overall, these descriptive statistics suggest that most physical placement orders remained intact from the time of divorce until the time of the survey and, for those families that did return to court to change their placement orders, most shifted toward a more equal distribution of the child's time with each parent. For example, the majority of unequal shared placement cases that returned to court to change their physical placement order (57 percent) moved to an equal shared arrangement. That most families did not return to court to change placement orders is not surprising, given that Wisconsin law prohibits substantial modifications of

⁷Weights for sampling and non-response bias were constructed from administrative data available for the full survey sample and are based on: county of divorce, date of the divorce petition, child placement at the divorce judgment, fathers' earnings, and child support payment history.

TABLE 4
Probit Estimates of Whether Child Spent Less Time in Father's Care
in the Year Prior to the Survey than at Divorce

Characteristics	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Type of shared placement:			
Sole mother (reference category)			
Unequal shared-mother primary	-0.186** (0.063)	-0.157* (0.071)	-0.154* (0.074)
Equal shared	-0.154** (0.047)	-0.127* (0.049)	-0.129* (0.053)
Unequal shared-father primary	-0.226* (0.109)	-0.191 (0.132)	-0.184 (0.156)
Joint legal custody at final divorce judgment	-0.154 (0.096)	-0.105 (0.091)	-0.039 (0.087)
Mother had legal representation in the divorce	0.000 (0.064)	0.027 (0.063)	0.063 (0.062)
Father had legal representation in the divorce	-0.047 (0.060)	-0.034 (0.059)	-0.011 (0.060)
Mother's parents separated during her childhood		-0.082 (0.064)	-0.090 (0.065)
Father's parents separated during his childhood		0.155* (0.074)	0.110 (0.078)
Mother was previously married		-0.013 (0.071)	0.017 (0.068)
Father was previously married		-0.080 (0.065)	-0.074 (0.066)
Married 10 years or more		0.015 (0.064)	0.040 (0.065)
Only one child in divorced family		0.141* (0.056)	0.131* (0.056)
Any boys in the divorced family		-0.021 (0.056)	-0.002 (0.056)
Age of youngest child at survey:			
Youngest child under age 6		-0.057 (0.093)	-0.062 (0.094)
Youngest child age 6 to 12		-0.081 (0.068)	-0.094 (0.071)
Youngest child age 13 or over (reference category)			
Mother more than high school education		-0.043 (0.054)	-0.042 (0.056)
Father more than high school education		-0.102+ (0.056)	-0.103+ (0.055)
Time between final divorce judgment and survey			-0.004 (0.004)

(table continues)

TABLE 4, continued

Characteristics	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
LN Distance between parents' homes at time of survey			0.050** (0.014)
Mother employed in year prior to survey			0.009 (0.136)
Father employed in year prior to survey			-0.102 (0.183)
LN Mother's earnings in year prior to survey			-0.010 (0.015)
LN Father's earnings in year prior to the survey			-0.032 (0.020)
Child support owed but not paid in year prior to the survey			0.249* (0.112)
Mother has remarried			0.047 (0.064)
Father has remarried			0.061 (0.069)
Mother has new child(ren)			0.004 (0.079)
Father has new child(ren)			0.221* (0.087)
Family returned to court and time with father was reduced			0.421** (0.117)
Family returned to court and time with father was increased			-0.253** (0.069)
Pseudo-R2	0.076	0.113	0.203
Observations	769	769	769

Notes: Marginal effects (and standard errors) from probit regressions presented. The outcome variable is whether the focal child spent less time in his or her father's care in the year before the survey than at the divorce. These models also include controls for cohort, county, and indicators for missing data on fathers' earnings and whether the father's parents' separation during his childhood. Data are weighted to correct for sample selection and nonresponse bias. +p < 0.10; *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.

a physical placement order within two years of the order unless family circumstances make continuation of the placement impractical (Wis. Stat. §767.325(2)) or both parties agree to a modification of the order (Wis. Stat. §767.329).

Changes in Children's Time in Their Father's Care

Table 2 presents results from bivariate statistics (t-tests) that examined changes in the amount of time children with different placement arrangements spent in their father's care at the time of divorce and in the year before the survey. This information was drawn from mothers' responses to a survey item asking whether, compared to when the mother and father were first divorced, the focal child spent more time, less time, or about the same amount of time in the father's care in the year prior to the survey. Mothers who reported that the focal child spent no time in the father's care in the year prior to the survey (52 cases) were not asked whether this differed from the time of divorce. For these analyses, we excluded unequal shared-father primary cases (21 observations) because the number of cases in this category is too small to produce reliable estimates.

As shown in Table 2, none of the children with unequal shared-mother primary placements, and 0.2 percent (only one child) with an equal shared placement, spent no time in their father's care in the year prior to the survey. By contrast, about 16 percent of children with sole mother placement spent no time in their father's care during this period. In those cases in which children spent some time in their father's care in the year before the survey, our data reveal that equal shared placement cases are significantly more likely to have maintained the same level of father-child contact than both sole mother cases and unequal shared-mother primary cases. Greater proportions of children with both equal and unequal shared placement spent more, rather than less, time in their father's care in the year before the survey. This is especially striking for children with unequal shared-mother primary placements, where 40 percent spent more time in their father's care in the year before the survey than at the divorce, and 15 percent spent less time in their father's care in the year before the survey than at the divorce. Thus, rather than revealing evidence of the maternal drift suggested by Maccoby and Mnookin's (1992) findings,

families in our sample exhibit a slight propensity for paternal drift, particularly among unequal shared-mother primary cases. The results for sole mother placement cases are quite different. A considerable proportion of children with sole mother placement spent some, but less, time (28 percent) or no time (16 percent) in their father's care in the year before the survey, as compared to the time of the divorce. Additionally, about 23 percent of children with sole mother placement spent more time in their father's care in the year before the survey than at the divorce.

Physical Placement Orders and Children's Time in Their Father's Care

We next investigated the extent to which children's living arrangements in the year before the survey were consistent with their physical placement orders. Here, we compared the proportion of time focal children spent in their father's care in the year before the survey to the proportion of time they should have spent in their father's care given the placement order in effect both at the time of divorce and in the year before the survey. We excluded cases that returned to court to change their physical placement order between the divorce and survey from these analyses. Because there is likely to be measurement error in mothers' reports of children's time spent with fathers (e.g., due to recall problems), we focused on broad categories of time spent with fathers that approximate Wisconsin guidelines regarding shared placement rather than on the exact percentage of time that mothers reported children spent in their father's care. For example, we considered children who spent 46 to 54 percent of their time in their father's care to be in equal shared (i.e., 50 percent) living arrangements.

Column A of Table 3 shows results for families that had an equal shared placement order at the time of the final divorce judgment and for which this order was still in effect at the time of the survey reference period. We see that a majority of these children had living arrangements that were consistent with their physical placement order. Sixty-nine percent of these children spent about half (46 to 54 percent) of their time in their father's care. About 12 percent spent more than half, and 19 percent less than half (i.e., 45 percent or less), of their time in their father's care. Almost 8 percent of children with

equal shared placement were engaged in de facto sole father arrangements, and about 15 percent were in de facto sole mother arrangements.

Column B of Table 3 presents results when all shared placement cases—equal shared, unequal shared-mother primary, and unequal shared-father primary—were aggregated. This allowed us to broadly consider changes in living arrangements for children with any type of shared placement. It also enabled us to more directly compare our results to those presented in Maccoby and Mnookin (1992). Maccoby and Mnookin defined dual residence as a child “spending at least 4 overnights with each parent in a typical two-week period.” This amounts to slightly more than 28 percent of his or her time, which is comparable to the 30 percent used to define shared placement under the Wisconsin child support guidelines that applied to our sample. Again, we excluded cases that returned to court to change their placement order from these analyses. The results in Column B of Table 3 reveal that 19 percent of 362 children were in de facto sole mother placements and 7 percent in de facto sole father placements in the year before the survey. In the remaining 74 percent of shared placement cases, mothers reported living arrangements that conformed to the state’s definition of shared physical placement. By comparison, Maccoby and Mnookin report that only 54 percent of the 143 children with dual residence placements in their sample retained this arrangement three years later. In the other 46 percent of families in their sample, children were living in de facto sole placements, two-thirds with mothers. Furthermore, only 45 percent of families with shared placement orders in the final divorce decree maintained dual residence, providing considerable evidence of maternal drift. Our results indicate that only 26 percent of shared placement cases changed to de facto sole placement, and that slightly over a quarter of these became de facto sole father placements. As such, we find considerably less evidence of maternal drift. Rather, we find a high level of post-divorce commitment to shared physical placement among these families.

We also examined the living arrangements of children with sole mother placement at the time of both the divorce and survey. Column C of Table 3 shows that almost 17 percent⁸ of these children spent no time in their father's care in the 12 months prior to the survey. About 14 percent were cared for by their father more than 30 percent of the time, suggesting that some children with sole mother placement were spending more time with their father than was required by the placement order.

The results presented in Table 3 have implications for child support orders. Under the shared placement child support formula in effect in Wisconsin during the period of observation, a 1 percent (or greater) change in either parent's time with the child should have triggered a change in the amount of child support ordered for families with shared placement. Thus, for parents who had an equal shared placement arrangement at the time of divorce, their child support order should potentially have been adjusted as follows: 19 percent to increase the child support paid to (or decrease the child support paid by) the mother and 12 percent to increase the child support paid to (or decrease the child support paid by) the father. For parents with any type of shared placement, these figures would be 19 percent and 7 percent; for parents with a sole mother placement, about 14 percent should have had their child support order adjusted to decrease the child support paid to the mother given that the father was caring for the child more than 30 percent of the time.⁹

⁸Note that this figure is slightly larger than the (13 percent) figure presented in Table 2 because 22 sole mother cases were excluded from this analysis due to missing data on the amount of time the focal child spent in the father's care in the year before the survey.

⁹Changes in time spent with the father among families with sole mother placements would not require an adjustment to the child support order unless they crossed the 30 percent threshold for sole mother placement. The Wisconsin child support formula applicable to sole mother placement cases is not based upon the amount of time a child spends in his or her father's care (other than by its defining characteristic, that the child spend 30 percent or less of his or her time in the nonprimary parent's care). The amount of time children in sole mother cases spend in their father's care can vary between 0 and 30 percent without requiring a return to court to adjust the child support order.

Physical Placement Orders and Reports of Decreased Time Spent with Fathers

Our final set of analyses examined associations between physical placement orders and the probability that children spent less time in their fathers' care approximately three years after the divorce than at the time of the divorce, net of case and family characteristics. Table 4 presents results from a set of probit regressions that were used to estimate these associations in three steps. Model 1 controls for characteristics of the divorce. Model 2 adds basic family characteristics and Model 3 adds extended family characteristics.

Model 1, which controls only for joint legal custody ordered, parents' legal representation status in the divorce, county, and cohort, reveals that, compared to children with sole mother placement, those with all types of shared placement are statistically significantly less likely to have spent less time in their fathers' care in the year before the survey than at the time of the divorce. Those with unequal shared-mother primary placement are 19 percentage points, and those with equal shared and unequal shared-father primary placement are 15 and 23 percentage points less likely to have experienced a decrease in time in their fathers' care. These effects do not significantly differ from one another. Thus, controlling only for characteristics of the divorce, we find that children with any type of shared placement at the time of divorce are more likely than those with a sole mother placement to be spending as much or more time in their fathers care about three years later.

Model 2 adds controls for basic family characteristics. Here, the marginal effects on the placement type variables are slightly attenuated and the marginal effect of unequal shared-father primary placement type is no longer statistically significant. Given that only 22 children, less than 3 percent of the total sample, had an unequal shared-father primary placement, it is unclear whether there is no statistically significant association between this placement type and father-child contact over time, or whether we lacked the statistical power to identify a statistically significant effect of this variable once we controlled for basic family characteristics. In regard to the other shared placement types, we continue to find negative and statistically significant associations between both unequal shared-mother primary and

equal shared placements and the probability that children are spending less time in their fathers care about three years after the divorce. As in the previous model, the marginal effects for each type of shared placement do not statistically significantly differ from each other. Of the basic family characteristics, the father's parents having separated during his childhood and the family having only one child are associated with decreases in the amount of time the focal child spent in the father's care between the divorce and survey. The father having less than a high school education is marginally ($p < 0.10$) associated with decreased time with the child.

Model 3 adds extended family characteristics measured at the time of the survey. The addition of these controls does little to alter the marginal effects of the placement variables. Unequal shared-mother primary and equal shared placement continue to be statistically significantly associated with a higher probability that children spend as much or more time in their fathers care, and the marginal effects of the shared placement variables do not statistically differ from one another. Turning to the control variables, we find that having only one child in the divorced family continues to be associated with a decrease in time spent with the father, as does the father having new children, a longer distance between the parents' homes, and one parent owing but not having paid child support to the other parent in the year before the survey. Fathers with less than a high school education are marginally significantly ($p < 0.10$) more likely to spend less time with the focal child. The indicators for returns to court that altered (i.e., increased or decreased) the child's time in the physical custody of his or her father under the physical placement order function in the expected directions. However, because these variables are endogenous to whether a child spends less time in his or her father's care over the years following divorce, we also estimated Model 3 for the subsample of families that did not return to court and have their placement order revised. Results from this specification (not shown, but available upon request) suggest that the exclusion of these cases does little to change the overall pattern of results. In the specification presented in Table 4, we find that children with unequal shared-mother primary placement and those with equal shared placement are 15.4 and 12.9 percentage points less likely than those with sole mother placement to have experienced a

decrease in the amount of time in their father's care between the divorce and survey. When the 63 cases that returned to court and had their placement orders revised are excluded from the sample, these estimates are 18.3 and 13.1 percentage points, respectively. Overall, the results from this set of analyses suggest that, on average, children with shared placement are less likely than children with sole mother placement to spend less time in their father's care three years after divorce than at the time of divorce.

DISCUSSION

This is the first large-scale study to investigate associations between child physical placement orders and children's de facto living arrangements following divorce since Maccoby and Mnookin's (1992) groundbreaking research on divorcing California families in the mid-1980s. We used data from two cohorts of divorced Wisconsin families (those that entered the court system between 1996 and 1998 and those that entered between 2000 and 2001) to describe the living arrangements of children with sole mother and (equal and unequal) shared physical placements following their parent's divorce, as well as the stability of those living arrangements approximately three years after the divorce. Maccoby and Mnookin identified a strong pattern of what we have termed maternal drift during the process of divorce. In contrast, we found that the living arrangements of children with shared physical placement were relatively stable over the three years following divorce. We also found that—consistent with their placement orders—children with shared placement spent considerably more time in their father's care than children with sole mother placement, and that children with equal shared placement spent more time in their father's care than children with unequal shared-mother primary placement. Although we caution that, like prior research in this area, we cannot make causal claims regarding our findings, in contrast to prior work we found little evidence that shared physical placements are associated with substantial maternal drift. Below, we review our main findings, compare them to prior studies, and discuss their implications for public policy.

Our first set of analyses (Table 1) examined whether families with different physical placement orders at the time of divorce returned to court to revise those orders over the next three years. We found

that the vast majority of families did not return to court to revise their placement order, regardless of their original placement type. For those families (7.1 percent) that did return to court to revise their placement order, it is likely that child support orders were adjusted accordingly such that parental resource sharing would be commensurate with the time children spent in each parent's care. In such cases, the parent who assumed the greater amount of care should have a child support order granting him or her access to resources through which to provide such care. This may not be the case for families that changed placement arrangements without returning to court. For this reason, our additional analyses primarily focused on families who did not return to court to revise their placement order.

Our second set of analyses (Table 2) found that more than a quarter of children with sole mother placement at divorce experienced decreases in time spent with their father over time and that an additional 16 percent of children with sole mother placement spent no time in their father's care after their parents' divorce. Children with shared placement were considerably less likely to experience this phenomenon: they were more likely than those with sole mother placement to spend either as much as, or more, time in their father's care three years after the divorce than at the time of divorce. Our third set of analyses (Table 3) yielded similar results. We found that the vast majority of children in all placement types had de facto living arrangements that were consistent with their physical placement orders three years after their parents' divorce. Our final set of analyses (Table 4) described associations between placement types and whether a child spent less time with his or her father (i.e., had experienced maternal drift) about three years after the divorce, as compared to at the time of the divorce, net of case and family background characteristics. We found that this was less common for children with shared placements. It is important to note, however, that these results do not necessarily have causal implications regarding the effects of placement type on the amount of time children spend with each parent given that, for a variety of reasons, families may self-select into placement arrangements in ways that are also associated with ongoing father-child contact. Our analyses revealed that several case and family characteristics were associated with the amount of time children spent in their father's care; prior research (see, e.g., Donnelly and Finkelhor,

1993; Melli, Brown, and Cancian, 1997; Cancian and Meyer, 1998; Gunnoe and Braver, 2001; Cancian, Cassetty, Cook, and Meyer, 2002; Juby, LeBourdais, and Marcil-Gratton, 2005) has linked many of these same factors to the likelihood that a family receives a shared, as compared to a sole mother, or an equal shared, as compared to unequal shared, placement order. Despite this caveat, our results suggest little evidence of maternal drift among shared placement families in this sample.

Our results are largely inconsistent with Maccoby and Mnookin's (1992) finding that only 45 percent of dual residence families maintained a shared placement one to two years after divorce: we find that about 74 percent of shared placement families maintained de facto shared living arrangements for children about three years after divorce. What may account for such differences across the two studies? One potential explanation may be related to differences in the way in which placement types were defined and operationalized in each study. For example, returns to court to change placement orders between the final divorce judgment and final interview were not accounted for in Maccoby and Mnookin's (1992) study. We excluded these cases from many of our analyses. Thus, to some extent, the two studies may be analyzing different types of changes in children's living arrangements. The two studies also differ in their measurement of the amount of time children spend in each parent's care. Maccoby and Mnookin construct their measure from data on the number of overnights a child had with each parent during a two-week period of the school year and do not account for daytime equivalent care. In contrast, our measure includes the proportion of time children spent with each parent over an entire 12-month period (i.e., including both the school year and summer months). We were also able to account for daytime equivalent care. To some extent, these measurement issues may explain differences in the results of the two studies.

Turning to more substantive explanations, differences in the results of the two studies may be related to differences in the legal environments in which the families in each sample underwent divorce. However, a review of legislation regarding child physical placement that would have applied to each sample suggests that this is unlikely to be the case. Neither California nor Wisconsin law provided for a presumption of shared physical placement during the period in which the relevant sample was observed.

However, laws in both states appear to have viewed shared placement orders favorably. For example, California Civil Code §4600.5(a) presumed “that joint custody is in the best interests of a minor child” in cases in which parents were in agreement about such placement. California law (Civil Code §4600.5(b)) also authorized shared placement orders upon the request of only one parent in disputed cases. Similarly, Wisconsin courts have historically entered placement orders that parents have agreed to prior to coming to court (Melli, Erlanger, and Chambliss, 1988) and, since the late 1990s, Wisconsin courts have been granted the discretion to order shared physical placement in disputed divorce cases. In May 2000, Wisconsin law was amended to encourage consideration of physical placement orders that maximize the amount of time children spend with each parent (Wis. Stat. §767.24(4)(a)(2.)). The later cohort of divorce cases in our sample may have been affected by this policy. In short, California statutes pertaining to child placement from 1984 to 1989 appear to be relatively comparable with those in Wisconsin during the period 1996 to 2001—although Wisconsin law (particularly that which was applicable to the later cohort of divorce cases in this study) may have more explicitly encouraged shared placement. On the whole, however, differences in the legal environments are not likely to fully account for differences in the behaviors of these families regarding placement. Furthermore, we have no reason to believe that differences in legal environments would differentially affect family behavior regarding children’s de facto living arrangements in the years following the divorce.

It is also possible that child support policies in effect for each sample may have affected the implementation and maintenance of physical placement orders. Although Maccoby and Mnookin’s California sample was not subject to state-level child support guidelines, superior courts in both counties from which their sample was drawn had adopted county child support schedules for use “during the pendency of the divorce proceedings” (pp. 352–353). The child support schedules in effect in both counties explicitly accounted for the proportion of time that children spent with each parent in assigning child support. In contrast to child support policies in effect for the California sample, statewide child support guidelines regarding shared placement cases in Wisconsin were implemented in 1987, nearly a

decade before the earlier cohort of divorce cases in our sample came to court. It is therefore likely that divorcing Wisconsin parents, and certainly the judges and lawyers involved in their divorces, were aware that child support orders for shared placement families would reflect the amount of time children spent in each parent's care. This may have encouraged parents to fully implement their physical placement order and to maintain it over time in order to avoid returning to court to adjust their child support order. Thus, it is possible that differences in child support formulas and their implementation and enforcement across the two studies may have differentially influenced behaviors regarding children's living arrangements.

Changes in the social context over the past 15 to 20 years may further explain differences in findings across the two studies. Shared physical placement was a fairly new and relatively rare arrangement in the mid-1980s, both in California and in the rest of the nation, as mothers were traditionally granted sole custody of their children following divorce. As such, social support (e.g., from school systems, extended families, and employers) for such arrangements, as well as openness to them on the part of the courts and mediation services, may have been more limited at that time than when the Wisconsin sample underwent divorce. For these reasons, it is possible that, in the mid-1980s, some mothers may have resisted giving up what may have been seen as a "right" to a sole mother placement. By the early 2000s, however, when over 30 percent of children of divorcing Wisconsin families were in shared placement, communication about, and encouragement and support for, such placement may have been much more common. If so, parents may have been more likely to engage in shared placements and to sustain them over time. Furthermore, if a more select group of parents chose to engage in shared placement in the mid-1980s, as compared to the early 2000s, then the unobservable characteristics of parents selecting into these placements may differ across the two studies. This, too, may partially explain differences in their results.

Another potential explanation for differences in the findings of the two studies is that the distribution of equal and unequal shared placement cases differs substantially in the two samples. In the California sample, a majority (67 percent) of the dual residence families had unequal shared-mother

primary arrangements at the time of the first interview. In contrast, a minority (33 percent) of the shared placement cases in our sample had this arrangement, and the majority had equal shared placement. Existing evidence suggests that unequal shared placement may, in part, result from compromises between parents in legal environments in which shared placement is not presumptive, whereas equal shared placement may more often result from agreements between cooperative parents (Melli, Brown, and Cancian, 1997). In our sample, 37 and 39 percent of cases that received sole mother and equal shared placement orders arrived at the final divorce hearing having had no prior court appearances. Cases that received unequal shared orders were considerably more litigious: 24 and 26 percent of families that received unequal shared-mother primary and unequal shared-father primary orders arrived at the final divorce hearing with no prior court appearances, 76 and 74 percent had one or more prior court appearances, and 43 and 28 percent had two or more prior appearances (see Appendix 2). To the extent that unequal shared placements are the result of a more litigious decision-making process than equal shared placements, differences in the distributions of these placements may be reflected by differences in the stability of shared placements across the two samples. That is, if cooperative parents are more likely than noncooperative parents to engage in equal shared placement and also to maintain these placements over time, then the difference in the distribution of equal and unequal shared placements across the two studies may partially explain their contradictory results. Our sample comprises a considerably larger proportion of equal shared families than the California sample. If these families were more cooperative than those in the California sample, they may have had greater success in maintaining shared placement over time. Indeed, Maccoby and Mnookin (1992, p. 159) report that their “most disturbing finding is the frequency with which joint physical custody decrees are being used by high-conflict families to resolve disputes.” About half of the “high-conflict” families with shared placement in their sample were engaged in de facto sole mother placement at the end of their observation period.

CONCLUSION

In contrast to prior work, we found little evidence that children with shared physical placement spent less time in their father's care approximately three years after their parents' divorce than they did at the time of the divorce. As such, our results suggest that, in and of itself, shared physical placement is not associated with maternal drift within a three-year time frame. Thus, to the extent that shared physical placement may be linked to positive developmental outcomes for children, presumably by increasing the amount of time that children spend in the care of each of their parents (see, e.g., Bauserman, 2002), and that increases in father-child contact are associated with increases in non-resident fathers' financial contributions to their children's care (see, e.g., Nepomnyaschy, in press; Peters et al., 2004; Seltzer, Schaeffer, and Charng, 1989), the results of this study imply that recent increases in shared physical placement following divorce may benefit children.

APPENDIX TABLE 1
Descriptive Statistics

	Physical Placement at Time of Survey										
	All Families		Sole Mother		Unequal Shared-Mother Primary		Equal Shared		Unequal Shared-Father Primary		
	Percent		Percent		Percent		Percent		Percent		
Physical placement order in final divorce judgment:											
Sole mother	73.76		98.06		0.00		7.11		0.00		
Unequal shared-mother primary	6.35		0.25		91.61		2.86		0.00		
Equal shared	18.87		1.66		8.39		89.95		0.00		
Unequal shared-father primary	1.02		0.02		0.00		0.07		100.00		
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	
Time spent in fathers' care (percent of time)	23.58	82.62	15.08	69.87	35.45	37.00	48.43	48.99	51.04	54.72	
Joint legal custody at final divorce judgment	0.86	1.32	0.82	1.77	1.00	0.00	0.97	0.46	1.00	0.00	
Years between final divorce judgment and survey	2.56	2.90	2.62	3.49	2.33	2.30	2.39	2.07	2.32	2.13	
Mother had legal representation in the divorce	0.72	1.72	0.72	2.08	0.78	1.23	0.72	1.24	0.85	1.16	
Father had legal representation in the divorce	0.55	1.91	0.48	2.31	0.83	1.13	0.73	1.23	0.77	1.34	
Distance between parents' homes at divorce (miles)*	45	593	57	800	14	113	15	257	7	22	
Mother's parents separated during her childhood	0.23	1.62	0.26	1.03	0.11	0.95	0.16	1.02	0.27	1.42	
Father's parents separated during his childhood**	0.11	1.18	0.11	1.42	0.12	0.95	0.10	0.84	0.12	1.04	
Mother was previously married	0.17	1.43	0.16	1.70	0.13	1.00	0.19	1.09	0.29	1.45	
Father was previously married	0.15	1.36	0.14	1.61	0.14	1.03	0.17	1.04	0.27	1.42	
Married 10 years or more	0.42	1.90	0.39	2.25	0.41	1.47	0.55	1.38	0.06	0.73	
Only one child in divorced family	0.40	1.88	0.43	2.28	0.28	1.34	0.40	1.35	0.34	1.52	
Gender of children—any boys in divorced family	0.64	1.85	0.62	2.24	0.72	1.33	0.64	1.33	0.80	1.28	
Age of youngest child at survey (in years)	10.03	14.58	9.98	17.74	8.91	10.76	10.46	9.89	7.86	7.51	
Mother more than high school education	0.64	1.84	0.63	2.23	0.63	1.44	0.70	1.26	0.32	1.49	
Father more than high school education	0.45	1.91	0.39	2.25	0.71	1.36	0.56	1.37	0.66	1.52	
Mother employed in year prior to survey	0.92	1.03	0.92	1.24	0.87	1.01	0.94	0.66	0.93	0.83	
Father employed in year prior to survey	0.96	0.79	0.95	1.04	0.99	0.32	0.98	0.38	1.00	0.00	
Mothers earnings in year prior to survey (2003 \$\$)	\$29,922	\$90,803	\$27,499	\$89,771	\$35,876	\$114,069	\$37,796	\$81,675	\$23,078	\$38,904	
Fathers earnings in year prior to survey (2003 \$\$)	\$44,613	\$135,680	\$40,800	\$159,628	\$60,189	\$112,924	\$53,310	\$96,333	\$61,864	\$91,829	
Child support paid in year prior to survey	0.72	1.72	0.81	1.81	0.74	1.31	0.40	1.35	0.59	1.57	
Mother has remarried	0.27	1.79	0.28	2.06	0.24	1.28	0.25	1.19	0.05	0.68	

(table continues)

APPENDIX TABLE 1, continued

	Physical Placement at Time of Survey									
	All Families		Sole Mother		Unequal Shared-Mother Primary		Equal Shared		Unequal Shared-Father Primary	
	Percent		Percent		Percent		Percent		Percent	
Father has remarried	0.22	1.58	0.21	1.89	0.31	1.38	0.21	1.12	0.09	0.93
Mother has new child(ren)	0.16	1.42	0.18	1.78	0.11	0.94	0.13	0.94	0.05	0.68
Father has new child(ren)	0.10	1.15	0.11	1.43	0.07	0.75	0.08	0.77	0.00	0.00
Number of observations	769		386		78		278		12	

Note: Based on complete survey and administrative data for 769 families entering the Wisconsin court system between either 1996 and 1998 or 2000 and 2001 and in which the mother was a survey respondent. Data are weighted to correct for sample selection and nonresponse bias.

*Distance was computed as distance in miles between parents' zipcode centroids.

**Information about the father's parents was not asked of mothers in the earlier of the two surveys. Therefore, for cases in the earlier survey, we used information provided by respondent fathers for this item. Data on this item is missing for nonrespondent fathers on the earlier survey (26 percent of cases). For cases in the later survey, information about the father's parents was provided by the mother. There was no missing data on this item.

APPENDIX TABLE 2
Number of Court Appearances Prior to the Final Divorce Judgment

	N	None	1	2 or more
Placement Order at Divorce				
Sole mother	595	37.2%	38.4%	24.4%
Unequal shared-mother primary	127	24.2	33.2	42.6
Equal shared	449	39.3	36.0	24.7
Unequal shared-father primary	22	26.2	46.0	27.8

Note: Based on administrative data for 1,193 families entering the Wisconsin court system between either 1996 and 1998 or 2000 and 2001. This constitutes the full sample of families selected to participate in the telephone survey (both respondents and nonrespondents). Data are weighted to correct for sample selection bias.

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