
Urban American Indians: A Comparison of Father Involvement Predictors across Race

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Father involvement in families of urban American Indians has been a neglected area of research. In this study, the authors examined the associations among parental relationship quality, father involvement, and coresidence. The authors conducted a multiple group analysis through structural equation modeling comparing 107 American Indian fathers with fathers of the general population in the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study. Although the results were similar between groups, findings indicated two key differences for urban American Indians. First, emotional supportiveness had a stronger relationship with physically active engagement for American Indian fathers. Second, parental relationship quality had greater total standardized effects on American Indian father engagement than did coresidence. When developing culturally sensitive supports to increase American Indian father involvement, these findings imply that this will be best achieved through increasing the couple's relationship quality.

KEY WORDS: *American Indian; fathers; Native American; parental involvement; relationship quality*

Scholars have declared the father's physical absence from the home as one of America's greatest social problems (Dudley & Stone, 2001). Although the impact of unmarried parents on children is a concern generally, it is more problematic for certain groups of color. Data from the National Vital Statistics Reports indicated that in 2006 nearly 65% of American Indian children were born to unmarried parents. This is the second highest percentage of nonmarital births (the highest percentage is in black Americans: 70%). Unmarried births of non-Hispanic white Americans approached only 27% (Martin et al., 2009). However, few studies have examined the impact of unmarried fatherhood in American Indian families, particularly those living in an urban setting. Using the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study (FFCWS), our purpose was to provide insight into the association among parental relationship quality, father involvement, and coresidence for urban American Indian fathers relative to the general population. The following sections provide a brief synopsis of family systems theory that can be used as a framework through which we can understand parental relationship quality, father involvement, and coresidence and how they relate to what is known about American Indian families and fatherhood.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Family Systems Theory

Scholars have developed family systems literature into a diverse body of work; each individual theorist has focused on various aspects of the family system (White & Klein, 2002). Although broad generalizations regarding family systems theory must be made cautiously, there are enough commonalities to provide a meaningful discussion. The primary unifying feature of family systems theory is the concept of wholeness (Cox & Paley, 2003; Minuchin, Nichols, & Lee, 2007). An important aspect of wholeness is the consideration of historical and intergenerational influences (Kilpatrick, Hopps, & Gray, 2009). Therefore, within this framework, a family system is greater than the sum of its individual members, and it must be viewed within current and historical context to be properly understood (Cox & Paley, 1997, 2003; Kilpatrick et al., 2009).

Three commonly emphasized characteristics of a family system are clear boundaries that set rules for inclusion or exclusion from the system, interaction among members, and subsystems within the family that are defined by power differentials and alliances between individual members (Cox & Paley, 1997; White & Klein, 2002). For example, Belsky (1981)

posited that feedback loops would enable the pattern and quality of interactions in the parental subsystem to influence the father's subsequent interaction with his children and vice versa. Such patterns of interaction further imply that family members have developed shared meaning and established a common bond through roles. Therefore, the framework of family systems theory can be helpful in attempting to understand the role of fatherhood.

Father Involvement and Parental Relationship Quality

Consistent with family systems theory, fatherhood is viewed as a multifaceted concept that structures a father's interactions with members of his family. Two facets are father involvement and parental relationship quality (Lamb, 2000). Due to mutual reciprocity, parental relationship quality can logically be extended as a salient predictor of father involvement. Research has supported the notion that a favorable and harmonious relationship between parents has a positive association with father involvement (Ryan, Kalil, & Ziol-Guest, 2008). This trend has been shown to persist when parents are no longer romantically involved but maintain a friendly relationship (Cabrera, Ryan, Mitchell, Shannon, & Tamis-LeMonda, 2008).

In the United States, fatherhood has been viewed as a "package deal" in which women mediate men's efforts to fulfill their role as a father (Townsend, 2002). In other words, a father's ability to maintain a relationship with his children is contingent upon the quality of his relationship with the mother and her desire for him to be a part of family life. Accordingly, repartnering and multipartner fertility of unmarried mothers are associated with greater declines in a father's contact with his biological children than similar transitions of unmarried fathers (Tach, Mincy, & Edin, 2010). Consistent with the expectations of family systems theory, if an unmarried father wants to maintain involvement with his children, it appears that the optimal way to do this is to nurture a positive relationship with the mother(s) of his children.

Father involvement has also been viewed as a multifaceted concept (Lamb, 2000). Lamb (2000) identified one of the facets of this concept as engagement or the direct interaction between fathers and their children. Engagement has a positive association with parental relationship quality (Carlson & McLanahan, 2006; Gee, McNeerney,

Reiter, & Leaman, 2007). Engagement also appears to be multidimensional. The engagement measure used by Carlson and McLanahan (2006) assessed direct interaction that enabled the father to evoke imaginative responses, either overtly (as in playing peek-a-boo) or covertly (as in reading stories), whereas the engagement measure used by Gee et al. (2007) assessed interaction that required both the father and the child to be engaged physically in the activity, such as playing with toys or putting the child to bed.

Father Involvement and Coresidence

It is intuitive assumption that a father who lives with his children will be more involved with them, if for no other reason than the increased accessibility. Indeed, coresidence has been described as what "[sets] the stage for involved fathering" (Sarkadi, Kristiansson, Oberklaid, & Bremberg, 2008, p. 156). Literature has supported the notion that coresidence of the father and child is a strong predictor of father involvement (Gee et al., 2007) and is associated with greater levels of parental relationship quality between the birth parents (Carlson & McLanahan, 2006). There is also evidence to suggest that when a nonresidential father maintains a romantic relationship with the mother he remains quite involved with his children (Cabrera et al., 2004). Thus, coresidence is likely an outgrowth of greater parental relationship quality, and it is the stronger relationship between birth parents that drives the increased father involvement, as family systems theory would suggest.

American Indian Parental Relationship Quality and Father Involvement

The association among parental relationship quality, father involvement, and coresidence has rarely been examined for American Indians. There are 564 federally recognized tribes (Bureau of Indian Affairs, 2010), each with unique history and heritage (Forehand & Kotchick, 1996). Generalizations in relation to parenting practices across tribes and setting (rural or urban) must be made cautiously. For example, the literature makes little distinction between urban and rural American Indians; urban American Indians are more likely to be disenfranchised from their native culture than those living in a rural setting and therefore are more likely to have adopted a Eurocentric worldview (Glover, 2001). However, there are enough commonalities among the various tribes to present a meaningful

discussion of parenting or fathering practices among American Indians. Two commonalities that may influence parental relationship quality, father involvement, and coresidence in many American Indian tribal cultures are a collectivistic approach to family life and the impact of historical trauma.

Collectivistic Family Life. In traditional American Indian culture, the extended family, community, tribe, and clan are viewed as part of the family circle (Red Horse, 1997). Thus parents, children, aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents form an extended kinship system in which all directly participate in the rearing of children, transmitting cultural beliefs and values (Limb, Hodge, & Panos, 2008), and sharing parental responsibilities (Red Horse, 1997). Thus, the collectivistic nature of American Indian culture provides children with an extensive support structure not normally found in the individualistic Eurocentric model that permeates the mainstream culture of the United States. The parenting role taken on by the kinship network expands the parental subsystem to include more than just the birth parents. This expansion has the potential to decrease American Indian father involvement by diffusing the responsibility for interacting with children across the kinship network. However, the potential decrease in father involvement is likely offset by the extra support provided by a functioning kinship system.

Historical Trauma. Despite the rich heritage of positive parenting models in American Indian culture, American Indian men have an increasingly difficult time fulfilling their role as fathers. This lack of positive parenting and fathering is further complicated by a common lack of a kinship support system (Glover, 2001; Kawamoto, 2001). These difficulties are evidenced by some of the highest rates of father absence (White, Godfrey, & Moccasin, 2006) and child abuse in the United States (Cross, Earle, & Simmons, 2000), as well as substance abuse and suicide rates in American Indian youth that are three times the national average (Kawamoto, 2001). Many of these challenges are linked with efforts of the U.S. government to assimilate American Indians into mainstream culture by forcibly relocating tribal children into boarding schools from approximately 1800 to 1970 (Brave Heart & DeBruyn, 1998; George, 1997). Cut off from their parents and extended kin

networks, American Indian children in boarding schools had little social support from which to develop healthy parenting practices (Cross et al., 2000). The attempted genocide of American Indian culture has resulted in what Brave Heart and DeBruyn (1998) have termed “historical trauma.”

In light of the loss of many of their traditional parenting role models, American Indian tribes are engaging in an effort to restore lost heritage and positive parenting practices (for example, see White et al., 2006). Because of the difficulties American Indian families face, it could be expected that American Indian fathers might be less engaged with their children than the general population. However, given the increased barriers to using collectivistic parenting practices outside of the reservations, urban American Indian fathers may have adopted the more Eurocentric worldview of parenting that places greater importance on direct father involvement than fathers living on reservations.

From a review of the general literature on fathering, researchers have found that increasing parental relationship quality is positively associated with father involvement, but these findings have been untested in an American Indian sample. Therefore, by using data from the first two waves of the FFCWS, our purpose is to provide insight into the association among father involvement, parental relationship quality, and coresidence for urban American Indian fathers relative to the general population. In addition, we seek to increase awareness regarding American Indian fatherhood and its impact within urban American Indian families.

Based on previous literature and in accordance with family systems theory, we hypothesized (H1) that American Indian parental relationship quality would be positively related to father involvement. However, given the more collectivistic cultural heritage of American Indian fathers, we also hypothesized (H2) that American Indian fathers’ involvement would have a greater association with parental relationship quality than it would for the general population of the FFCWS sample. We also hypothesized (H3) that parental relationship quality would have statistically significant effects on father involvement, controlling for the father’s coresidence with the mother. In addition, we hypothesized (H4) that parental relationship quality would have greater total effects on father involvement than would coresidence.

METHOD

Participants and Procedure

This study used data from fathers who participated in the first two waves of the FFCWS, a national, longitudinal study that followed almost 5,000 children born in 20 U.S. cities, beginning between 1998 and 2000 and continuing until the present day (data currently on age 9 wave) (Reichman, Teitler, Garfinkel, & McLanahan, 2001). Data were collected from cities with populations over 200,000 using a stratified random sampling design that oversampled for unmarried families (see Reichman et al., [2001] for a detailed description of the stratification procedures).

Mothers were interviewed shortly after giving birth and fathers were interviewed as soon as possible thereafter. Overall, 4,898 mothers were interviewed. At the baseline interview, 3,830 fathers participated. At the first year follow-up, when the focal child was approximately one year old, only 3,135 of these fathers participated. An additional 352 fathers were lost due to listwise deletion of missing data (16 were American Indian). Thus, the final sample was 2,783 fathers. One hundred seven fathers self-identified as American Indian, and 27 of the mothers self-identified as American Indian. A primary goal of the FFCWS was to describe the conditions and capabilities of unmarried parents, the relationships between family members, and the resulting consequences for children (Reichman et al., 2001). The FFCWS presents a rare opportunity to study American Indian fathers with a sample large enough to use structural equation modeling (SEM).

Measures

Parental Relationship Quality. Parental relationship quality was estimated with two measures from the baseline year. First, fathers completed a four-item measure of emotional supportiveness that estimated the level of emotional help and encouragement they received from their partner. Indicators were scored on a three-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (often) to 3 (never). Questions were coded such that higher scores indicated greater levels of emotional supportiveness. Previous research with the FFCWS indicated that emotional supportiveness has a positive association with father involvement that is not based on marital status (Carlson & McLanahan, 2006) and is positively associated with stable

unions (Carlson, McLanahan, & England, 2004). Therefore, based on previous research, we expected emotional supportiveness to have a positive association with American Indian father involvement. Cronbach's alpha was .60, which is comparable to the reliability reported by Howard and Brooks-Gunn (2009).

Second, fathers completed a measure of social engagement composed of four dichotomous (1 = yes, 0 = no) indicators from the baseline year. Fathers answered questions regarding shared leisure with their partner. For example, fathers reported whether during the last month they and the birth mothers ever went out to a movie, sporting event, or some other entertainment. The four indicators were summed to create an ordinal variable. Higher scores indicated a greater breadth of social engagement activities between the birth parents.

Most research into social engagement has examined it from the perspective of shared leisure being a positive predictor of parental relationship quality (for example, see Claxton & Perry-Jenkins, 2008). It is expected that social engagement will have a positive association with emotional supportiveness. However, given that social engagement reflects the level of bonding activities in the parental subsystem, it is a measure of the parents' ability to maintain and grow their relationship. Therefore it is a logical extension, through family systems theory, to consider social engagement as another dimension of parental relationship quality. Cronbach's alpha was .61, which is comparable to the reliability reported by Gee et al. (2007).

Coresidence. Coresidence is a composite measure assessed during the one-year follow-up interview that ordinally measures how often the father lived with the mother during the previous year. Fathers who reported that they were in a romantic relationship or were married to the birth mother were asked how often they lived with the mother. Responses were reverse coded and ranged from 1 (never) to 4 (all/most of the time). Fathers who were not in a romantic relationship were coded as 0 to reflect the greater social distance separating fathers from their children; thus, the final scale ranged from 0 to 4.

Father Involvement. Father involvement was assessed at the one-year follow-up interview (when the child was approximately one year old) through eight father-report items reflecting the dimension of father involvement referred to as "engagement"

(Lamb, 2000). Engagement was measured on an eight-point scale ranging from 0 (times per week) to 7 (times per week). Fathers reported how often they directly interacted with the focal child in various age appropriate activities, such as playing games like peek-a-boo or gotcha. Fathers who had not seen the focal child during the previous 30 days were coded as 0 on these measures. Cronbach's alpha was .86. An exploratory factor analysis using maximum likelihood estimation and a varimax rotation revealed that the measure is composed of two dimensions with eigenvalues greater than 1, which suggests that there is more than one type of engagement.

When the items in each factor were examined, the two dimensions appeared to be differentiated on the basis of the type of interaction between the father and child. We labeled these dimensions as evocative/imaginary and physically active engagement to distinguish between the two types of direct interaction fathers have with their children. These interactions are labeled based on a continuum from being more evocative/imaginary (such as reading stories) to more physically active (such as playing with toys). One item, telling stories, cross-loaded on both factors and was subsequently removed from further analyses. Thus, physically active engagement was measured by four indicators, ($\alpha = .84$), and evocative/imaginary engagement was measured by three indicators ($\alpha = .75$).

Data Analysis

We first screened the data for improbable outliers with SPSS 16.0 (SPSS Inc., 2007) and no cases were removed. Subsequently, we used AMOS 16.0 to perform SEM with maximum likelihood estimation. We used the two-step procedure described by Kline (2005) to test the model. In the first step, we performed a series of confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) to assess the measurement portion of the model for adequate fit. In the second step, we assessed a hybrid model that combined the measurement portion with path analysis. We then consulted modification indices to correlate error terms for each latent variable; error terms were correlated if they were consistent with family systems theory.

To provide a better description of American Indian fathers relative to the general population, we performed multiple group analysis. Multiple group analysis tests nested models by progressively constraining the hybrid model to be equal across

groups. We created one group for American Indian fathers and another for all other races in the FFCWS (hereinafter referred to as the general population in the FFCWS). To know if and where group heterogeneity existed, we conducted chi-square difference tests to determine the extent of the constraints that could be placed on the hybrid model. We supplemented these tests by critical ratios to determine heterogeneity of specific regression paths between the groups. Due to the exploratory nature of the analysis for American Indian fathers, we used a p value of .10. We retained the standard p value of .05 for the general population in the FFCWS due to the larger sample size and a substantial body of previous research.

RESULTS

A brief summary of descriptive statistics for the sample is presented in Table 1. One-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) and chi-square difference tests were used to compare scores between American Indians and the general population in the FFCWS. American Indian fathers in the sample tended to be younger ($M = 25.95$, $SD = 6.25$) than the fathers of the general population in the FFCWS ($M = 27.84$, $SD = 7.12$, $p < .01$). In addition, American Indian fathers were less likely to be involved in physically active engagement ($M = 3.81$, $SD = 2.62$) than the fathers of the general population in the FFCWS ($M = 4.39$, $SD = 2.04$, $p < .01$). Chi-square difference tests revealed group differences in levels of education and living arrangements.

CFAs

The first measurement model tested involved the emotional supportiveness variable. The CFA was an adequate fit to the data [$\chi^2(1, N = 2,784) = 0.00$, $p = .915$]; comparative fit index (CFI) = 1.00; root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .000; 90% confidence interval (CI), .000 to .20; standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) = .0004; factor loadings ranged from .35 to .66. The second measurement model correlated the two measures of father involvement, evocative/imaginary and physically active engagement. This CFA provided an adequate fit to the data [$\chi^2(4, N = 2,784) = 13.1$, $p = .01$]; CFI = .999; RMSEA = .029; 90% CI, .012 to .047; SRMR = .009; factor loadings ranged from .49 to .88, and the correlation between evocative/imaginary and physically active engagement was .67. A final CFA was conducted that correlated evocative/imaginary engagement, physically active

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Main Study Variables and Selected Sample Descriptives

Variable	American Indian (n = 107)	All Other Races (n = 2,677)
	% or <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	% or <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)
Baseline characteristics		
Father's age at baby's birth	25.95 (6.25)**	27.91 (7.15)**
Father's education***		
Less than high school	60.7	29.9
High school	26.2	33.3
Some college or more	13.1	36.3
Living arrangements***		
Married	15.0	28.7
Cohabiting	66.4	45.1
Living apart	18.6	26.2
Birth father's health	3.84 (1.02)	4.00 (.916)
Baby's sex (male)	59.8	52.1
Mother's emotional supportiveness	2.65 (.387)	2.66 (.362)
Social engagement	3.14 (1.06)	3.17 (1.07)
Coresidence	3.19	3.05
Father's active engagement	3.81 (2.62)**	4.39 (2.04)**
Father's passive engagement	4.54 (1.82)	4.19 (2.07)

Note: Father's health was rated on a five-point scale (ranging from 5 = excellent to 1 = poor); coresidence was rated on a five-point scale (ranging from 4 = all/most, 1 = never, 0 = not in relationship with mother); percentages do not necessarily add to 100 due to rounding error; analyses of variance compared means, and chi-square difference tests compared percentages.

** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$ indicates score for American Indians is significantly different from the score for all other races. All variables except baby's sex are father's report.

engagement, and emotional supportiveness. This model, as expected, fit the data well [$\chi^2(31, N = 2,784) = 38.68, p = .162$]; CFI = .999; RMSEA = .009; 90% CI, .00 to .018; SRMR = .013; factor loadings ranged from .35 to .88. The correlation between evocative/imaginary engagement and emotional supportiveness was .27, and the correlation between physically active engagement and emotional supportiveness was .15. Social engagement was treated as an observed variable and therefore was excluded from the CFA.

Structural Regression Model and Multiple Group Comparison

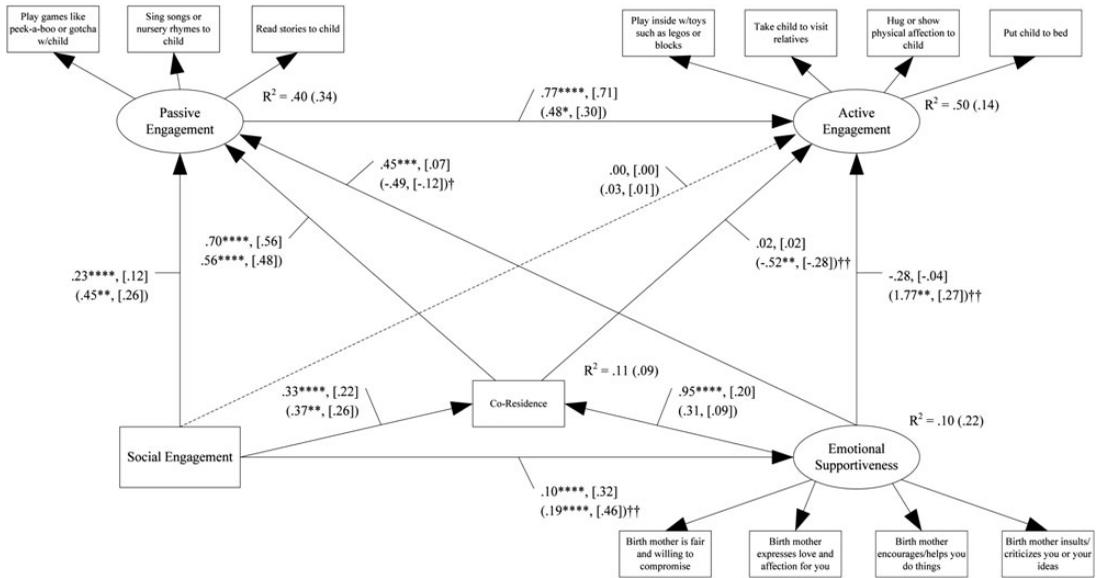
The structural regression model (without multiple groups), was a good fit to the data. Although the chi-square value was significant [$\chi^2(47, N = 107) = 129.30, p < .001$], the other fit measures were within acceptable ranges: CFI = .992; RMSEA = .025; 90% CI, .020 to .030; and SRMR = .019. For the purposes of this study, model results for American Indians ($n = 107$) and the general population of the FFCWS ($n = 2,676$) were subsequently compared (see Figure 1). All nested models were significantly different across groups at $p < .001$ (results not shown), with the exception of the measurement weights model, $\Delta\chi^2(9, N = 2,676) = 10.11, p = .34$. A consistent measurement weights model across

groups is ideal because potential differences in the structural paths are not likely a result of differences in the measurement weights between groups.

Regarding our first hypothesis (H1), all significant regression paths from social engagement and emotional supportiveness to either evocative/imaginary or physically active engagement were positive. (See Table 2 for a decomposition of effects in the final model.) Specifically, a 1 *SD* increase in social engagement resulted in a .26 *SD* increase in evocative/imaginary engagement for American Indian fathers and a .12 *SD* increase for fathers of the general population of the FFCWS. A 1 *SD* increase in emotional supportiveness was associated with a .27 *SD* increase in physically active engagement for American Indian fathers and a .07 *SD* increase in evocative/imaginary engagement for fathers of the general population of the FFCWS. Social engagement, however, was not directly related to physically active engagement for either group. Emotional supportiveness was unrelated to either evocative/imaginary engagement for American Indian fathers or physically active engagement for fathers of the general population of the FFCWS.

With respect to our second hypothesis (H2), standardized direct effects from emotional supportiveness to physically active engagement were greater for American Indian fathers ($\beta = .271$)

Figure 1: Structural Equation Model with Path Coefficients for American Indians and the General Population of the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study.



Note: Coefficients for American Indians are in parentheses. Standardized path coefficients are in brackets. Nonsignificant paths for both groups are dashed lines. Significant difference between the two pathways at † $p < .10$ and †† $p < .05$. * $p < .10$. ** $p < .05$. *** $p < .01$. **** $p < .001$.

Table 2: Decomposition of Standardized Effects from the SEM of Social Engagement, Emotional Supportiveness, and Coresidence Predicting Active and Passive Engagement

Exogenous Variable	Endogenous Variables		
	Passive Engagement	Active Engagement	Father Engagement
Social engagement			
Direct effect	.122 (.264)	.000 (.012)	.122 (.276)
Indirect effect	.179 (.086)	.204 (.149)	.383 (.235)
Total effect	.301 (.351)	.204 (.162)	.505 (.513)
Emotional supportiveness			
Direct effect	.074 (-.119)	-.043 (.271)	.031 (.152)
Indirect effect	.110 (.042)	.133 (-.048)	.243 (-.006)
Total effect	.184 (-.077)	.090 (.223)	.274 (.146)
Coresidence			
Direct effect	.558 (.480)	.017 (-.278)	.575 (.202)
Indirect effect		.394 (.145)	.394 (.145)
Total effect	.558 (.480)	.411 (-.133)	.969 (.347)
Parental relationship quality			
Direct effect	.196 (.145)	-.043 (.283)	.153 (.428)
Indirect effect	.289 (.128)	.337 (.101)	.626 (.229)
Total effect	.485 (.274)	.294 (.385)	.779 (.659)

Note: SEM = structural equation model. Standard errors for indirect and total effects are not calculated. See Figure 1 for significance tests of direct effects. Coefficients for American Indian fathers are in parentheses. Parental relationship quality is the sum of effects for social engagement and emotional supportiveness. Father engagement is the sum of effects for passive and active engagement. Total effect does not always equal the sum of direct effect and indirect effect due to rounding error.

than for fathers of the general population of the FFCWS ($\beta = -.043$). The standardized direct effects from social engagement to evocative/imaginary

engagement were also greater for American Indian fathers ($\beta = .264$) compared to fathers of the general population of the FFCWS ($\beta = .122$). The path

from emotional supportiveness to physically active engagement was significantly different between groups (critical ratio [CR] = -2.248, $p = .027$). In addition, standardized direct effects of parental relationship quality variables on father involvement variables for American Indian fathers were nearly three times greater than those of the general population in the FFCWS ($\beta = .428$ compared to $\beta = .153$).

The path from social engagement to evocative/imaginary engagement (CR = -1.157, $p = .25$) was not significantly different between groups. The path from emotional supportiveness to evocative/imaginary engagement was lower for American Indian fathers than for fathers of the general population of the FFCWS, and the path coefficient between groups was significantly different (CR = -1.776, $p = .079$). We also conducted Sobel tests on the indirect unstandardized pathways of the parental relationship quality variables for both groups (results not shown) that indicated four significant indirect effects for fathers of the general population of the FFCWS. Total significant indirect standardized effects of parental relationship quality variables, measured as social engagement and emotional supportiveness, on father involvement variables, measured as evocative/imaginary engagement and physically active engagement, were .370. For American Indian fathers, the Sobel tests indicated two significant indirect standardized effects for the parental relationship quality variables. Total significant indirect standardized effects of American Indian parental relationship quality variables on father involvement variables were .249.

Regarding our third hypothesis (H3), the path from social engagement was related to evocative/imaginary engagement ($b = .45$, $p = .015$, $\beta = .26$) as well as the path from emotional supportiveness to physically active engagement ($b = .177$, $p = .049$, $\beta = .27$). In addition, the paths from emotional supportiveness to evocative/imaginary engagement and from social engagement to physically active engagement remained nonsignificant in a model, without controlling for the effects of coresidence on evocative/imaginary and physically active engagement (results not shown).

Regarding our fourth hypothesis (H4), the results indicate that coresidence had stronger total standardized effects on evocative/imaginary and physically active engagement for the fathers of the general population of the FFCWS, ($\beta = .969$) than did the parental relationship quality variables ($\beta = .779$). However, for American Indian fathers, the opposite

appeared to be true. Parental relationship quality produced greater total standardized effects ($\beta = .659$) when compared to the total standardized effects of coresidence ($\beta = .347$). In addition, a 1 *SD* increase in coresidence was associated with a .28 *SD* decrease in American Indian fathers' physically active engagement, whereas the relationship between the two variables was nonsignificant for fathers of the general population in the FFCWS.

DISCUSSION

Increasing numbers of children are born each year to unmarried couples, with American Indians having the next highest percentage of nonmarital births, second only to black Americans (Martin et al., 2009). We know little regarding the role of parental relationship quality and coresidence among urban American Indian parents and the strength of their association with father involvement. Our analyses expand upon previous research by extending the discussion to the urban American Indian population. As such, this is the first study to use the FFCWS to provide insight into this association for urban American Indian fathers relative to the general population. Our study found that emotional supportiveness appears to be a more salient predictor of a father's physically active engagement for urban American Indians. Furthermore, parental relationship quality has a stronger association with urban American Indian father involvement than does coresidence.

Model results for both urban American Indian fathers and fathers of the general population in the FFCWS offer partial support of H1—that parental relationship quality is positively linked with father involvement. However, there were differences between groups; emotional supportiveness did not have a significant relationship with evocative/imaginary engagement for American Indian fathers. This difference is further emphasized with Carlson and McLanahan's (2006) finding that emotional supportiveness in the general population of the FFCWS is positively related to an engagement measure that is most closely aligned with what we have termed "evocative/imaginary engagement." For American Indian fathers, some have suggested that this difference is indirectly associated with the impact of historical trauma (Brave Heart & DeBruyn, 1998). Boarding schools and the systematic separation of American Indian families negatively affected proper role modeling of

emotional supportiveness and evocative/imaginary engagement that often occurs in intact families.

When considering physically active engagement, the path from social engagement was not significant and mirrored the results of the general population in the FFCWS. This finding is consistent with [Gee et al. \(2007\)](#) in which social engagement was not associated with an engagement measure more closely aligned with physically active engagement (see also [Lamb's \[2010\]](#) work on engagement and child development for insights on the contribution of fathers). For urban American Indian fathers, the path from emotional supportiveness to physically active engagement showed that they were more likely to be engaged in physically active activities with their child when they perceived the mother as being emotionally supportive. In other words, the level of emotional supportiveness that the fathers perceived in the mother was more salient for urban American Indian fathers' engagement in physically active activities with their children than for those of the general population in the FFCWS. Here, additional research is needed to determine the cultural implications of why physically active engagement for American Indian fathers was significantly associated with mothers' emotional supportiveness.

The increased salience of parental relationship quality is consistent with family systems theory for a family with a more collectivistic support structure. Children in a collectivistic culture receive parenting from more adults than just their birth parents ([Red Horse, 1997](#)). Although the role of the birth father is important in American Indian culture, it is not as critical as in a Eurocentric family operating within a nuclear structure. Recent research suggests that fathers outside of American Indian culture tend to remain relatively involved with their children despite the quality of their relationship with the mother or until the mother forms a romantic attachment with a live-in partner, which essentially replaces the birth father's role in the family system ("daddy swap") ([Tach et al., 2010](#)).

In a collectivistic culture, however, the responsibility of parenting is diffused across more family members. Greater parental relationship quality with the mother strengthens the commonality, or common bond, that ties the American Indian father to his place in the family system more than it does for fathers in the general population of the

FFCWS. A stronger tie to the family system likely results in a sharpening of the boundary separating the father from the rest of the environment and increases the father's interaction with family members. In other words, the parenting contribution provided by the kinship network potentially increases father involvement when parental relationship quality is high. The model provided additional support for this concept; parental relationship quality path coefficients for urban American Indians produced greater standardized direct effects on the father involvement variables (.428) than did the parental relationship quality path coefficients for fathers of the general population in the FFCWS (.153).

Another way to view the increased importance of parental relationship quality for urban American Indian fathers is to recognize the impact of historical trauma on American Indian fatherhood. As noted earlier, the effect of historical trauma is potentially seen when considering H4—that parental relationship quality will have greater effects on father engagement than coresidence. H4 was supported for the American Indian fathers but not the fathers of the general population, which suggests that some aspect of the parental relationship is influencing American Indian fathers differently. Due to the loss of traditional positive parenting practices consistent with their cultural upbringing, American Indian fathers need constructive role models. Positive interactions within the parental subsystem are concomitant with increased parental relationship quality. This suggests that greater parental relationship quality could be a catalyst for constructive father involvement and aid in overcoming the potential negative impacts of historical trauma. Thus, contrary to what appears true in the general population, social service providers will likely be more effective in increasing urban American Indian father engagement when their interventions are focused more on improving parental relationship quality than on encouraging the couple to live together.

Several limitations of our study should be mentioned. First, the use of self-report data and selection of the dependent variables from the one-year follow-up and independent variables from the baseline year have the potential to increase response bias. The small sample size and the decision not to use weights when analyzing urban American Indian fathers are also limitations. The small sample size limited the analysis in terms of the variables that

could be included in the model (including control variables such as education, income, employment, and health), which may have reduced the possibility of spurious associations in the model. The model results generally appear consistent with the literature on father engagement and parental relationship quality in which these additional controls were included.

Another limitation involves the comparison of urban American Indians to other fathers in the FFCWS. It is more difficult to make general interpretations as this data set includes a very diverse group of other fathers. A final limitation concerns the associations between the parental relationship quality variables and the father engagement variables. The differences observed could be due to cultural/personal preferences or some other unmeasured variable. There is a need for further research on the possibility of multidimensional father engagement and how it relates to the intersection of culture and fathering for American Indians.

Future Research

Future research should seek to replicate the results with a larger American Indian sample to facilitate a more complete examination of the American Indian family system. Furthermore, collection of data specific to American Indians would provide information of particular significance to American Indian families. Future additions to the model could include the kinship network, measures of cultural participation, and spirituality. Other studies could focus on the specific age-appropriate behaviors that are ideally expected from American Indian fathers when they interact with their children. Other control variables known to be related to father engagement (multipartner fertility, education, income, employment, and health) could be included to minimize the likelihood of spurious associations in future models. Discussion of the association between parental relationship quality and father involvement should also be extended to American Indians living on the reservations. This extension is important because our sample cannot be generalized to those fathers living on reservations, who are likely to have a more stable and extensive kinship system and an increased tie to traditional American Indian culture.

Conclusion

This study represents the first effort to assess the association between parental relationship quality

and father involvement for urban American Indians in the FFCWS. As such, the results provide important insights into a positive association between parental relationship quality and father involvement for this population. Given the current challenges faced by American Indian youth and that prior research with other populations has indicated that positive parental relationship quality can potentially benefit the entire family system, particularly children, parental relationship quality is an important avenue for future research with the American Indian population. Although these results are similar when compared to the general population of the FFCWS, they are not the same. Urban American Indians' experiences with historical trauma and their collectivistic cultural heritage have likely led to two key differences. First, emotional supportiveness has a stronger relationship with physically active engagement for American Indian fathers. Second, parental relationship quality is a stronger predictor of American Indian father engagement than the coresidence of the couple.

These differences in the context of cultural heritage and historical trauma suggest two implications for clinical practice with urban American Indian fathers. First, the differences underscore the importance of conducting a bio-psycho-social history of the American Indian family, including a genogram that will enable the practitioner to determine the extent to which historical trauma has affected the family system. Second, the model suggests that practitioners can most effectively increase father engagement by increasing the couple's relationship quality, specifically, a father's awareness of the mother's emotionally supportive behavior and his ability to cultivate that support. **SWR**

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