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Family Ties and Young Fathers' Engagement in Cape Town, South Africa

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Abstract

Young South African fathers are often engaged in their children's lives even if they do not live together. Using longitudinal data on children (n = 1,209) from the Cape Town area, the authors show that although only 26% of young fathers live with their children, 66% of nonresidential fathers maintain regular contact, and 61% provide financial support. The father–child relationship, however, is embedded in broader family ties. The type of father–mother relationship is strongly associated with whether fathers coreside with their children, but not with fathers' contact with nonresidential children. Close mother and maternal grandmother bonds reduce the likelihood that fathers live with their children, whereas close ties between fathers and paternal grandmothers increase the chance that fathers visit nonresidential children. Family ties do not affect fathers' financial contributions, which are driven by men's current economic situation. These findings illustrate that father–child relationships are best understood in the context of interacting family systems.

Keywords

African families; father; child relations; intergenerational relations; living arrangements; nonresidential parents

South Africa has one of the lowest rates of father–child coresidence in the world, with over 60% of children younger than age 14 living apart from their fathers (Posel & Devey, 2006). Although these fathers are absent from their children's households, they are often actively involved in their lives (Madhavan, Townsend, & Garey, 2008; Richter & Morrell, 2006;

The Cape Area Panel Study Waves 1–2–3 were collected between 2002 and 2005 by the University of Cape Town and the University of Michigan, with funding provided by the U.S. National Institute for Child Health and Human Development and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. Wave 4 was collected in 2006 by the University of Cape Town, University of Michigan, and Princeton University. Major funding for Wave 4 was provided by the National Institute on Aging through a grant to Princeton University, in addition to funding provided by National Institute for Child Health and Human Development through the University of Michigan.

Swartz & Bhana, 2009). Despite enduring public stereotypes that portray nonresidential fathers as disengaged and shirking their responsibilities (Montgomery, Hosegood, Busza, & Timaeus, 2006), recent research demonstrates that many men do not fit this image (Richter & Morrell, 2006; Swartz & Bhana, 2009). One study in urban Johannesburg, for example, found that over 60% of children under age 5 received uninterrupted financial support from their fathers (Madhavan, Richter, Norris, & Hosegood, in press). Perhaps more surprisingly, qualitative research indicates that some never-married, nonresidential fathers are increasingly playing caregiving roles beyond economic provider, helping with homework, and providing moral instruction (Makusha, Richter, & Bhana, 2012; Montgomery et al., 2006; Swartz & Bhana, 2009).

Because of the vital roles that both residential and nonresidential fathers are believed to play in promoting positive child outcomes (Carlson & Magnuson, 2011), understanding the factors that inhibit or foster fathers' engagement is important. Previous research on this topic has identified high levels of poverty and labor migration as major impediments to fathers' coresidence and engagement (Richter & Morrell, 2008). In the apartheid era, men were traditionally engaged in mining or other industrialized activities, leaving their female partners and children behind in designated homeland areas. Although the strict Pass Laws ended in 1986, these high rates of male migration without accompanying family members have continued (Rabe, 2007), with up to 60% of men age 35–54 reported as temporary migrants in rural South Africa (Collinson, Tollman, Kahn, Clark, & Garenne, 2006). Much of this migration is, in fact, driven by the poor economic prospects for young men, who face an unemployment rate of nearly 40% for those age 16–24 (Leibbrandt, Woolard, McEwen, & Koep, 2010). Nonetheless, although many fathers are forced to leave their child's household to find work, successful migratory Black fathers, in particular, are likely to send back remittances and thus fulfill one of the important roles of fathers as a breadwinner (Lu & Treiman, 2011).

In addition to low levels of employment, young South African fathers are particularly unlikely to live with their children because of the precipitous decline in formal marriages among Black South Africans (Posel, Rudwick, & Casale, 2011). Fewer than half of men and women living in KwaZulu–Natal reported being in a formal marriage by age 40 (Hosegood, McGrath, & Moultrie, 2009). In rural South Africa about half of all births to women age 12–26 occur out of wedlock (Garenne, Tollman, & Kahn, 2000). The practice of *lobola*, whereby the groom's family is expected to pay the bride's family before marriage, is often blamed for delaying marriages and increasing premarital childbearing because many families find it difficult to accumulate the full brideprice (Posel et al., 2011). The dependence of most young men on their families to help negotiate and pay the *lobola* highlights the importance of extended kin in South Africa.

In fact, to fully understand the father–child relationship in South Africa, it is essential to consider the role of extended kin. Fatherhood among young men in South Africa happens to families rather than individuals (Swartz & Bhana, 2009). Paternal kin not only help pay *lobola*, but they also assist in the payment of *isisu* (damages), which are paid if the young father does not intend to marry the child's mother and wishes to acknowledge his paternity.

Fathers often complain that their contact with their children is curtailed if neither *lobola* nor *isisu* payments are made (Bhana & Nkani, 2014; Hunter, 2006; Swartz & Bhana, 2009).

The child's maternal kin also play an integral role in making decisions about how children are raised, and by whom. Much has been written about the importance of maternal grandmothers helping to raise young children in South Africa, in particular if their daughters are unmarried (Madhavan, Harrison, & Sennott, 2013; Schatz, 2007). Maternal kin may also act as important gatekeepers, refusing to acknowledge paternity or grant fathers access to their children if *isisu* payments have not been made (Swartz, Bhana, Richter, & Versfeld, 2013). In short, as Madhavan and Roy (2012) argued, the care of children, including the role that young fathers will play, is often a negotiated process between the biological parents and their respective kin.

In this study, we explored how these family ties are related to three measures of fathers' engagement with their children: (a) coresidence, (b) frequency of contact, and (c) financial support. We focused on young fathers because these men face the highest unemployment rates and are least likely to have established a stable marital or cohabiting partnership with the child's mother. As a consequence, they are most likely to depend on extended kin both to assist in raising their children and to help them navigate their roles and responsibilities. By using exceptionally rich longitudinal data collected in Cape Town, our study offers two main advantages over previous analyses of fathers' engagement. First, we assessed the association between *prior* indicators of the relationships between mothers and fathers, mothers and maternal grandmothers, and fathers and paternal grandmothers and *current* levels of fathers' engagement, to minimize the potential for reverse causality. Second, unlike many previous studies, which have relied primarily on young mothers' reports of fathers' involvement (Gee & Rhodes, 2003; Herzog, Umaña-Taylor, Madden-Derdich, & Leonard, 2007; Kalil, Ziol-Guest, & Coley, 2005; Madhavan et al., in press; Madhavan, Richter, & Norris, 2014), we analyzed representative samples of both young fathers and mothers to explore fathers' engagement from both male and female perspectives. By looking at men's engagement in childrearing in the context of broader family relationships, our analyses help identify the complex factors that can encourage or discourage young men from being active participants in their children's lives.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Our conceptual framework draws on *family systems theory*, which views families as dynamic and interdependent systems in which different relational subsystems (dyadic pairs of family members) influence other subsystems (Cox & Paley, 1997; O'Brien, 2005; Parke, 2004). Specifically, we were interested in how the key dyadic pairs—mother–father, mother–maternal grandmother, and father–paternal grandmother—are related to the father–child relationship. The family systems approach has frequently been applied to the study of young fathers' involvement in low-income, African American families in the United States. Several of these studies have found that the quality of the relationship between mothers and fathers is strongly related to the involvement of nonresidential fathers (Coley & Chase-Lansdale, 1999; Gavin et al., 2002; Herzog et al., 2007; Kalil et al., 2005; Krishnakumar & Black, 2003; Rhein et al., 1997). Other studies have emphasized the central role of maternal

grandmothers not only in caring for their grandchildren but also in facilitating or hindering fathers' contact with and financial support of their children (Gavin et al., 2002; Gee & Rhodes, 2003; Herzog et al., 2007; Kalil et al., 2005; Krishnakumar & Black, 2003; Rhein et al., 1997). Paternal grandmothers have received less attention, although they too appear to be important (Greene & Moore, 2000; Kalil et al., 2005). Although this research demonstrates the value of taking a family systems-based approach to studying fathers' involvement, this theoretical perspective has not been applied to research in South Africa, which primarily draws on theories of masculinity to explain men's roles within the family structures (Bhana & Nkani, 2014; Hunter, 2006).

Ties Between Fathers and Mothers

In South Africa, the vast majority of young children live with their mothers; thus, whether mothers and fathers are *currently* in a cohabiting relationship would likely determine whether or not fathers lived with their children. Yet, relationship statuses change over time, and some types of conjugal bonds may be weaker than others. Marriages and cohabiting unions dissolve, and fathers move out of the household to seek work. In other instances, couples who had been living apart may form an independent household. Thus, we would expect that the type of relationship between mothers and fathers *at the time of pregnancy* would strongly, but not perfectly, predict whether fathers subsequently lived with their children and that fathers with weaker initial conjugal bonds will be the least likely to currently live with their children.

Similarly nonresidential fathers who are in a committed relationship with the child's mother would be most likely to provide economic support and assist with child care. Conversely, low-quality parental relationships could result in little support from nonresidential fathers. As participants in one qualitative study asserted, "Where the mother–father relationship was not good or it was non-existent, it was most likely to result in minimal, if any, support for the child from the father" (Makusha et al., 2012, p. 138). Other qualitative research, however, suggests that even if mothers are not in a romantic relationship with the child's father, mothers may encourage fathers to play an active role and will welcome financial support from them (Madhavan, 2010; Madhavan & Roy, 2012). Young men, in particular, felt that "being a good father revolved around being present and supporting their child, irrespective of whether they had an ongoing relationship with the mother of their child" (Swartz & Bhana, 2009, p. 45). Thus, we expected that the effect of the type of the conjugal relationship on fathers' contact with and financial support of their nonresidential children may be weaker than that for coresidence.

Ties Between Fathers and Paternal Grandmothers

Patrilineal kinship structures are common throughout South Africa. This strong vertical lineage system traced through paternal lines reinforces the central role of fathers in providing social standing, legitimacy, protection, and economic support for their children. As a consequence, paternal grandparents and other relatives have a keen interest in helping fathers build and maintain strong ties to their children. Paternal grandmothers appear to play a particularly important role in helping young fathers adjust to parenthood, by encouraging young men to participate in parenting the child. Young men often describe their mothers "as

provider, as emotional supporter and encourager, as mediator and protector, and as counselor or teacher" (Swartz & Bhana, 2009, p. 58). Thus, we would expect that young men who maintained strong ties to their paternal kin, especially their mothers, would be more likely to marry and to maintain an active and ongoing relationship with their nonresidential children.

Ties Between Mothers and Maternal Grandmothers

Although the majority of ethnic groups in South Africa are patrilineal, most groups, including the Xhosa, recognize *bilateral descent*, whereby kin from both sides play an active role in sharing childrearing responsibilities (Mkhize, 2006). Moreover, traditionally until *lobola* is paid children remain members of the maternal family. In these instances, the maternal grandmother rather than the biological father may act as the primary coparent (Madhavan et al., 2013). The support that young, unmarried mothers receive from their mothers and other family members may come at a cost, however. Because the child's maternal relatives have primary responsibility for the child's care, "They often have power to determine the degree to which young fathers have access to and are involved in raising their children" (Swartz et al., 2013, p. 2). Although some young men report that the child's maternal grandmother would help arrange for them to visit their child, others note that maternal grandmothers tended to "side with their daughters" and formed a formidable barrier to seeing their children, particularly if the *isisu* had not been paid (Bhana & Nkani, 2014). As one young mother's relative commented, "In our culture there is no role a young father can play" (Swartz & Bhana, 2009, p. 69). Quantitative data also suggest a negative correlation between support from maternal kin and fathers' involvement. In Johannesburg, nonresidential fathers are less likely to provide financial support or to keep in contact with their children if the children's mother lives in a household with other adults (who are presumably the child's maternal kin; Madhavan et al., 2014, in press). Thus, we hypothesized that stronger ties between mothers and the child's maternal grandmothers will decrease the likelihood that fathers live with their children, regularly visit their children, or provide financial support.

Men's Employment

Although the primary objective of this study was to assess how family ties are related to father–child relationships, other factors have also been shown to be related to men's engagement. Foremost among these are economic factors. As mentioned above, both the need to migrate for employment and to pay *lobola* limits fathers' ability to live with their children. Fathers who are unemployed or underemployed are also unlikely to be able to provide regular financial support. Shame associated with being unable to pay for child support can spill over into other aspects of the father–child relationship. For example, in qualitative interviews, some young fathers reported feeling too ashamed to see a child if they could not pay for clothing, food, or other essentials (Swartz & Bhana, 2009). Thus, poverty may affect not only fathers' financial support of their children but also their likelihood of coresiding and having frequent contact with their children.

Parents' Race and Age

Race is intrinsically linked to fatherhood in South Africa. The majority of Blacks living in the Cape Area belong to the Xhosa ethnic group, which is characterized by high migration because most were confined to nearby "homeland settlements." Following the end of apartheid, family structures and household dynamics changed dramatically as restrictions on mobility and urban residence for Blacks were lifted. Coloureds, a heterogeneous mixed-ancestry ethnic group historically categorized separately from both Blacks and Whites, make up approximately 47% of Cape Town's population, followed by Blacks (38%) and Whites (14.7%), with less than 1% of the population reported as Asian (City of Cape Town, 2010). Rates of fathers' absenteeism are higher among Black South African children (over 50%) than among Coloured children (about 40%) and are lowest for White children (less than 15%; Posel & Devey, 2006).

Last, both the age of the parent at the time of birth and the child's age are related to whether fathers live with their children and how often fathers see or provide financial support for their nonresident children. Young fathers are less likely than older men to live with their children because many young fathers are finishing school and attempting to save sufficient resources to marry and establish an independent household. The age of the child may also determine fathers' level of involvement. One study of children in Johannesburg, for example, found that financial support declined with the age of the child (Madhavan et al., 2014).

METHOD

For our analyses, we used data from the Cape Area Panel Study (CAPS; www.caps.uct.ac.za/). CAPS was designed using a two-stage probability sample of households, with an oversampling of Black and White households in order to obtain samples large enough to make meaningful comparisons across groups. The baseline wave of CAPS, conducted in 2002, surveyed 4,751 young adults (age 14–22) in 3,304 households located in the metropolitan Cape Town area of South Africa. As in most South African household surveys, response rates were high in Black (89%) and Coloured (83%) areas and low in White (46%) areas, largely because Whites disproportionately live in gated communities to which interviewers have limited access (Lam et al., 2008).

Second, third, and fourth rounds were conducted in 2003/2004, 2005, and 2006, respectively. In the fourth round (Wave 4), 3,438 young adults (1,561 men and 1,877 women), now age 18–26, were interviewed, representing approximately 72% of the original sample. Less than 2% of our sample in Wave 4 falls outside of this age range because of slight age misreporting. We removed one woman who reported a very large age difference (13 years) across waves. Attrition rates differed significantly by race. By Wave 4, Coloured youth had the lowest attrition rates (20%), followed by Blacks (26%) and Whites (58%). Most attrition by Blacks was due to return migration to the rural Eastern Cape Province, the main sending region for Blacks living in Cape Town. Attrition rates for Whites were the result of both migration out of Cape Town (including out of South Africa; 34%) and a significant number of refusals (39% refused, and 25% were not available). Because of both high attrition rates and low initial response rates, we excluded Whites from our analyses

presented below. Lam and colleagues (2008) provided a full description of the details of the CAPS study design, response rates, and attrition across the first four waves.

By Wave 4, nearly 40% of women, and 17.5% of men, had had at least one child. Of those with at least one child, women had, on average, 1.2 children, and men had 1.1 children. For our analyses, we included all children reported by respondents, yielding a total of 311 children reported by young fathers and 898 children reported by young mothers. Our primary analytic samples of children excluded two children with missing birth dates and 15 children who died before Wave 4. Moreover, because we were interested in assessing parental involvement, our samples also excluded 23 children who had lost a biological parent (18 fathers and two mothers). Thus, in total, 3% of all reported children were excluded. Our analyses focused on three main outcomes: (a) whether children coreside with their young fathers, (b) whether children see their nonresidential fathers at least once a week, and (c) whether children receive financial assistance from their nonresidential fathers. Because previous research suggests that mothers and fathers may provide different assessments of fathers' engagement (Coley & Morris, 2002; Makusha et al., 2012; Mikelson, 2008), all analyses were run separately for children reported by mothers and those reported by fathers. Young mothers and fathers were reporting different children (i.e., these are not matched couple data). Both fathers and mothers provided reports about children's residence and financial support, whereas frequency of contact was reported only by fathers.

Our first outcome indicated whether the child normally lives with the father at Wave 4. The handful of young mothers or fathers who reported that their children "sometimes" reside with their father were coded as not coresiding. For children who do not reside with their fathers, we examined how often fathers see their child, our second analytical outcome. This categorical variable captured whether fathers see their child "every day" (30.1%), "several times a week" (36.2%), "several times a month" (10.0%), "several times a year" (17.9%), or "never" (5.7%). We considered fathers who see their children at least once a week as having regular contact, and thus we collapsed these categories into a dummy variable for which 1 = every day or several times a week and 0 = less than once a week. In our final set of analyses, we assessed both men's and women's reports of fathers' financial support to nonresidential children. Young fathers who do not reside with their child were asked, "Do you provide any financial support to anyone to look after [child]?", and young mothers who do not reside with the child's father were asked, "Does [child] other parent provide any financial support to you for [child's name]?".

Our two key independent variables focused on indicators of the type of the parents' relationship to each other and the intergenerational ties between the young parent and his or her parents (i.e., the child's paternal and maternal grandparents). Our primary measure of the parents' relationship with each other used the question, "How would you describe your relationship with [the child's other parent] at the time the pregnancy occurred?" We coded these responses as 1 = spouse/married; 2 = coresidential girl/boyfriend; 3 = noncohabiting girl/boyfriend; and 4 = ex-spouse, former girl/boyfriend, or never a steady relationship. We focused on relationship status during pregnancy to establish temporal order and reduce the potential for reverse causality.

To assess the quality of the parent–grandmother relationship, we relied on an indicator of the closeness of the parent–grandmother bond; specifically, young adults were asked, “Over the past 12 months, how often has [your biological mother] had conversations with you about personal matters?” We preferred this measure of intergenerational ties to a more common indicator of whether the parent coresided with the grandmother because it better captures emotional closeness. Unfortunately, however, this question was asked only in Wave 1, when one third of children had already been born. In additional analyses (not shown), we tested the effects of coresidence at the time of pregnancy and draw very similar conclusions, even though the correlation coefficient between coresidence at pregnancy and having personal conversations at Wave 1 was less than.3. We also accounted for whether parents spoke with their fathers about personal matters in our models, but this relationship never had a significant impact on our outcomes and is not shown in our tables.

All models include indicators for parents’ race and economic status. Unless otherwise indicated in Tables 4 and 5, our indicators of employment status and household economic status (self-reported as “very comfortable,” “comfortable,” “getting by,” “poor,” and “very poor”) were measured at Wave 1 or at the wave immediately preceding the child’s birth. Other important factors, such as parents’ age at childbirth, parents’ education (measured as parents’ highest level of education), and the child’s age and gender, were included in all of our models but are not shown in the tables. All of our multivariate analyses used logistic regression and clustered by mother or father to account for the correlations between children with the same parent.

RESULTS

The data in Table 1 describe the living arrangements and characteristics of children of young mothers and fathers. Only 26.4% of children reported by young fathers, and 32.1% of children reported by young mothers, coresided with their biological fathers in Wave 4. Two thirds of nonresidential fathers, however, reported that they see their child at least once a week, and over 60% reported providing financial support. Young mothers reported that only about half of nonresidential fathers provided economic support. These differences between mothers’ and fathers’ reports about financial support are consistent with previous research in the United States suggesting that mothers underestimate nonresidential fathers’ contributions and involvement (Coley & Morris, 2002). These differences, however, may reflect real differences between our samples of young fathers and young mothers because these are not matched couples. In fact, the male partners of young mothers tended to be older, on average, than the young fathers in our sample (24.1 vs. 20.7 years old).

The relationship status of young fathers and mothers at the time of pregnancy, however, was not significantly different. At the time of pregnancy, 18.0% of women and 12.5% of men reported being married. About 13% of both men and women reported having a coresidential girlfriend or boyfriend, whereas the largest proportion (68.2 % of fathers and 63.4% of mothers) reported being in a relationship with the other parent, but not living together. A mere 6.1% of men and 5.4% of women reported that they were not in a relationship at the time of pregnancy. Young men’s and women’s relationship status and residency patterns changed considerably between the time of pregnancy and Wave 4 (see Table 2). Many

romantic relationships ended, regardless of whether the couple lived together at the time of pregnancy. A small but nonnegligible proportion of both cohabiting and noncohabiting relationships transitioned into marriage.

Young fathers and mothers were similarly likely to live with their parents (i.e., the child's respective paternal or maternal grandparents) at the time of pregnancy. Both young fathers and young mothers were significantly more likely to speak about personal matters with their mothers (the child's grandmothers) than their fathers (the child's grandfathers). Our sample was divided roughly equally between Black and Coloured fathers and mothers. Only about one-fifth of our respondents had graduated from secondary school by the time of the pregnancy. Household-level poverty rates of young mothers and fathers were roughly comparable, with over one third describing their economic status as "poor" or "very poor." Twice as many young fathers as young mothers, however, were working at the time of pregnancy (43.7% vs. 21.9%).

Turning to our multivariate logistic regressions, Table 3 summarizes the results of our examinations of fathers' and mothers' reports about father–child coresidence. The type of the mother–father relationship at the time of the pregnancy was strongly correlated with whether young fathers lived with their young children in Wave 4. Compared to married young fathers, those who cohabited with their partners during the pregnancy experienced a roughly 80% decline in the odds that they would be living with their child at Wave 4 (Model 1). Young mothers reported a nearly 90% difference in the likelihood of father–child coresidence between married and cohabiting partners at the time of pregnancy (Model 2). Both men and women reported that if fathers and mothers were in a relationship, but did not live together at the time of pregnancy, fathers were unlikely to live with the child at Wave 4.

The data in Table 3 also focus on whether parents' relationships with their mothers was associated with where fathers live. Whether fathers talk about personal matters with their mothers (i.e., the child's paternal grandmother) had little impact on whether young fathers live with their children. In contrast, when mothers have a close relationship with their mothers (measured as discussing personal matters together), the odds that fathers coreside with their children falls by half. Both mothers and fathers reported that the odds of a Coloured father living with his child are over two times higher than those of an African father. Last, there were no significant relationships between men's or women's employment at the time of pregnancy and whether fathers subsequently live with their children.

Fathers' reports of how often they see their nonresidential children are summarized in Table 4. In contrast to the findings given in Table 3, we found that fathers' relationship to the child's mother was not significantly related to whether he maintains regular contact with his child (Model 1). Furthermore, no contrasting sets of comparisons by parents' relationship status at the time of pregnancy were significant. Fathers with closer relationships with their own mothers (father–paternal grandmother relationships), however, are more than three times as likely to maintain regular contact with their nonresidential child. Interestingly, we found that men's work status, education, and household-level poverty at the time of pregnancy (Model 1) or currently (Model 2) were not correlated with how often they saw their nonresidential children at Wave 4. Consistent with residency patterns (see Table 3),

Table 4 shows that Coloured fathers are more likely than African fathers to see their children regularly.

Our final sets of models (see Table 5) explored fathers' (Models 1 and 2) and mothers' (Models 3 and 4) reports of financial support from nonresidential fathers. We found that the status of the parents' relationship at pregnancy was not significantly related to whether fathers subsequently provide economic support for their children. In fact, none of the pairwise comparisons were significantly different except mothers' report that fathers with whom they had no relationship at the time of pregnancy are significantly less likely to provide financial support than fathers with whom they had a noncohabiting romantic relationship ($p = .03$, Model 3 of Table 5). There were no significant differences between fathers and mothers who cohabited and those who were in a noncohabiting romantic relationship at pregnancy.

The closeness of father–grandmother relationships also had no significant effect on whether fathers subsequently give financial support to their nonresidential children (Models 1 and 2). In Model 1, we found that none of fathers' other characteristics, such as their race, employment status, or household economic conditions, when measured at the time of pregnancy, were significantly related to whether fathers provide economic assistance to their nonresidential children. In contrast, fathers' current economic conditions (Model 2) were strongly associated with whether he gives child support. Fathers who were currently working were more than seven times as likely to report that they financially support their children as fathers who are not currently working. Moreover, fathers currently living in poor or very poor households were 82% less likely to provide economic support compared to fathers who lived in financially comfortable households. It is interesting that, after controlling for current economic status in Model 2, we found that Black fathers are significantly more likely than Coloured fathers to give financial support to their nonresidential children, even though Coloured fathers see their nonresidential children more often than Black fathers. These differences most likely reflect different rates of labor migration and remittances among young Black and Coloured men in Cape Town.

Mothers' reports of child support, shown in Models 3 and 4 of Table 5, provide a different perspective. They show that mother–grandmother relationships have little impact on fathers' financial support and that women's previous and current economic conditions are not related to whether they subsequently receive support from nonresidential fathers. These results indicate that fathers are not more likely to give support to children with greater financial need.

DISCUSSION

In our analyses we took a family systems approach to examine how father–mother and parent–grandmother relationships are related to young fathers' engagement in their children's lives in South Africa. Prior research shows that there are important differences in fathers' involvement by race and ethnicity in the United States (King, Harris, & Heard, 2004). Interesting comparisons can also be made within the same race but across different social, cultural, and economic environments. Young Black and Coloured fathers in urban

South Africa share many characteristics and challenges with young African American fathers in U.S. cities, including high rates of poverty, low employment, limited educational opportunities, and fragile relationships with their child's mother. Yet they live in the aftermath of different historical legacies, follow different cultural practices (most notably *lobola* and *isisu*, in the case of South Africa), and are more likely to migrate in search of work.

Similar to studies among low-income African American fathers, we found that less than one third of young fathers in the Cape Town live with their children. Coresidence is closely related to the type of relationship fathers had with the child's mother at the time of pregnancy. Children whose parents were married at the time of pregnancy are significantly more likely to subsequently live with their fathers even compared to children whose parents were cohabiting. Consistent with studies in the United States (Wu & Musick, 2008), this suggests that cohabiting unions are less stable environments for young children. In addition, children whose parents did not live together at the time of pregnancy, regardless of whether their parents were in a committed relationship, were much less likely to subsequently live with their fathers, suggesting that, although many noncohabiting young couples may ultimately hope to marry and move in together, few do (at least in the short run). Several studies in the United States also have shown that if teen mothers are not in a romantic relationship with the child's father, they are likely to restrict his access to their children (Gavin et al., 2002; Herzog et al., 2007; Kalil et al., 2005, Krishnakumar & Black, 2003). Other research on Black families in the United States, however, indicated that even when romantic relationships between parents had terminated or had never existed, some young mothers encouraged the participation of fathers, who pursued active parenting in order to ensure a place for the child in paternal kinship networks (Stack, 1974). We found, however, no effect of the type of mother–father relationship at the time of pregnancy on whether nonresidential fathers regularly visit or provide financial support for their children. This may indicate that such support from fathers is welcomed in order to legitimize the relationship between young fathers and their children, providing the child with additional resources and kinship ties on which to draw.

Interesting parallels can also be drawn between the roles of grandmothers in the United States and South Africa. In both places, maternal grandmothers play a central and critical role in helping their unmarried daughters care for their grandchildren. Yet, as Kalil and colleagues (2005) argued, this strong support from grandmothers may reduce young mothers' desire and need for fathers' involvement. Most studies in the United States suggest that high levels of support from maternal grandmothers (Gee & Rhodes, 2003; Kalil et al., 2005; Krishnakumar & Black, 2003), or poor relationships between maternal grandmothers and fathers (Gavin et al., 2002; Herzog et al., 2007; Rhein et al., 1997), limit fathers' involvement. Only one study found no significant relationship between highly involved grandmothers and fathers' engagement (Coley & Chase-Lansdale, 1999). Consistent with these findings, we showed that close ties between mothers and maternal grandmothers is negatively associated with fathers' subsequent coresidence, even after controlling for the type of relationship between mothers and fathers. These findings reflect sentiments from qualitative interviews with young fathers in Cape Town, who reported feeling intimidated

and unwelcomed by the family of the child's mother (Swartz & Bhana, 2009). Close maternal ties did not seem to deter nonresidential fathers from seeing their children or providing economic support, consistent with Madhavan's (2010) arguments that many young mothers welcome support from nonresidential fathers even if they are not in an ongoing relationship with them.

Paternal grandmothers in Cape Town appear to play an important role in encouraging young fathers to maintain close contact with nonresidential children, but they do not facilitate coresidence or economic support from fathers. In qualitative interviews, young fathers noted that their mothers helped them to be better fathers, instructing them to stay in the relationship with the child's mother, finish their schooling so they could secure a better job, or quit using drugs (Swartz & Bhana, 2009). Young fathers in patrilineal societies may be encouraged by their mothers to "activate" their parental and kinship rights to children by socially recognizing their legitimacy, as grandmothers seek to be a significant part of their grandchildren's lives even when romantic bonds with the child's mother have dissolved or were never present. Studies in the United States similarly have found that paternal grandmothers actively support young fathers in parenting their children. Good relationships between mothers and the child's paternal grandmothers predicts greater father involvement (Kalil et al., 2005), and one study found that if the father's family provided economic support for the child, nonresidential fathers were more likely to visit their children (Greene & Moore, 2000).

Last, as in the United States (Coley & Chase-Lansdale, 1999; Danziger & Radin, 1990; Gavin et al., 2002), economics is a large factor in determining fathers' involvement. We found that fathers' financial support of nonresidential children is primarily dependent on their current economic circumstances rather than their previous economic status or other family ties. According to South Africa's Maintenance Act No. 99 of 1998, parents are expected to provide payment for the maintenance (lodging, food, clothing, and medical care) for all their biological children that is consistent with the standard of living of the noncustodial parent. Given that most of the research on maintenance has focused on White fathers (Khunou, 2006), it is unclear whether this law is regularly enforced among nonresidential Black fathers. Although we found a strong positive correlation between whether men are currently employed and whether they provide economic support for their children, men's contributions are not responsive to mothers' (or children's) needs. In light of the high rates of unemployment in South Africa (Leibbrandt et al., 2010), particularly among Blacks, young men may struggle to find and maintain employment that allows them to support their children. Regardless of whether fathers wish to provide financial support to their nonresidential children, a lack of employment opportunities may prevent them from doing so. Fathers may face difficulties in engaging with children, especially when they lack the financial capability to play the role of breadwinner. Given the economic insecurity many young men experience in South Africa, improving access to training and employment opportunities may prove to be an important means of increasing fathers' engagement in their children's lives.

Despite the richness of these data, there are several limitations of this study. First, all information came from relatively young fathers and mothers (age 18–26). Given the high

rates of premarital childbearing and the relatively low median age at childbearing in South Africa, this is an important age group of parents to study, but our findings do not necessarily reflect the situation of older parents in South Africa, who are more likely to live with their children and provide economic support (Richter & Morrell, 2006). Second, our data came from a particular urban environment in South Africa, which may reduce its generalizability to rural settings, or even other urban areas of sub-Saharan Africa. Third, although we were able to compare and contrast reports on child coresidence and financial support from both young mothers and fathers, these were not matched couples. In fact, the fathers reported by young mothers were, on average, slightly older than the young fathers we interviewed. Hence, differences in the reported averages cannot necessarily be attributed to gender differences in reporting.

Fourth, in our analyses we moved beyond simple indicators of coresidence between parents and between parents and grandparents, yet, although our indicators of the type of parental relationship and willingness to talk about personal matters may better capture the closeness of these conjugal and consanguineous ties, respectively, they are not ideal. More detailed questions about relationship quality could improve this study. Finally, although we endeavored to minimize the potential for reverse causality by examining these conjugal ties at the time of pregnancy and consanguineous relationships at Wave 1, we cannot exclude the possibility that some omitted factors, such as unobserved personality traits about who selects into becoming an unmarried young parent, may be influencing both the nature of these conjugal ties and the extent of fathers' subsequent engagement with their children.

Our results suggest that by examining broader kin relationships we can better understand the manner and extent of young fathers' engagement with their children. Specifically, viewing families as interconnected pairs of relationships that evolve over time and influence each other can help identify the complex factors that can encourage or discourage young men from being active participants in their children's lives. In societies like urban South Africa, where social, cultural, and economic conditions are rapidly changing, the role of fathers is often ambiguous, and young men have to navigate complex—and, at times, even conflicting—norms governing their responsibilities toward their children. The legacy of apartheid, coupled with poor current economic prospects, undermines young fathers' ability to form and sustain independent households with their children. At the same time, the traditional patriarchal family structures of the Xhosa stand in contrast with a long history of strong maternal kin investment in raising children, which may further marginalize the role of fathers. Nonetheless, despite these factors, young fathers in Cape Town appear to be carving out new roles for themselves, which may draw on support for their families, especially their mothers, but which are also largely independent of their relationships with their children's mothers.

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Table 1

Characteristics of Children of Young Parents (Father and Mother Reports)

Variables	Young fathers		Young mothers		
	% or *M*	*n*	% or *M*	*n*	Sig.
Dependent variables					
Father coresides with child (%)	26.4	311	32.1	898	
Father sees nonresidential child weekly (%)	66.4	229			
Father provides monthly financial support (%)	61.4	229	49.7	610	
Independent variables					
Conjugal and consanguineous relationships					
Parents' relationship status (at pregnancy; %)		311		898	
Spouse (%)	12.5		18.0		
Girl/boyfriend (coresidential; %)	13.2		13.3		
Girl/boyfriend (live apart; %)	68.2		63.4		
Ex-partner (%)	6.1		5.4		
Parents' relationship transition		311		898	
Remains the same (%)	63.3		62.6		
Deteriorates (%)	27.0		26.6		
Improves (%)	9.7		10.8		
Parent talks with grandmother (at Wave 1)		309		893	
No (%)	65.1		61.1		
Yes (%)	27.8		30.6		
Grandmother deceased (%)	7.1		8.3		
Parent talks with grandfather (at Wave 1; %)		309		889	
No (%)	60.2		65.8		
Yes (%)	14.6		10.4		
Grandfather deceased (%)	25.2		23.9		
Child characteristics					
Child age (Wave 4; *M*)	2.7	311	3.2	898	***

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Variables	Young fathers		Young mothers		
	% or *M*	*n*	% or *M*	*n*	Sig.
Female child (*M*)	49.8	311	50.3	898	
Parent characteristics					
Age at birth (*M*)	20.7	310	19.6	898	***
Partner's age (at pregnancy; *M*)	19.7		24.1		
Race		311		898	
Black (%)	47.3		52.3		
Coloured (%)	52.7		47.7		
Highest level of education (at pregnancy; %)		311		898	
Primary or less (%)	13.2		16.7		
Some secondary (%)	64.3		63.7		
Matriculated from secondary or higher (%)	22.5		19.6		
Working (at pregnancy; %)	43.7	311	21.9	898	***
Household economic status (at pregnancy; %)		311		898	
Comfortable or very comfortable (%)	19.3		15.6		
Getting by (%)	44.4		43.4		
Poor or very poor (%)	36.3		41.0		

Note. Sig. = significance.

*** $p < .001$.

Table 2

Relationship Transitions Between Pregnancy and Wave 4

	At Wave 4									
	Mothers' reports					Fathers' reports				
At the time of pregnancy	Spouse	Boyfriend (coreside)	Boyfriend (live apart)	Ex-partner	*n*	Spouse	Girlfriend (coreside)	Girlfriend (live apart)	Ex-partner	*n*
Spouse	95.1	0.0	0.0	4.9	162	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	39
Girl/boyfriend (coreside)	21.9	44.5	12.6	21.0	119	4.9	43.9	26.8	24.4	41
Girl/boyfriend (live apart)	9.3	3.0	54.1	33.6	569	7.1	6.1	57.1	29.7	212
Ex-partner	0.0	2.1	0.0	97.9	48	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	19

Table 3

Logistic Analysis of Predictors of Fathers' Coresidence With Children at Wave 4

Predictor	Model 1: Father's reports (*n* = 307)				Model 2: Mother's reports (*n* = 887)			
	B	**Sig.**	***SE***	**OR**	***B***	**Sig.**	***SE***	**OR**
Parents' relationship at pregnancy (ref.: spouse)								
Girl/boyfriend (coresidential)	−1.67	*	0.76	0.19	−2.20	***	0.44	0.11
Girl/boyfriend (live apart)	−4.03	***	0.71	0.02	−4.52	***	0.42	0.01
Ex-partner	−4.76	**	1.37	0.01	−6.33	***	1.12	0.00
Parent talks with grandmother (ref.: no)								
Yes	0.26		0.45	1.30	−0.85	**	0.32	0.43
Parents' characteristics								
Race (ref.: Black)								
Coloured	1.06	*	0.51	2.89	0.90	***	0.26	2.47
Working	0.77		0.43	2.16	0.28		0.29	1.33
Household economic status (ref.: comfortable or very comfortable)								
Getting by	0.01		0.49	1.01	−0.12		0.38	0.89
Poor or very poor	−0.20		0.54	0.82	0.19		0.38	1.20
Constant	1.70		1.13	5.46	0.97		0.61	2.63
Wald χ^2 (*df* = 18)	77.70	***			190.70	***		

Note. All models include parent talks with grandfather, grandmother decreased, grandfather decreased; child's age, age squared, and sex; parent's age and highest level of education. Models are adjusted for clustering within parent. Sig. = significance; OR = odds ratio; ref. = reference category.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

*** $p < .001$.

Table 4

Logistic Analysis of Predictors of Fathers' Contact with Nonresidential Children at Wave 4

Predictor	Model 1: Previous economic conditions (father's reports, *n* = 226)				Model 2: Current economic conditions (father's reports, *n* = 226)			
	B	**Sig.**	***SE B***	**OR**	***B***	**Sig.**	***SE B***	**OR**
Parents' relationship at pregnancy (ref.: married/living together)								
Girl/boyfriend (live apart)	0.17		0.53	1.19	0.28		0.57	1.32
Ex-partner	−0.57		0.87	0.56	−0.58		0.99	0.56
Father talks with grandmother (ref.: no)								
Yes	1.21	*	0.57	3.35	1.25	*	0.55	3.49
Father's characteristics								
Race (ref.: Black)								
Coloured	1.48	***	0.43	4.38	1.13	**	0.44	3.10
Working	−0.12		0.41	0.89	0.73		0.40	2.08
Household economic status (ref.: comfortable or very comfortable)								
Getting by	0.21		0.51	1.23	−0.42		0.48	0.66
Poor or very poor	0.36		0.58	1.43	−0.39		0.68	0.68
Constant	0.28		1.09	1.33	1.89		1.35	6.62
Wald χ^2 (*df* = 17)	45.3	***			46.2	***		

Note. All models include parent talks with grandfather, grandmother decreased, grandfather decreased; child's age, age squared, and sex; parent's age, and highest level of education. Models adjusted for clustering within parent. Sig. = significance; OR = odds ratio; ref. = reference category.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

*** $p < .001$.

Table 5

Logistic Analysis of Predictors of Father's Financial Support of Nonresidential Children at Wave 4

Predictor	Model 1: Previous economic conditions (father's reports, *n* = 226)			Model 2: Current economic conditions (father's reports, *n* = 226)				Model 3: Previous economic conditions (mother's reports, *n* = 599)				Model 4: Current economic conditions (mother's reports, *n* = 599)			
	B	**Sig.**	***SE***	***B***	**Sig.**	**Sig.**	***SE***	**OR**	***B***	**Sig.**	***SE***	**OR**	***B***	**Sig.**	***SE***	**OR**
Parents' relationship at pregnancy (ref.: married/living together)																
Girl/boyfriend (live apart)	0.20		0.53	0.16			0.55	1.27	0.08		0.33	1.08	0.16		0.32	1.17
Ex-partner	−0.70		0.71	−0.74			0.75	0.61	−0.82		0.52	0.44	−0.74		0.52	0.48
Parent talks with grandmother (ref.: no)																
Yes	−0.20		0.38	0.07			0.40	1.02	0.03		0.21	1.03	0.07		0.22	1.08
Parents' characteristics																
Race (ref.: Black)				−0.21					−0.08		0.22	0.93	−0.21		0.22	0.81
Coloured	−0.66		0.43	−0.12		**	0.47	0.29	0.06		0.26	1.06	−0.12		0.20	0.89
Working	0.39		0.35			***	0.44	7.38								
Household economic status (ref.: comfortable or very comfortable				−0.17					−0.29		0.28	0.74	−0.17		0.26	0.85
Getting by	−0.44		0.48	−0.49		**	0.50	0.26	−0.07		0.30	0.93	−0.49		0.31	0.61
Poor or very poor	−0.69		0.55	0.16		*	0.69	0.18	0.46		0.54	1.58	0.16		0.64	1.17
Constant	0.00		1.06	47.7	***		1.62	4.36	43.10	***			47.7	***		
Wald χ^2 (*df* = 17)	20.30				41.4	***										

Note. All models include parent talks with grandfather, grandmother decreased, grandfather decreased; child's age, age squared, and sex; parent's age, and highest level of education. Models adjusted for clustering within parent. Sig. = significance; OR = odds ratio; ref. = reference category

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

*** $p < .001$.