

**Securing Fatherhood through Kinwork:
A Comparison of Black Fathers and Families in South Africa and the U.S.**

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Abstract

In this paper, we draw on ethnographic data on men who fathered children from 1992-2005 in South Africa and the U.S., to demonstrate that fathers' roles as kin workers enable them to meet culturally-defined criteria for responsible fatherhood in two economically fragile contexts. Black men in both societies face enormous challenges including a web of interlocking inequalities that effectively precluded them from accessing employment with good wages, legacies of racism, increasing rates of incarceration and HIV/AIDS that is disproportionately affecting black communities. Using a comparative framework based on kin work and the life course, we examine how kin networks develop strategies to secure father involvement in economically marginalized communities. We conclude with a discussion of the policy implications of our findings.

Key Words: fathers, kin, poverty, South Africa, US

The study of Black fathers in low-income communities has a long tradition in the U.S. (Jarrett, Roy and Burton 2002) and is increasingly garnering attention in South Africa (Morrell and Richter 2006). Black men in both societies face enormous challenges to being engaged fathers, including a web of interlocking inequalities that have effectively precluded them from accessing employment with good wages; legacies of racism; increasing rates of incarceration; and HIV/AIDS that disproportionately affects Black communities. Socio-historical shifts in recent decades, such as the rise and decline of the sole breadwinner role, declines in men's wages, and the flow of mothers into the paid labor force, have altered normative roles for generations of low-income men within families (Smit 2002; Tamis Le-Monda and Cabrera 1999). Indeed, these macro level forces have resulted in diverse patterns of household residence, union formation, and work histories that have defied the norms of fathers for being both present and providing for their children. In response to such exigencies, most low income men in both contexts interact with their families throughout the life course any way they can to provide child care and establish their status as responsible fathers (Mkhize 2006; Mott 1990). In this paper, we draw on ethnographic data from South Africa and the US to demonstrate how fathers' roles as "kin workers" enable them to meet culturally defined criteria for responsible fathering in contexts marked by economic instability and legacies of racism. Specifically, we identify three processes - the continuous negotiations between maternal and paternal kin, a pedifocal instead of couple centered approach and flexible fathering – that are common to both contexts.

Literature Review

In most societies, achievement of adult male status is reflected in the ability to have and support children (Marsiglio and Pleck 2004). In a recent youth survey done in South Africa, over 70% of young people ranked aspects of parenthood such as the ability to provide as defining features of adulthood (Emmett et al. 2004). Over the past century, through industrialization and men's movement out of families to locate employment, provision of support has played the critical role in men's status in families (Griswold 1993; Moodie and Ndatshe 2004). However, father involvement also relies on access to resources to act as providers and caregivers, as well as spouses, workers, and homeowners (Townsend 2002). The twin goals of consistent co-residence and financial provision, while idealized visions of successful fathering, have been challenged in the literature in both the US and South African contexts. Low-income and middle-class men of color in both societies aspire to be providers and caregivers (Jarrett, Roy and Burton 2002), but they encounter unique challenges, such as role strain due to inability to provide for families (Bowman and Sanders 1998) leaving them, according to Hunter (2006), "fathers without *amandla* [zulu word for power]." Achieving autonomy and control over one's life opportunities has become increasingly difficult

for African American and Black South African men (Mincy 2006; Ramphele and Richter 2006). In apartheid South Africa, Black men had little choice but to migrate away from their homes to find employment (Burawoy 1976). Even with the end of apartheid in the early 90s, the spatial separation of employment and family continues to be a reality for many South Africans as men and women move to various places in search of employment. In the postindustrial political economy, wage labor relegates poor African American men to sources of contingent labor which may be outsourced to relocated businesses outside of major urban communities (Wilson 1996).

The assumption of father absence masks transitions of men in and out of residence with their children, a modal pattern especially common for young Black families in both the US and South Africa. Multiple sets of residential children and nonresidential children complicate men's parenting responsibilities in the U.S. (Manning, Stewart and Smock 2003). African American fathers often spend less time in residence with their biological children and more time in residence with non-biological children, although some findings suggest that they become more involved with biological children as they age (Eggebeen 2002). Multiple families are not new to the South African context, as seen in Ramphele's description of the tension between migrant men's primary rural families and their second families in the city during apartheid (1993). Research among Zulu men suggests that some men follow traditional norms of fathering children with several women (Hunter 2006). More recently, the declining opportunities for gainful employment for Black men in South Africa have made it increasingly difficult to solidify relationships resulting in a pattern of serial or concurrent unions with different women. These patterns point to role flexibility in dynamic family relationships, as well as to cycles of engagement and disengagement of low-income Black fathers with their children. Nonresidential fathers in both contexts make efforts to provide and care for their children (Stier and Tienda 1993), but they are commonly lacking access to resources needed to successfully fulfill provider and caregiver roles.

The Case for Comparison

Comparative frameworks are compelling, particularly when they offer concepts that bridge seemingly disparate experiences. The choice of Black communities in South Africa and the US is justified on a number of fronts. Both societies have histories of racism that have profoundly affected access to resources and opportunities in Black communities. Domestic fluidity, 'stretched' households, and 'dispersed' kin groups (Spiegel 1987) are relevant concepts in both contexts. In South Africa, the role of male labor migration under apartheid made it necessary for families to depend on kin for vital support in child care (Sharpe 1994). In the US context, the Great Migration of Black men and women to Northern cities in

search of employment that took place in the early part of the 20th century put in place patterns of kin dispersion and family reciprocity that continue today (Stack 1996). Other commonalities include low marriage rates for women, high rates of out-of-wedlock births, higher returns to education for women compared to men, increasing rates of incarceration for men, and disproportionately high rates of HIV in the Black community. Culturally, there is a growing literature on the commonalities in family structure amongst Black families in Africa and the diaspora (Allen and James 1998) that highlights the role of extended kin in child rearing. Finally, both societies are in the midst of policy debates about the promotion of responsible fathering in low income communities.

There are differences that must be understood as well. The Black population in South Africa makes up 78% of the population compared to its minority status in the US. South Africa is a very young democracy having achieved universal suffrage only in 1994. Apartheid era restrictions on physical movement, living areas and access to employment produced a unique context in which men and their families needed to survive. The concentration of African Americans in low income urban communities is a distinctive feature of the U.S. Culturally, Black South Africans are made up of many ethnic groups, each of which is characterized by particular cultural norms and values. Whereas class stratification is applicable to both contexts, the distribution is likely to be more skewed among Black South Africans who have only recently been offered the same opportunities as other race groups.

The case for comparison rests on the fact that the experiences of Black men in both contexts have been fundamentally shaped by structural inequalities that have impacted their abilities to be successful fathers (Roy, 2008). Therefore, kin networks in both contexts offer the space and resources needed to enable men to meet their paternal responsibilities. Given the contextual differences, the practice of kin work will undoubtedly look different. For example, we would expect to find a more prominent role of remittances from migrant fathers in the South African context and more formal child custody transactions in the US context. While young men in both contexts experience similar feelings of insecurity about their status as fathers, different cultural norms about accepting paternity might impact how kin respond. Additionally, the role of the state and how Black men and their kin respond to policies is also likely to be different. Despite these differences, we argue that context-specific praxis all reflect similar underlying issues of adaptation, agency, and resistance to structures of inequality.

Conceptual Framework

Our conceptual framework is anchored in the situated practice of *kin work*, defined as the work that members of a family do to keep the kin group functioning (Stack and Burton 1993). This group includes

immediate, extended and fictive kin. One of the most important duties is the rearing of children which, in low income communities, is a responsibility shared by extended kin. Extended child-focused networks are maintained by parental figures who perform kin-work tasks “to regenerate families, maintain lifetime continuities, sustain intergenerational responsibilities, and reinforce shared values” (Stack and Burton 1993: 160). Kin systems may be resources by which fathers can give meaning to their roles and can secure involvement with their children. Previous work in South Africa (Madhavan, Townsend and Garey 2008) and in the United States (Roy 2004), found that most children have received some support from their fathers throughout their lives and that co-residence of fathers does not necessarily guarantee financial support. Men often rely on female-headed households and networks to support parenting (Roy, Dyson and Jackson 2009), and they generally engage in fewer intergenerational exchange relationships than women. Fathers tend to receive a significant amount of support during their transition to fatherhood, although they may not unanimously reciprocate such support (Hogan, Eggebeen and Clogg 1993). Therefore, researchers must delineate not only which networks of kin are available, but also how these networks are used (Furstenberg 2005).

A life course framework is particularly well-designed to examine historical experiences of minority families in multiple contexts (Dilworth-Anderson, Burton and Boulin Johnson 1993). The framework makes social change central to the interpretation of men’s place on the margins of work and family (Burton and Snyder 1998). We draw on three sociological concepts developed by Elder (1995) to compare men’s experiences as fathers. *Timing of lives* refers to the multiple temporal contexts in which a father acquires work and family roles. We use watershed events such as the collapse of apartheid in South Africa (1990) and welfare reform in the US (early 1990s) to determine cohort differences based on the assumption that different conditions engender different responses in men’s ability to father and kin network involvement in fathering. *Linked lives* indicate the nature of social interdependence, such that these diverse groups of men, women, and families’ histories are interconnected in complex and dynamic ways. *Reciprocal continuity* recognizes that men respond, resist, and actively negotiate social-historical events, shaping strategies to become involved parents with their children. These concepts provide a foundation from which we can explore changes between work/family interfaces over historical time in different multicultural and unequal societies, as well as address intersectionality of race/ethnicity, class and gender (Collins 1998).

Data and Methods

Context Description

The South African research was conducted in the Agincourt sub-district of Mpumalanga Province in the northeastern part of the country. The area is typical of much of southern Africa in three important respects: the land is insufficient to support the population through subsistence agriculture or other local activities; there are very few local employment opportunities; and the population has high levels of migration and mobility. This rural area was, under apartheid, part of the ‘homeland’ system that aimed to concentrate the black population in areas with little infrastructure and poor land. More recently, lay offs on the mines and the shift in the labor market towards skilled employment have made it increasingly difficult for black men to find wage labor. Unemployment in Mpumalanga was at 30% in 2002, one of the highest rates in the country. National trends show that Blacks have the highest unemployment rates but that women have lower rates than men (Statistics SA 2007).

The research in the United States was conducted in Chicago and Indianapolis, Midwestern cities that received thousands of migrants from sharecropping families during the Great Migration. These families lived in highly segregated low-income communities with up to twice the poverty rate of other neighborhoods in the respective cities. Neighborhoods in both cities suffered local effects of broader changes in the post-industrial economy as it impacted traditional industrial sector jobs and employers, who abandoned Illinois and Indiana’s Black Belt. For example, throughout a period of economic restructuring between 1954 and 1982, Chicago lost 63 percent of its manufacturing jobs and half of its industrial plants, many of which were located in South Side African American neighborhoods (Wacquant and Wilson 1989). Unemployment rates for black men in Chicago more than doubled to 29 percent by 1982 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 1979-1994) and, in these neighborhoods, rates remained high through the end of the 1990s, ranging from 15 to 26 percent (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2000).

Sample Description

In both datasets, we used turning 18 before or after 1990 to classify older and younger cohorts..In South Africa, 1990 signified the dismantling of apartheid; in the U.S. the early 1990s marked the period in which general assistance support programs for men in the Midwest ended and welfare reform took root. In both datasets, we focus on fathers who had a child after 1992 for two reasons: 1) to avoid the problems of comparing different life stages of children and 2) to minimize recall error associated with the description of events that occurred in the distant past. However, our case studies include discussion of older siblings and other children.

The South African data come from the Children's Well-Being and Social Connections (CWSC) study conducted in 2002. The CWSC study was designed to study a number of groups of socially connected households in order to examine the full range of children's social connections and the effects of those connections on their well-being. Using stratified random sampling, we selected 13 children from different economic levels in 2 villages and collected data on the "contact group" of each of these children over a 4 month period. We found, on average, contact groups were made up of six households resulting in an extensive array of information on 89 households and about 650 individuals. There are 119 men who have fathered 156 children between 1992 and 2002. Removing the 4 men who had missing dates of birth and keeping only the older child for each man, the resulting sample is 115 fathers with 115 children. Out of the 115 men, 59 were born before 1972 and 56 after. A range of data collection instruments were used but the analysis presented in this paper relies primarily on the lifetime residence and support histories, kinship diagrams and discussions with fathers and their kin.

For the US data, Roy and colleagues interviewed 89 African American fathers over the course of four projects conducted between 1998-2004. Young fathers were recruited from community-based fathering programs, life skills programs in a work release correctional facility, and a child care center. Their efforts to become more involved with their children and to access employment training and placement, parenting classes, educational, housing and drug treatment referrals, and co-parental counseling distinguished them in some ways from their peers who were not involved in such a program. Retrospective life histories were used to gather insight into how men gave meaning to life events that affected their abilities to act as providers and caregivers for their children. Fathers were also asked to discuss timing and sequencing of transitions and life events, such as changes in family structure, residential movement, and shifts in paternal involvement across multiple families; these were recorded on calendar grids. From this group of 89 fathers, 82 men who had children born after 1992 were selected. Out of these 82 men, 34 were born before 1972 and 48 after 1972.

Method of Analysis

We begin by presenting descriptive data on father's relationship status with the mother of the child, and their employment and residence status. Residence is divided into three categories – present (co-resident), contactable and absent. In terms of employment, we divided the group into employed and unemployed as proxy measures for the potential to provide for their children. For the qualitative analysis, we used a modified grounded theory approach and conducted multiple waves of coding: 1) to identify themes related to kin network strategies for shaping men's roles as fathers; 2) to compare and contrast profiles

across datasets to examine processes identified during open coding; and 3) to select patterns within and across cases to describe a range of common strategies that enabled successful fathering through the practice of kin work. To illustrate these common strategies, we identified and present exemplar case studies of fathers in both contexts.

Fathering Outside the Norm

Table 1 presents the relationship status, residence and employment status of South African and US fathers by cohort. It is a snapshot at time of interview and therefore does not reflect the dynamism of residence, employment and union formation that fathers in both contexts experience. It is precisely this flux that necessitates the active participation of kin, a point to be demonstrated with our qualitative data.

Table 1: Cohort Patterns of Relationship, Residence and Employment Status among South African and U.S. Fathers

	South Africa		US	
	Turned 18 Pre-72	Turned 18 Post-72	Turned 18 Pre-72	Turned 18 Post-72
Relationship to Mother of child				
Not in relationship	3 (5.1%)	9 (16.1%)	21 (61%)	24 (50%)
Not married	13 (22.1%)	33 (58.9%)	8 (23.5%)	24 (50%)
Married	43 (72.9%)	14 (25%)	5 (14.7%)	0 (0%)
N	59	56	34	48
Present/Employed	9.1%	5.6%	15%	6%
Present/Unemployed	3.6%	13%	12%	4%
Contactable/Employed	55%	35%	21%	25%
Contactable/Unemployed	15%	15%	32%	44%
Absent/Employed	7.3%	9.3%	6%	2%
Absent/Unemployed	10.9%	22.2%	15%	17%
N	55	54	34	48

In both contexts, a much higher percentage of older men are married to the mother of the child reflecting the difficulties that young men face in both contexts of securing marriage through stable employment.

The cohort difference in the contactable/employed category is much more pronounced in the South African context most likely attributable to the higher percentage of older labor migrants. Ironically, employment was more stable under apartheid compared to soaring unemployment in the post-apartheid context. The cohort difference in proportions absent and unemployed is also much stronger in the South African context quite likely due to the wider availability of child care grants which offers men a way out of meeting paternal obligations. The cohort difference in the contactable/ unemployed category is more evident in the US context attributable in part to the incarceration of younger men. The cells that represent “normative” fatherhood - being present and employed - are not the dominant categories in either context. However, most men are in contact with their children in both cohorts across contexts. As a result of the separation of the spheres of production and reproduction, increasing unemployment, and high rates of incarceration, men in both contexts are not able to be present and provide for their children on a consistent basis. In effect, our data suggest a need to understand the strategies that are employed by men and their kin to secure fathering in such challenging contexts.

The Practice of Kin Work

Given the vast contextual differences between South Africa and the US, it would be difficult or even impossible to identify *common strategies* employed in *both* contexts that enable successful fathering. A more fruitful approach that supports the comparative emphasis of this paper is to frame the analysis in terms of three core elements of strategies – negotiations between maternal and paternal kin, pedifocal approach and flexible fathering - and discuss them in terms of the life course perspective presented earlier. We use our data to present illustrative examples of context specific strategies that men and kin employ that address each of these elements. It should be made clear that our examples are not meant to be mutually exclusive but rather were chosen because each emphasizes particular elements.

Negotiation between Maternal and Paternal Kin

From our data, it is clear that young men’s efforts to nurture their children are supported by their own kin (paternal kin) and the kin of the mother of their children (maternal kin). These groups of people negotiate everything from the everyday necessities of diapers, food, clothes and medicine to intangibles such as future obligations of children to kin. In South Africa, for example, this may be very formally done as in the payment of “damages” (kutikomba) by the man’s family to the woman’s family for impregnating the woman whereby accepting paternity. In such situations, it is understood that this may or may not lead to a more formal union legitimized through bridewealth exchange (lobola) and formal marriage sometime in

the future. The success of such negotiations in both contexts depend on several key factors – residential proximity of the various kin, extent of trust in the other group’s ability to care for a child, perception of the relationship between the man and the mother of the child, and, in cases where the union has dissolved, the attitude of the man’s new partner towards the child. Whereas such negotiations offer young men time and space to establish their roles as fathers, it is hardly a smooth process. However, as the following examples of Advice from South Africa and Andre from the US demonstrate, they are essential to securing a young man’s status as a father.

When we met Advice in 2002, he was 21 years old and in his last year of secondary school. He lived with his mother, maternal grandparents, maternal uncle and his family and Cecilia, his “wife” (bridewealth had not been paid). He also had a 2 year old daughter with Cecilia. Cecilia moved into Advice’s household after the birth of the baby. Since Advice was still in school and not employed, his daughter was financially supported by Advice’s maternal grandparents (the child’s paternal kin) and by her maternal grandparents who live in the same village. There are differing assessments of the division of financial responsibility. Whereas Advice’s grandmother claimed that she paid for everything, the child’s maternal grandmother countered that the other side had never given any money towards the payment of crèche (day care) fees as they had agreed upon. It should also be noted that Cecilia’s father never approved of Cecilia’s relationship with Advice and was angry when she got pregnant. This undoubtedly influenced the level of involvement of maternal kin. Advice was co-resident with his daughter until he finished school and then left to work as a security guard in a large town a few hours away. After this move, he sent money to Cecilia as partial contribution towards their daughter’s expenses. The day to day care of his daughter continued to be a joint effort by Cecilia, Advice’s mother, Advice’s mother’s mother and Cecilia’s mother and siblings.

This situation illustrates how kinwork not only enables responsible fathering, but even serves to strengthen a young father’s status. In this case, Advice did all the right things; since he did not make enough money yet to pay the bridewealth, he was not expected to set up his own household and provide for his daughter but he was keenly aware that the support from kin was not indefinite. Whereas the unfavorable economic climate was not favorable to promoting marital stability, the payment of bridewealth leading to a formalization of unions is a culturally desirable goal. Therefore, it is in the best interest of kin to do their part to promote this agenda by supporting young fathers. Furthermore, Advice took his role as a father very seriously and attempted to be a good role model to his daughter. The process of kin working together to support young fathers was common to most of the men in our study and might well be the case nationally. Given that 10% of South African men under the age of 25 reported having

fathered a child in a 2003 national survey (Emmett et al. 2004), it is crucial that we understand the role of kin in ensuring the status of these young men as well as the well-being of their children.

Another young man, Andre, was a 19-year-old father with a 4 month old daughter in the United States. Living with his mother, he just graduated high school and began to take courses at a community college on the Southside of Chicago. He worked at various minimum-wage jobs, but Andre wanted to pursue journalism as a career. He was quite excited with the birth of his daughter, but he and Chassidy, the baby's mother, struggled to transform their intimate relationship into a supportive co-parenting relationship. A critical aspect of Andre's fathering was that Chassidy's mother was supportive of his involvement and encouraged his participation in his daughter's life. However, at the beginning, the families remained tentative about his involvement.

When I first talked about how often I'd keep the baby, I said I'd take her three days [per week]. Chassidy and her mother said "We're going to see," because of lot of men these days don't even want to see their kids. They were kind of surprised, and they were happy too. I'm at the point where I can call Chassidy and say "I want to come over to see my daughter right now." I'm in good with her mother, she likes me a lot, and her mother kind of overrules everything. She just tells me, "You can see your baby anytime you want to see her." Her mother's a really nice lady, because she keeps her during the daytime while I go to school or work, and Chassidy's going to work.

Support from maternal and paternal kin could buy time for young fathers like Andre (and young mothers like Chassidy) to complete school and establish themselves in stable careers. Kin members, in particular maternal and paternal grandmothers, could set a level of reasonable expectations for young fathers' contributions. Andre, who was just starting off in work and college, understood the value of a minimal level of contribution, as well as the help that he received in not bearing the burden for all of support that might be placed on a full-time working father. He preferred to work with family members to create a flexible system of trustworthy caregiving that would hold up over time – and outside the courts. As he said, "My mom talks to Chassidy's mom all the time. We should be able to have that type of relationship where we could change the schedule if I can't keep my daughter. I'd rather it be more up to Chassidy and me than the courts."

These examples illustrate three dimensions of the life course model. The fact that these processes are more common for young fathers reflect the timing of life events such as schooling, securing employment and emotional preparation for extended commitment to a partner. Put simply, kin allow young fathers to buy time to be parents when they are not fully ready. The linking of lives is evident in that the child links people across generations, households, kin networks. Put another way, alliances across kin groups are

made through childbearing, not through marriage, resulting in something akin to an “arranged nurturance.” Finally, these negotiations enable reciprocal continuity by allowing young men to respond to their fragile economic conditions and weak educational capital.

Pedifocal Relations

Crosby-Burnett and Lewis (1999) note that pedifocal networks offer an alternative view onto how families distribute priorities to parent/child relations. Rather than focusing on the conjugal relationship, the focus becomes the child’s well-being. This tends to happen in the context of men’s multiple relationships that result in different sets of children. Some of these relationships are clearly resolved as the case of Abel from South Africa shows; or, as in our US example of Patrice, relationships may not have attained complete closure. In both cases, the key factor is that the biological parents of the child as well as both sets of kin are focused on the well-being of the child rather than the state of the parental union. Childcare responsibilities are distributed in a number of ways including formal co-parenting agreements, periodic support provision by fathers, regular visiting by fathers, re-entry of fathers into their children’s lives as the kids age, and of course through negotiations with both sets of kin. Not surprisingly, these arrangements are often marked by conflict and uncertainty but there is little doubt that everyone involved is committed to ensuring the child’s well-being.

Abel was 50 years old and divorced twice but was involved in the lives of both sets of children, albeit to varying degrees. The three children from his first marriage lived with their mother in another village. Though not financially supporting them, he did visit them on occasion and felt that he should be involved in decision making about important matters such as marriage. His second marriage with Ester ended in 1997. Out of the 4 children they had together ranging in age from 21 to 8, his 14 year old son remained with him after the divorce while the other three moved with their mother to a neighboring village where their maternal kin resided. While the context of their divorce was far from amicable, both Abel and Ester decided that all the children needed to be in regular contact with both parents and their siblings. Furthermore, both parents have provided financial support and have even helped one another out during periods of financial hardship. For example, Abel was not able to pay the school fees for this son’s private school for a year because he had lost his job; therefore, Ester stepped in and covered for him. Abel’s financial support for his three non-resident children was not consistent but he had no doubt that he would be leading the bridewealth negotiations for his oldest daughter and that he would enroll his younger son in private school once he had the money to do so. Not surprisingly tension around child rearing styles surfaced periodically. For example, Abel told us that he was not happy with the way Ester was

disciplining the children made evident by his eldest daughter's pregnancy while in school. Additionally, he felt strongly that educational success of the children was a higher priority for him than for his ex-wife. Ester's response would likely point out the inconsistency in Abel's financial support for the children.

With rare exceptions, children in this part of South Africa take their father's name as their surnames, which automatically identify them as part of their father's kin group even if they reside with their mother and maternal kin. Maternal kin encourage children to maintain at least some relationship with their fathers and their paternal kin because it extends the safety net for the child and also solidifies one's position in the kin network. Most children from dissolved unions, particularly if they are young, tend to live with their mothers, and maternal kin are more visible in their day to day lives. However, fathers are not forgotten and in the best cases, provide support and visit regularly. In our study, most men whose unions had ended retained contact with their children and could enlist the support of the child's maternal kin to support this project. Negotiating such arrangements presented many challenges, particularly with current partners, but the well-being of the children is paramount.

At the time of the interview, Patrice was a 26-year-old father of five children. His three oldest children (ages 6, 3, and 2 years) lived in Mississippi with their mother, who had left to go home to her family and to attend university. His five-year-old son lived apart from him, with Patrice's second partner, in Chicago. And he lived with his own parents as well as his current partner, with whom he had a year-old daughter. His work experiences were quite limited, with part-time jobs over the past five years building drywall and various landscaping and contracting work. Patrice was dedicated to earning his GED, after dropping out of high school and hustling drugs ten years earlier.

Patrice's relationship to his children and multiple partners was complicated and marked with years of conflict and ambiguity. His first partner had left Chicago to go to school and "try to get herself together...so we put the relationship on hold for awhile, just focus on the kids." During this time, he had another son, and she was "devastated."

It was arguing and fighting and everything else. It worked out after a couple of years. After she got used to the fact that the baby is here now, so there's no sense in me holding a grudge towards the baby or towards him. It wasn't an easy thing for her to do at all. But if you really love them then you'll be able to find some kind of common ground. You can at least be cordial to one another and that's basically what me and her did. Me and her cooled off on the relationship thing for a minute. We needed to find ourselves again. Get back in tune with each other. Basically figure out where we went wrong for me to go out and have another child, and have another relationship with someone else anyway. It took some soul searching and some hard thinking and trials and tribulations to get over that. It was pretty hard.

However, the mother of Patrice's son, his second child, was more resistant to acceptance of his previous family commitment. She had contemplated an abortion, but according to Patrice, "she decided to keep him for the wrong reasons – maybe if I keep the baby, I can keep [the man.]" She encouraged Patrice to sign over his parental rights, and he grew distanced from his son, not seeing him for almost a year. Over time, however, he "tried to make up for lost months...and I can say now, she's accepted my other kids. She's accepted that me and her can only be mother and father." Patrice even noticed that both of his oldest children – a girl and a boy – want to know each other. He said, "They send little drawings back and forth to each other. They share toys and things, like when they're both at the house together, they say, Kanye, can I ride your bike? Or Nasira, can I use your pillow?"

For some fathers, a strong focus on co-parenting common children worked to suspend relationships that originally had little chance of success. In other words, a pedifocal relationship could take pressure off of parents to resolve a chance at marriage or commitment that was risky at best. Patrice still considered the option of committing to his first partner in Mississippi.

The focus on children illustrated in both contexts can be summarized using the life course model. This arrangement can be applied to older fathers who have definitively ended certain unions and to younger ones who may still be trying to salvage a relationship. In either case the focus is on the children. A pedifocal system also links a web of kin and in some cases, non-kin, who come together for the sake of the child. Clearly there are ongoing issues of control and decision-making that need to be resolved as made clear from both examples. However, the focus on children does support forms of reciprocal continuity for fathers who have made peace with the termination of the union or who have temporarily put a relationship on hold. It enables fathers who have ended relationships or those who are having trouble maintaining conjugal relationships to continue being fathers whereby committing themselves to the continuity of families. Both instances offer a chance to support generativity in the face of economic hardship and union fragility.

Flexible Fathering

Whereas a pedifocal approach is all about the children, flexible fathering focuses on a specific father who plays many fathering roles with a range of children whereby serving an important function in the kin network. Conversely, one child can have many different types of fathers over the life course. Men can be the biological fathers to children but not necessarily co-resident with them or they can be non-biological

fathers sometimes as co-resident. Additionally, they can be social fathers through non-intimate relationships as in the case of maternal uncles. In other words, through complex family configurations of biological status, residence and intimacy, and supported by kin, men can assume a variety of fathering roles that strengthens their status and contributes to the well-being of children.

Caiphus was 41 years old and married, with full bridewealth paid, to Zodwa. Caiphus had worked in a town 50 km away from the village since 1986 but was always the financial provider for his wife and children and at times his extended family. He visited his wife and kids several times a month. His ability to maintain a job and be the principal provider for his family made him successful in the eyes of the community. Furthermore, he took the issue of discipline very seriously with his children. Finally, he contributed to his elderly mother's care and was willing to help out family and non kin in need.

Caiphus's fathering role came in numerous forms. Most consistently, he was a non-resident, biological father to his 5 kids ranging in age from newborn to 21. He was the sole provider of all their needs. However, he also supported his 12 year old daughter from an extra-marital relationship. Even though Zodwa was quite upset when she found out about the relationship and the child, she came around to accept the child and allowed Caiphus to continue supporting her. On occasion, this girl even came to visit her father, Zodwa and her half siblings. Additionally, Caiphus assumed a social fathering role to three of his nephews ranging in age from 14-24. These three boys experienced ongoing difficulty with their own fathers as a result of unstable employment and alcoholism. Therefore, Caiphus stepped in to provide financial support and practical assistance to get one of them out of jail, and he attempted to secure employment for them on several occasions. In return, all three boys had enormous respect for their maternal uncle and were willing to do things for him such as help with house repair and interestingly enough, help with child care for Caiphus's young children. It should be mentioned that Caiphus's older brother was treated as a father by Caiphus's children. Both Caiphus and his older brother, Willy, earned a great deal of respect from their families and the larger communities for taking on so many paternal responsibilities within their kin network.

Similarly, a father in Indianapolis, Earl, served as a father figure for four boys – but in very different contexts. By 19 years old, he was the father of two boys, yet was still “on the streets...getting fast money, hustling, stealing, anything to make a buck.” After four years, he was incarcerated and his relationship with his boys' mother deteriorated. On his reentry back to his neighborhood, Earl hit a turning point – at 24, he began to realize the importance of his sons.

When I started coming around my children to fill in the gaps, be consistent – that made a difference. And it was things that they showed me, things I missed about them growing up. There were times when I felt I was too young to be a father, but now my sons are more mature and responsible than some teenagers. And their mother has never discouraged me. She does all she can to let me be with my children. I have to commend her. She's like, "You're going to be whatever you're going to be, and that's fine." And I take it upon myself to come around.

Although his future with his sons' mother was limited, at 27 Earl began a relationship with a 41 year old woman with two sons who were a few years older than his biological sons. Both of these boys had different fathers, and Earl struggled with how to create a relationship not based on biological bonds, but on nurturance and support for their development. The range of fathering roles that men had to embrace – involving coresidence or non-residence, biological or nonbiological ties, intimate or non-intimate relations with children's mothers – meant that they had to develop different fathering strategies for different children over time – and often simultaneously. It was this sense of adaptation, given changing personal circumstances, which shaped Earl's expressions of care for his four boys. From our data, it becomes clear that men who play diverse flexible fathering roles are urgently needed, in kin networks that rely on few men to care for many children.

As is clear from our examples, men have the opportunity (not necessarily desired) to be fathers under a variety of conditions. These roles are open to both young and older men though there might be some cohort differences. For example, the advent of state child support grants in South Africa may give young men a way out of assuming even biological paternal responsibilities. In the US, it appears that younger fathers have fewer men in their networks as a result of incarceration, decline of marriage, and unemployment with the result being that more is asked of young men. The linking of lives occurs as if through the "spokes of a wheel" which connect men at the center to various children and by extension, other kin and non-kin. This configuration clearly places burdens on particular men, which does lead to resentment and in some cases, major conflict. However, it also provides men a means to foster reciprocal continuity by stepping in for other men who cannot meet their paternal responsibilities due to job loss, incarceration, or death. Looked at another way, flexible fathering enables men to contribute to children's well-being even if they have "failed" as a partner, a biological father or are unable to be co-residential father. In short, they are doing their part as kinworkers.

Discussion

From the analysis presented here, it is clear that the criteria for successful/responsible fathering extends beyond co-residence and provision. Men's ability to meet these goals depends on their relationships and

negotiations with their kin and in some cases, the child's maternal kin around kinwork. Our cases make it clear that while strategies to enable successful fathering are different, there are at least three common underlying components of these processes that are applicable to both South Africa and the US. The physical separation of fathers and their children, the uncertainty of employment, the inadequacy of wages and the fragility of unions in both contexts necessitate a pedifocal approach which places greater value on flexible fathering. The continuous negotiation between fathers and their maternal and paternal kin is essential, particularly for young fathers, to solidify their roles as fathers to their biological children as well as the kids of extended kin. Our analysis makes a contribution to the literature on kinwork in three important ways. One, we focus on lived experience and show how kin negotiations, a pedifocal approach, and flexible fathering actually work in practice. Furthermore, we recognize how life stages condition the challenges and opportunities for fathers to be providers – and nurturers – in family contexts. Two, we offer a comparative perspective that highlights kin responses to similar struggles faced by Black men in different contexts. Three, we situate our understanding of kinwork in historical context by focusing on macro level changes in political, economic and policy environments. Taken together, our analysis underscores the need to apply appropriate models of family functioning in assessing the effectiveness of fathering in communities that have had histories of social inequality.

The analysis presented here has several limitations. One, whereas we made an attempt to account for children's life stage by focusing the analysis on men's relationship with young children, a more systematic analysis of different life stages is needed to fully understand how strategies change as children age. Similarly, more fine-grained analysis of variation by birth order of child and union order could provide greater clarity on the complex links between union status, fertility and child rearing patterns. . Three, we did not examine actual outcomes for children (e.g. education, health) so we cannot say to what extent these strategies result in favorable outcomes for children. Despite these shortcomings, our analysis underscores the importance of qualitative research. Existing data from surveys and censuses offer limited scope for analysis on fathering. The reliance on surveys and censuses give primacy to co-residential households leaving out important links of exchange and connectivity across households. As our analysis has shown, it is precisely these interhousehold connections that facilitate men's involvement with their children. Additionally, qualitative data collection is ideally suited to capture the dynamism of father's involvement over the lifecourse as well as the tension that is characteristic of men's negotiation with their kin.

We believe that our analysis can help inform policy debates. In communities of interlocking inequalities, nonresidential or transitory fathers' contributions are not limited to money, but in-kind resources and time

for caregiving. However, social policy in both contexts reinforce that normative father involvement requires residence and provision. For example, by stressing job placement services and measuring program success by increased child support payments, responsible fatherhood programs in the US and South Africa may promote normative expectations for providing at the expense of father/child interaction (Haney and March, 2003). Other publicly and privately funded initiatives have focused less on child support payments, and more on paternal involvement with nonresidential children. Federal policies in both countries are moving in very different directions. In South Africa, more emphasis and more resources have been placed on a national system of poverty alleviation grants. Men's requirements to support their children are critical, but less systematic. In the United States, on the other hand, great emphasis has been placed on enforcing men's contributions to children's well-being, through child support payments. What would be the effect of integrating an emphasis on enforcing paternal contributions with offering support for men's involvement on family policy in the United States? Future comparative analyses may indicate that new social policy initiatives can be adapted from different contexts – and can be effective in promoting father involvement and family well-being.

Given the absence of social policy that can address the barriers to father involvement for low-income men, however, this analysis shows that kin networks have opened up other options and crafted flexible roles for fathers. How can we find hybrid solutions, in which social policy can recognize the dynamic patterns of father involvement, and changing configurations of residence and employment? Through comparative analyses like this one, we can recognize the diversity of culturally-embedded lived experiences in families. We can also identify common processes of family adaptation, agency, and resistance to social changes in societies shaped by histories of inequality.

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