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Management of non-marital fertility in two South African communities

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Abstract

In this analysis, we draw on qualitative data to examine the management of non-marital fertility among young women in two rural, Black communities situated in different provinces of South Africa: KwaZulu–Natal and Mpumalanga. While the two communities share a history of economic and social disadvantage and limited access to the labour market, there are, nonetheless, distinctive features that are evident in the management of non-marital fertility. We show that young women in both communities aspire to an ideal ordering of events that places finishing education before getting married and having children but this is not easily attained. However, there are important differences in the ways young women and their families respond to union formation and childbearing that often occurs outside of a recognized union. In Hlabisa, formal processes for legitimising non-marital pregnancies through union recognition are still in place whereas, in Agincourt, more emphasis is placed on securing support and paternal recognition for the child rather than on cementing the union between the young woman and her partner. We also find that the older generation in Agincourt at times views education as a threat to marriage while this is not common in Hlabisa. Our findings have important implications for intervention programmes that often treat Black communities as homogeneous wholes.

Keywords

culture; non-marital fertility; young people; social reproduction; South Africa

High adolescent fertility and late marriage among Black South Africans underlie high rates of “non-marital”¹ fertility. Although the median age at first marriage is 27, almost one-third of Black women have a birth by age 19 (South African Demographic and Health Survey 1998)². Black South Africans are often treated as an undifferentiated whole, resulting from the legacy of apartheid and assumptions about shared cultural and ethnic attributes (Burman et al. 1997). However, some important cultural and regional differences do exist, for example in the management of non-marital fertility. By management, we mean the ways young women and their families (and to a lesser extent, young men) respond to a non-marital birth. Management thus involves the practices which legitimise a non-marital birth: gaining recognition of a woman’s union with the child’s father or integrating the child into

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¹We use the term non-marital here instead of pre-marital. to describe current demographic trends in South Africa, where marriage rates are low and continue to decline, and where early fertility generally happens outside of marriage.

²It is now well documented that the 2003 SADHS is fraught with data problems that have resulted in unreliable estimates of fertility (SADHS 2003 Final Report); therefore, we have chosen to reference the 1998 SADHS.

the mother's family. In this analysis, we examine the similarities and differences in the management of non-marital fertility among young women in two rural and predominantly Black communities in two South African provinces: KwaZulu-Natal and Mpumalanga. Through comparative analysis of qualitative data, this study offers a dynamic approach to understanding the management of non-marital fertility, attending to the interactions between established ideas about kinship and union formation with contemporary constructions of social reproduction.

We contribute to discussions of fertility and union formation in southern Africa in several ways. First, we provide new insights into how young women and their partners and families engage with non-marital fertility, a relatively common occurrence. Second, we consider sociocultural and regional differences within one race category³ in South Africa – a topic that has received scant attention. Third, we offer a dynamic cultural approach to the comparative study of fertility and union formation that privileges smaller scale (e.g., sub-national or sub-group) heterogeneity and variation, via an interactive cultural framework comprised of likely influences on fertility and union formation.

Conceptual framework

Fertility research usually treats Black South Africans as an undifferentiated, culturally homogenous group resulting in race being the most common basis of comparison (Caldwell and Caldwell 1993; Moultrie and Timaeus 2003). The conflation of race and culture in studies of non-marital fertility in South Africa has been described as a racialising project that exoticises the category of Black with immutable notions of race, 'tradition,' and culture (MacLeod and Durrheim 2002). Critics argue that the use of race as a proxy for culture creates homogeneous and static cultural understandings that mask important differences between groups and changes over time (Abu-Lughod 1991; Greenhalgh 1995; Kelley 1997; Said 1978). Moreover, it misses a critical observation that the management of non-marital fertility reflects a wide range of historical and cultural influences, including colonial administrative and legal structures, Christian beliefs and practices, and contemporary reification of 'traditional' cultural practices (Delius and Glaser 2002).

In an effort to correct this representation, we adopt Spillman's (2002:4) broad definition of culture as "processes of meaning-making" that are fluid and active. We emphasize culture as a dynamic process by employing an interactive model of two critical factors that underpin the unique strategies employed by women and families to manage non-marital pregnancies and births in two South African communities. These factors are: (1) prevailing sociocultural norms towards union formation and non-marital fertility; and (2) life aspirations and the value of education. Prevailing sociocultural norms refers to shared beliefs and practices about the timing and process of union formation especially in relation to fertility. We pay particular attention to the legitimisation of non-marital births to preserve moral codes of behaviour. We also examine how exposure to knowledge about HIV/AIDS influences decisions on union formation and childbearing. Life aspirations and the value of education pertains to how young women and their families view connections between the completion of secondary schooling and other milestones, namely, forming stable relationships and having children. We also examine the tensions inherent in satisfying multiple criteria of respectability, such as getting married and attaining education. While privileging the local context, we recognise that broader historical and global factors – economic constraints, media exposure, and experiences of HIV/AIDS – have resulted in more similarity than difference in certain areas.

³Conventional race categories that are used in most large-scale data collection include Black, White, Coloured, and Indian.

Data

The qualitative data in this study were collected through long-term engagement and observation in two communities: (1) the Agincourt sub-district of Mpumalanga Province; and (2) the Hlabisa sub-district of KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) Province. While the dominant ethnicity in Agincourt is Tsonga⁴ (with some Pedi and Sotho), the site in KwaZulu-Natal is almost exclusively Zulu.

The Agincourt data were collected in 2003-2004 and again in 2010 while the Hlabisa data were collected between 2000 and 2005. The first wave of the Agincourt data comes from the Children's Social Connections and Well-Being study and includes detailed data on 19 young mothers, their families, and children. The second set of data is comprised of 4 focus group discussions (FGDs) and 61 in-depth interviews with women aged 18-75. Topics include reproduction, HIV/AIDS, work and education, and ideas about 'modern' women.

The Hlabisa data come from the project, Gender and the Social Dynamics of Adolescent Risk, which included young men and women aged 14-24 years from five communities. This analysis includes data from 30 peer group discussions and 12 in-depth interviews. Sexuality, HIV, and pregnancy-related behaviours were discussed in single-sex groups that met six times over a four to six month period. Data are also included from two FGDs with teenage mothers on their pregnancy and parenting experiences and the impacts on schooling and employment, and from a study of gender, relationships, and HIV risk among 18-24 year-olds, where pregnancy was extensively discussed.

In Hlabisa, all interviews were conducted in isiZulu and in Agincourt, in xiTsonga. In both sites, interviews were translated and transcribed by native speakers, and then coded using NVIVO software. Data analysis was based on various levels of coding (primary, axial) and the extraction of relevant patterns for comparison. We used a comparative analytical framework to guide the data analysis, seeking to apply the interactive cultural model outlined above to understanding factors influencing the management of non-marital fertility in the two sites. To do this, we followed a two-step approach: first, main themes for each site were elucidated and second, these themes were used as the basis for the comparative analysis across the two sites. In the comparative analysis, themes from each site were consolidated into the main themes of: (1) prevailing norms toward union formation and non-marital fertility; and (2) life aspirations and the value of education. Each of these main themes was then divided into sub-themes, which represent either a common theme across the two sites or a dominant theme from one site. In this way, we engaged two distinct but complementary processes of data analysis that reflected the study's interactive cultural model. Quotes and vignettes are presented to lend emphasis to particular ideas and comparisons when appropriate.

Similarities in political economic context

Both sites are in rural areas neglected under apartheid, which functioned as labour sending areas to Johannesburg and other large cities, generally for employment in mines (Burawoy 1976). Now, both sites are connected to larger towns through improvements in roads and public transportation. School quality is poor (Fiske and Ladd 2003) and viewed as an obstacle to accessing good jobs; better-off families may send children away to private boarding schools. Employment opportunities in both sites are mainly found in small scale commerce, teaching, nursing, and tourism (Ashley and Roe 2002; SSA 2008). Informal, non-school-based educational and training opportunities have boomed recently, reflected in

⁴The Agincourt sub-district has a large Mozambican population as a result of the civil war in Mozambique in the 1980s followed up by economic migrants. As a result xiTsonga has become the dominant language in the area.

the growth of driving school businesses, computer training centres, and other skills training, including as lay health workers in HIV and AIDS-related care. Despite these changes, young people in both sites face enormous challenges in finding local employment even with a strong educational background. In order to work, young people, particularly men, may move to urban areas, while those who cannot find work (often young mothers) are likely to remain in rural areas but may depend on financial support from family or partners. Thus, young women may keep closer links to their homes and the local political economy, while young men may make a new start and return home less often. Yet despite these similarities, the ways in which young people and their families make decisions about the management of non-marital fertility are not necessarily the same, as discussed below.

Prevailing norms towards union formation and non-marital fertility

Maintaining control over reproduction

Most respondents in both sites say that pregnancy should come after some formal acknowledgement of a union, such as payment of bridewealth or *lobola*, as discussed below by two women ages 27 and 28, respectively in Agincourt:

Busi: Lobola should be the first priority. Other guys will know that you are Mrs. So and So. They will respect you rather than getting a child. Even the families cannot start a relationship because they don't know each other. What if that guy regrets? Lobola should be first, therefore children at last.

Sizakele: Lobola is not valuable today, because even married woman fail to respect their marriages, they tend to have extra affairs outside their marriages and if your husband can find you he can kill you.[]

Despite a lack of consensus on the value of lobola and the financial difficulties it causes men, many women (in both sites) remain positive about this practice.

In Hlabisa, young women often focus on social expectations around their relationships with men: introducing a young man to the family, often through a ceremony known as *ukumiso iduku* – 'raising the flag'; followed by gifts (*izibizo*); and formal recognition of the relationship, after which young people say *ngiqomile*, 'I am committed'. In recent years, as marriage has become less common, full lobola payments may never occur, thereby reinforcing the symbolic value of such commitment procedures. This is demonstrated in the poignant words of a 19 year old mother, Lindiwe, in Hlabisa:

I do not know whether it is because we have grown, we even have a baby in this relationship that is loved by both my family and his family. Because of that we had no choice but to introduce each other to our families because there was no need for any more lies. He also loves me so much, and I love him too, before, we used to do things very secretly. Also at that time, he was unable to show me how much he loves me because we were treating everything very confidential.

The young woman's references to 'any more lies' and 'doing things secretly' reflect the extent to which young people rely on culturally sanctioned procedures to navigate relationships, particularly when a pregnancy is involved. Familial recognition of a partnership permits a young couple to have a socially sanctioned relationship (and often a pregnancy) without social consequences, avoiding embarrassment to the families, especially the girl's (Harrison 2008). At the same time, non-marital pregnancy remains a stigmatised and undesirable outcome, especially for young women still in school, as indicated in the following interchange:

(How does your community see [non-marital pregnancy]?)

Gugu: They take it as a bad thing. When I was pregnant some of the parents told their children not to play with me or go with me because I was going to teach their children bad things.

Laughter

Nandi: My community talked a lot about a girl who is pregnant. Most mothers wouldn't allow their children to talk to me because I was pregnant. Whenever I was talking to someone, sometimes they would call her and tell her not to talk to me because I was going to teach her about boys. [16–19 year old mothers, Hlabisa]

Paying damages or *inhlawulo* constitutes another possible step in legitimising a non-marital pregnancy. Damage payments – culturally sanctioned means of compensation for premarital pregnancies in many African communities – are made by the boy or his family to the girl's family. These practices exist to a greater or lesser extent in both sites but financial challenges often make formal payment very difficult. Thus, we could not identify one case where a formal damage payment was made in Agincourt. In both sites when damage payments are not forthcoming, young women's families often seek alternative means of compensation, especially to ensure that a child is properly incorporated into an ancestral lineage. To avoid such responsibilities, young men may deny paternity, thus releasing them from the obligation of paying damages and from any further contact with the mother or the child (Kaufman, de Wet, and Stadler 2001).

In sum, these data suggest that sociocultural practices aimed at regulating young people's relationships and fertility remain important in Hlabisa, primarily through pursuit of more formal links to the father's family. However, neither structured engagement processes (Hlabisa) or more informal means (Agincourt) leads predictably to formal marital unions. Yet non-marital pregnancies are increasingly one of the few readily accessible means of obtaining adult status for young people in both sites even if these pregnancies are frowned upon by the larger community.

Responding to non-marital childbearing

Our data suggest differences across the two communities in fathers' behaviours following a non-marital pregnancy, as shown in the following statement made by Nomvula, a teen mother in Hlabisa

He told me to come to his home so as to inform the parents [about the pregnancy]. We went there ... They called him and ask him if he knew about me. He told them that I was his girlfriend. Whenever I got sick, he would give me money to go to the doctor. Even after delivery, he bought everything for the child; even now he still supports the baby. My parents buy whenever they feel like but it's not their duty to buy my child food and clothes.]

This young woman exhibits a sense of relief that her boyfriend 'recognised' her and did not deny the child, and also continued to support her and the child after the birth. At the same time, she is left to juggle between her parents and her boyfriend with regard to economic support for the child.

In contrast, many boyfriends in both sites did not support their offspring, as in the following story recounted by Precious, aged 28, from Agincourt:

My child's father was promising me heaven and earth before I fell pregnant. He was having a plan of the house he was going to build for us. But after a year, he dumped me to another woman. What I have learned is that if you are having a boyfriend, don't get a child faster. You can stay for more than ten years. If he is

serious he will wait for you. Again look at your background and his own background; therefore take a decision.

Even when partners do not live up to expectations, this participant and others like her use acknowledgement of paternity as a critical means of legitimising non-marital pregnancies. In Agincourt, the importance of recognising the union has been largely replaced with recognition of the pregnancy by the child's father, while in Hlabisa, recognising the union remains a key part of the process of legitimising the pregnancy. For reasons that remain unclear, paternal acknowledgement in Agincourt appears to symbolise a different and somewhat more contemporary approach to marriage and partnerships; it may also be the only way of gaining recognition of the child from the father. In Hlabisa, more emphasis is placed on the young partners' families and carrying out cultural practices that ultimately protect both the woman and child from social retribution.

In both sites, families of young mothers and their partners play an important role in supporting the child and sometimes the young couple. In Agincourt, most young women have their first child at their parents' home and receive the most help from their own mothers (Madhavan 2010), which appears to be a relatively new pattern signifying a notable shift in childrearing responsibilities to maternal kin. However, young mothers and their families attempt to make connections to young women's partners and their families in order to ensure financial support and to bolster legitimacy through an acknowledgement of paternity (Madhavan 2010). The level of support from fathers and their families varies enormously, from the sporadic provision of clothing and food to consistent support for the child. Even though women may desire to stay connected to their child's father, they are often ambivalent about paternal involvement, as made clear in the following conversation between two mothers, ages 16 and 19 in Agincourt:

Ayanda: It is difficult because you find me as the mother and the child's father do not agree on who the child should stay with, at the end you find that I am forced to give the child to his father. Only to find that the father is married to another woman who is going to live with my baby. My heart will always be painful, thinking that the woman is ill-treating my child, sometimes beating or not giving him enough food.

Nobuthle: Sometimes you find that the child is left in a family where they are careless about kids. They don't care where they play and who they play with.
[Young mothers, ages 16 and 19, Agincourt]

Both statements reflect the bind that young women find themselves in. In order to gain financial support from the child's father and access child care support from the father's family, young mothers may have to accept whatever conditions are offered.

While many families provide a needed safety net for young people and their children, often they cannot (or will not) provide such support, as indicated below:

Lazarus (age 55, Agincourt): But whenever a boy can impregnate someone else, that child [boy] will be forced to leave school and go to look for a job because his father (head of the family) won't be able to support the wife [the pregnant woman] and the [future] child.

Nomazano (teen mother, Hlabisa): There is a huge difference now. Before I had a child, I could ask anything and they would do it for me because I was the child they love. But since I have a baby, they told me that they are not responsible for me; the only person who has to look after me was my boyfriend. From then I learned that I have to look for a job so as to take care of the child, something I never thought I would do before I got pregnant.

In both settings, the young mother's family usually bears the bulk of responsibility for her child. Even when young women and their families attempt to maintain relations with the child's father, often explicitly hoping that marriage will occur, a non-marital pregnancy strains many relationships. In both sites, economic considerations are usually paramount. This, in turn, necessitates one or both young parents to work to support the child, which may geographically separate them for periods of time.

Knowledge about HIV/AIDS

Exposure to knowledge about HIV/AIDS is often cited as a critical factor enabling young women to exert more control over their reproductive decision-making and protect themselves from HIV. Moreover, given the high HIV prevalence rate in South Africa – 17.3% among adults age 15-49 (UNAIDS 2011) – it is likely that it would also influence how young women and their families view union formation and non-marital pregnancies. Indeed, a common refrain in both sites highlights the need to educate children about sexuality – especially HIV – as made clear in the following statement from a 52 year old man, Geoffrey, in Agincourt:

Children should also be taught the good way of handling themselves, behaviour and good manners. They should also be taught about the AIDS epidemic we are facing today.

There is also some evidence that the fear of infection is motivating women to end unions:

Like my child's father, I am the one who has told him to stop seeing each other because he was having another love affair. Sometimes he will come during the night. You will accommodate him and there are illnesses nowadays. He will end up coming with them to infect you while you are staying waiting for him. [Dudu, aged 20 Agincourt]

Despite such stated concerns, there is a notable lack of connection between HIV awareness and decisions around union formation and childbearing amongst young women in both communities. This is made clear in the following statement from an interviewer talking to a young mother, Sibonghile, in Hlabisa.

If I remember very well in one of our discussions you said falling pregnant is better because you deliver and you relax but if you have AIDS you will end up dying.

By presenting the two options of pregnancy and HIV/AIDS, this young woman appears to recognize the consequences of having unprotected sex. Yet, the prospect of becoming HIV positive does not seem to have motivated her to practice safe sex. In addition, it is, perhaps, not surprising, that she equates HIV/AIDS with a death sentence given the limited access to treatment in South Africa during this time.

The following interchange among female focus group discussants (ages 18–25) in Agincourt suggests a similar disconnect.

Nomthando: They [young women] lack knowledge. If a boy comes to share her, she only knows to say yes and the boyfriend will do anything he can. She is not able to say no as she doesn't take any decision. At any time and at any day the boyfriend feels he can have sex, she goes to him and she cannot regret.

(Why not?)

Joyce: She is still young and she doesn't know how to say no. All she thinks is that maybe it is the way to show your love. She doesn't know the after effects of sleeping with guys.

The lack of an explicit connection between HIV and reproductive decision-making processes exposes inherent contradictions in people's attempts to configure new approaches to union formation and reproductive behaviour. For example, in both sites, young mothers were often conflicted about the value of having a migrant partner. While they clearly valued financial contributions to help support their child, they were also suspicious about their partner's faithfulness and associated HIV risks, a valid concern in these high HIV prevalence locations. While educational and employment aspirations provide new freedom to determine who to have a relationship with, for how long, and whether to have a child together, these may also put young women at a higher risk for HIV unless they prioritise safe sex as an important component of their relationships. In reality, young women in both sites appeared to have very little specific information about their personal prevention needs related to either pregnancy or HIV/AIDS, although general knowledge of HIV/AIDS is now very high (Pettifor et al. 2005).

Life aspirations and the value of education

Timing of life events

Similar to other African settings, there is overwhelming consensus in both sites that completion of secondary education is an essential pathway to success, and an achievement that ideally should precede both union formation and childbearing (Johnson-Hanks 2007; Lloyd et al. 2005; Smith 2001). A young female respondent in Hlabisa, Thenjiwe, reflected on the importance of the proper ordering of life events:

Well, I've always wanted to finish school before I can involve myself in relationships. So what's been happening is that I have been refusing all proposals from the boys.

A similar sentiment was expressed by the following young man, Bandile, in Hlabisa:

It will remain that way for me [not having a baby] until I feel that I have all that I ever wanted in life, having a good job, getting married and then I can have a child, not by mistake. I just want my education to come first without any interruptions [pregnancies].

Despite expressed intentions, in reality schooling is interrupted in myriad ways, due to family economic circumstances, school closures, transfers between schools, and pregnancies for young women. There is now a substantial amount of research that highlights the challenges that young women face managing schooling and parenting (Madhavan and Thomas 2005; Marteleto et al. 2008; Morrell et al. 2008). As a result, despite recent government policies that set an upper limit for school completion, many rural young people continue schooling into their early twenties. Phumzile, a young woman in Agincourt described some of the complexities that may accompany young women's schooling experiences:

One can be a failure if he/she starts engaging herself in relationships, like myself – I fell in love with a teacher at a very early age, I was fourteen years. He ended up marrying me, and my schoolmates were calling me Madam, and that thing irritated me. I was no longer happy at school; from there I hated to go to school.

Overlap between union formation, pregnancy, and schooling is a realistic scenario as young women manage competing agendas. When this happens, the importance of schooling is usually reinforced by young women themselves and their families, as is evident in the following comments of Cecilia, an older woman from Agincourt:

There are no good reasons either for stopping a child's education. If your child impregnates a girl than you must take full responsibility and if it is your child who

has been impregnated you should look after the baby and let the child continue with her schooling.

Indeed research shows that girls who have a functional support system are more likely to return to school (Madhavan and Thomas 2005). However, this is far easier said than done and the data from both sites indicate considerable challenges in satisfying these multiple and sometime competing agendas. The following is a FGD between teen mothers in Hlabisa:

(How did pregnancy affect your schooling?)

Andile: Me, I decided to stop schooling in March when I realised that I was pregnant.

Duduzile:: The pregnancy affected me because I had to stop going to school in April because I was afraid that other students knew that I was pregnant...

Khethiwe: I changed the school. ...

Nozipho: When I left school, everyone knew that I was pregnant even the teachers so I didn't want to go back.

Focus group discussions with young mothers in Agincourt also highlight the challenges faced in returning to school following a pregnancy:

Nkateko: Because I didn't have someone to take care of my child. I have wasted my time because of bearing the child. I have stayed for two years, taking care of my child. My mother said she will look after her if she is two or three years. Then when I look because that the time is come, I will not be able to go back to school.

Nkhensani: I have stopped going to school after becoming pregnant. I didn't go back to school at all. I wanted to go back to school but my mother refused to stay with my child.

Moreover, there is a sense of "wrongdoing" when a girl gets pregnant while in school:

Thandi: Parents do not have to stop the child to go to school when she is pregnant. Parents have to talk to the child and when the child asks the parents to forgive her, the child should go on schooling. But if the child does not ask forgiveness, you can stop her and look after her child. [45 year old woman, Agincourt]

The stress on forgiveness suggests that young people and their families believe there should be strong censure against engaging in sexual activities as a student and inconveniencing a family with an extra child to care for.

Education, respectability, and marriage

In Agincourt, there is notable ambivalence among the older generation about the role of education in shaping young people's attitudes towards union formation and childbearing:

Girls who are educated are less likely to get married. Most girls who are educated think that they can survive even if they live on their own. Getting married is not what they usually do and they would just have partners, [Female age 55, Agincourt] When a man marries you while you are not educated he will leave you on the way. When he went to work and see that other men are working with their wives, he will come and divorce his wife at home. And he will start looking for a woman who is educated so that he can work with her. [Victoria, age 38, Agincourt]

In this same context, completion of schooling is seen as important because of its potential to translate into a good job, thus rendering one a preferable marriage partner. Both men and women seek partners with education and money to help support the household. Therefore,

young people have incentives to do well in school. However, because education and employment increase women's financial independence, they may offer reasons to avoid marriage.

In Hlabisa, marriage represents an important life aspiration for both young men and women. Material characteristics are important, but young women are also looking for polite and respectful partners who conform to expected social norms. Since parents often oppose relationships, young people may seek to improve this situation by selecting partners who will be acceptable at home. This may be particularly important if a young woman envisions a future for the relationship, meaning her family would have to accept her boyfriend. Below, women aged 14-16 from Hlabisa describe characteristics of an ideal partner:

(Alright, what type of partner do girls have for the first time?)

Laughter

Ntokozo: A boy who behaves well, who is clean, able to communicate with other people, and who loves other people.

Mbali: I want someone who is active, handsome, dresses smartly, loves people, wears a smile every time and is a sweet person. ...

Sizani: Maybe at college or at university level and not a person who is not working.

This list of fairly rigorous criteria reflects the idealism and romance surrounding ideas of relationships even with the recognition that attaining such ideals is unlikely. In Agincourt, both young men and women placed more emphasis on education and employment prospects as desirable qualities in partners.

Discussion

Using a conceptual framework grounded in an interactive model of culture, we set out to explore similarities and differences in the management of non-marital fertility in two Black communities in South Africa. In the context of a retreat from formal marriage (Hosegood, McGrath, and Moultrie 2009) and the limitations imposed by the local political economies in both sites, young people and their families engage in efforts to legitimise non-marital pregnancies and attain status. The two factors that we focused on: (1) prevailing norms towards union formation and non-marital fertility; and (2) life aspirations and the value of education have produced distinctive strategies in the management of non-marital fertility despite similarities in the political economic landscape in each site. In Agincourt, the formal processes of legitimising non-marital pregnancies (through damage payments or lobola) have been largely abandoned, although they are still considered the ideal. Instead, importance is now often placed in establishing connections with the child's father (and his family) as a means of social and financial support for the child. The focus seems to be more on securing support and paternal recognition for the child rather than on cementing the union between the young woman and her partner. In Hlabisa, formal processes for legitimising non-marital pregnancies through union recognition are still in place, although followed to different degrees. These processes serve to make the pregnancy respectable, which could mean sustaining the relationship with the child's father or accepting damages and legitimately raising the child within the mother's family. Although these routes are preferable, there are many instances where neither is followed and young women's families take responsibility for the child, a common situation in both sites.

These differing strategies need to be understood in light of idealised and actual life trajectories (Johnson-Hanks 2007). In both Hlabisa and Agincourt, education is a vital part of establishing a contemporary life trajectory, which ideally includes completing school,

formalising a union, and only then having children (Lloyd 2005). In both sites, young people have high expectations regarding secondary and tertiary education (Grant and Hallman 2008; Madhavan and Thomas 2005; Marteleto, Lam, and Ranchhod 2008), which is portrayed as attainable by all in post-apartheid South Africa. Education is now widely available in both sites but does not provide young people with the background and skills they need to be economically successful. Although upwards of 85% now attend secondary school, less than half are able to pass the national post-secondary matriculation exam, which provides entry to universities (SSA 2011). Secondary and tertiary level education is often constrained by family economic circumstances. In light of the retreat from marriage alongside high rates of non-marital pregnancies in both sites, our findings point to the fact that, intentionally or not, childbearing has become a means of achieving social goals, such as the transition to adulthood. Even while stating their desire not to become pregnant at a young age and prior to being in a well-established relationship, young people in our data acknowledge the social importance of parenthood and fertility, a point made in other literature (Preston-Whyte 1993). Thus, in the face of declining opportunities for marriage, childbearing appears to be playing an increasingly important role in social reproduction for young South Africans, especially women.

A variant of Johnson–Hanks’s (2007) ‘vital conjunctures’ idea about how young people’s decisions reflect the careful management and timing of key life events such as pregnancy, schooling, and marriage, our findings suggest that young people in both sites, but particularly in Hlabisa, are attempting to reconcile what they perceive to be their normative obligations to their kin group (i.e., choosing the right partner and having a child after marriage) with the reality which presents significant challenges to achieving this ideal. In this sense, kin identity continues to exert its influence, particularly in Hlabisa, similar to in other African contexts (Smith 2011). This appears to be related in part to the ongoing influence of cultural ideals in Hlabisa (Harrison 2008), a process readily apparent in young people’s discussions of sexuality and relationships, contrasted with the more rapid dilution of those ideals in Agincourt (Delius and Glaser 2002; MacLeod and Durrheim 2002; Oomen 2000). While the constraints of the local political economy are similar in both sites, it appears that young people in Hlabisa are attempting to be more responsive to kinship obligations and cultural mores by gaining family approval of partners, paying damages (in some circumstances), and avoiding communal sanctioning of non-marital births. In both sites, there is little evidence that knowledge of HIV/AIDS influences decisions about union formation or childbearing underscoring another point of tension in the ways young women and their families manage relationships and non-marital fertility.

Moreover, young women in both sites are attempting to reconcile family and community expectations with educational aspirations and accessing good jobs. Our analysis suggests that there are subtle differences in the ways young people and their families view the value of education in each site. In Agincourt, education increases one’s attractiveness to a potential partner but presents a dilemma for older generations who see it as a ticket to employment but also a potential threat to union formation and stability. In contrast, young women in Hlabisa value education and view it as an asset in seeking a marriage partner rather than a threat. In both sites, finishing schooling and finding viable employment are constrained by opportunities in the local political economy. Families recognise these constraints and are often willing to provide support, particularly to young mothers and children, where and when possible.

Our interactive model of culture permits a deeper understanding of both the similarities and differences between the sites and the inherent contradictions that are apparent in young people’s life trajectories (Abu–Lughod 1992; Swidler 1986). For example, the fact that more effort is made in Hlabisa to maintain formal practices compared to Agincourt may be a

reflection of how Zulu identity is being reshaped in the post-apartheid ethnic mosaic to resist a national homogenisation of Black African identity (Barber 1994), as well as historical realities in which Zulu cultural identity was promoted for political reasons and deeply entrenched (Burns 2007; Delius and Glaser 2002). The Agincourt area has always been more ethnically mixed which, in turn, may entail more pragmatic and flexible approaches to addressing non-marital fertility. Such differences may have implications for intervention strategies aimed at school completion and delaying childbearing. It may be that, in Hlabisa, more effort has to be made to design programs that respect and make reference to prevailing cultural ideals and social norms, including the recognition of kin groups, whereas young people in Agincourt may be more receptive to strategies that target individual behavioural change. One approach currently being tested in the Agincourt area is a conditional cash transfer programme to help young women stay in school, thereby reducing the likelihood of early childbearing and HIV infection and increasing future economic potential (Pettifor et al. 2012).

In both sites, the realities of the contemporary political economy related specifically to jobs and future aspirations, and more broadly to social disruption (Budlender and Lund 2011) overwhelm other considerations. There is little doubt that, in both communities, resources need to be committed to the improvement of schools and the creation of employment opportunities to help young people achieve more positive life trajectories, including delaying childbearing. Our analysis focused on the perceptions and behaviours of young women and their families in managing non-marital fertility. There is a need for future research that focuses on similarities and differences in these processes by gender because of the centrality of fertility and early childbearing in young women *and men's* lives. Swartz and Bhana's (2009) research on young South African fathers represents an emerging body of work on fathers, paternity, and the role of families; however, more research is needed in this area.

Our analysis suggests that demographic studies that attempt to understand differences only by race are very limited when it comes to the Black African population in South Africa. Treating the Black African population as an undifferentiated whole would miss important differences in the ways different communities have maintained, discarded, or reinvented cultural practices in the management of non-marital fertility against shared commonalities in structural disadvantage. Marriage remains an aspiration but no longer an achievable one for many young people. Within this context, non-marital fertility has a purpose and can be seen as a rational (if unintentional or unacknowledged) means of achieving adult status, and in some cases, of ensuring ongoing connection to family, community, and home. In this way, non-marital fertility may be seen as congruent with local culture, and as a marker of certainty in an uncertain world, in which young people frequently leave home communities for education and work, and in which their material success is severely constrained by the current state of local and global political economies. The integrated cultural framework that we employed to guide our analytical approach has contributed to our understanding of these processes as an ongoing process of cultural development and change, and to the phenomenon of non-marital fertility specifically as a product of a complex set of cultural processes. We hope our analysis will be followed by other studies that consider similarities and differences across cultural and regional contexts within one country so that we can extend these findings to other demographic processes and other parts of sub-Saharan Africa.

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