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# Breaking the Cycle of Absent Fathers: Highly Involved African-American Nonresidential Fathers Describe Their Roles and Responsibilities Beyond Biological Paternity

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# DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to all of the courageous Black men in general and fathers in particular. It is for men that know their children better than the child's mother. And those that long to connect and bond with their offspring but for numerous reasons have been unable to. It is for those men that face daily obstacles, struggles, and challenges as they attempt to be an instrumental part of their children's lives. And for those who have cemented a concrete bond and solid love for their children. Finally, it is for the generations of men in my family who have encountered the tenacious cycle of nonresidential fatherhood, unemployment, and poverty.

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# ABSTRACT

In-depth interviews of African-American nonresidential fathers were used to explore their perceptions of fathering, roles, and responsibilities beyond biological paternity. Participants described their experience, how they derived their meaning of being a father, who influenced that process, and some of the challenges associated with not residing in the home. Results from this study challenge the deficit model commonly used to describe Black families generally and fathers specifically. There are several conclusions frequently found in the literature and popular press that these data contradict. First, the negative connotations associated with the deficit model that imply that most Black men abandon their children and/or have little if any contact is refuted. Second, the assumption that African-American men do not place a high value on fatherhood or family in the ways that their cohorts in other ethnic minority groups do is rejected. Data suggested that there are African-American nonresidential fathers that are in fact interested and involved in child socialization techniques, discipline, and positive child rearing strategies.

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# CHAPTER 1

# INTRODUCTION

It is virtually impossible to ignore the national attention that is placed on what is considered to be the breakdown of the family. Declining marriage rates, increased rates of divorce, teen childbearing, and out of wedlock pregnancies are all highlighted as indicative of the social issues that Americans face. Even though there are various explanations for these changes in family structure, many seem to emphasize the absence of an appropriate male presence in families as a root cause. These issues have been particularly salient in the African-American community. Indeed, the matriarchal family system with the seemingly invisible father has been an area of inquiry for decades.

This study investigated the perceptions of fatherhood, roles, and responsibilities of highly involved African-American nonresidential fathers who stress the importance of being an active father with a solid commitment to their children.

## Statement of the Problem

There are several areas of concern as it relates to scholarship on fatherhood. Because this area of inquiry has gained attention only in the last couple of decades, a substantial portion of the work conducted has dealt with

defining and refining conceptualizations of fatherhood and father involvement (Lamb, Pleck, Charnov & Levine, 1987; Palkovitz, 1997). Additionally, as is true of most empirical investigations of family-related phenomenon, most scholars examine White, middle-class families. Finally, parental experiences and parent-child relations are typically studied by gathering data from the custodial parent/legal guardian, who is generally the biological mother. This area of inquiry is quite relevant since African-American mothers are the primary caregivers for their children in most single-parent families. However, it is equally as important to explore the experiences of nonresidential fathers. A description and better understanding of nonresidential fathers' experiences and the meanings they ascribe to them and how these experiences affect their involvement and investment in the lives of their children may help explain what the challenges and barriers are to greater paternal involvement.

## Rationale

Fathers have been under-represented in scholarly investigations of families because it is difficult to secure male participation in general and even more challenging with those men from cultural and ethnic minority groups. Many investigators have described Black males as an "endangered species" on the verge of extinction (Smith, 1986). Black males are viewed through a

perspective saturated by negative stereotypes that describe them as though there is little or no within-group variation.

Much of what we know about African-American fathers has evolved from what is known as the deficit model (Boyd-Franklin, 1989). This perspective appeared in the literature decades ago as an explanation for an inferior family structure, intelligence, perceptual abilities, and cognitive reasoning among African Americans (Johnson, 1998; White & Parham, 1990). This model is comparative in nature and negatively evaluates values, behaviors, and lifestyles that vary from White middle-class norms. Research taken from this perspective has focused largely on Black men who have not accepted parental responsibilities (Bowman, 1993) and who do not live in the home (Cochran, 1997). A proposed causal link between father absence and antisocial behavior among children and youth is central to most deficit-based research projects; examples include father absence linked to (a) child socialization processes (Coley, 1998), (b) peer problems, (c) school-related disruptions (Mason, Cauce, & Gonzales, 1994), and (d) early sexual initiation (Dittus, Jaccard, & Gordon, 1997). Absent fathers' unemployment, unsteady work patterns, and failure to make child support payments also are areas that have been investigated.

The present study is an attempt to explore the experiences of African-American nonresidential fathers who are an integral part of their children's lives. Indeed, it is time to move beyond a father-absence approach and begin to explore

factors that allow fathers to establish and maintain a healthy relationship and involvement with their offspring. It is hoped that a less problem-oriented and negative description of Black nonresidential fathers will become visible in the scholarly literature and broaden our perspective.

## Purpose

The purpose of this study was to understand and describe how African-American, nonresidential fathers' perceive themselves fathering beyond biological paternity including their roles, responsibilities, functions, and involvement with fatherhood. This study derived from my thesis on African-American single mothers. At the end of each interview, when each woman was asked if she had any other information she would like to share or suggest, invariably participants suggested that I should "talk to men to see what they have to say." I found it a fitting suggestion and quite complementary to my original study to make my dissertation this project.

## Central Research Question

How do African-American men experience being a nonresidential father?

## Topical Subquestions

1. What factors have influenced African-American men's ideas and choices about fatherhood?
2. What challenges are associated with being a nonresidential father?
3. What rewards are associated with being a nonresidential father?

## Theoretical Perspectives

There are a variety of factors that help shape African-American, nonresidential fathers' lives. Therefore, I believe that it is necessary to use at least two theoretical perspectives to help fully explore and explain their experiences. These two perspectives are Symbolic Interactionism and Ecological Theory. I used both frameworks to help guide the investigation and discussion as well as place the findings in their proper context.

### *Symbolic Interactionism*

The basic tenet of symbolic interactionism is that individuals' construct their reality based on individual and shared meanings of symbols. Symbolic interactionism focuses on symbols, shared meanings, and interactions within the larger context of society (Mead, 1934). Fundamental tenets of this framework include the following notions (a) people behave on the basis of the meaning that

symbols have for them, (b) meanings emerge from social interaction, and (c) meaning making is an interpretative process (Blumer, 1969).

The decision to use this framework was two-fold. First, the meaning that is attributed to an experience is derived largely from social experiences. The meaning may be individual or shared, socially or culturally based, and similar or different depending on the individual and his/her interpretation of the interactions within the larger context. Second, many scholarly inquiries seek to observe or rate actual behavior. Because my interest was in the actual behavior and the *meaning* that lies in the shadow of the behavior, this perspective was especially appropriate.

*Ecological Theory*

Various environmental and contextual factors have an impact on cognitive, behavioral, and socioemotional aspects of life. Ecological theory highlights the importance of many of these influences at the individual, historical, social, and political levels. The ecological perspective is particularly applicable to this study because it emphasizes the parenting experience in its contextual environment. This perspective can help explain various external factors that influence human behavior such as individual, interpersonal, and societal barriers to effective and consistent father-child involvement. The court system, particularly in terms of monetary and visitation issues, is one example of

the context of nonresidential fathers. Other factors include having more than one set of children, the nature of the relationship with the mother, and newly formed relationships.

## Definitions

*Nonresidential/Noncustodial Father*

Scholars and the lay audience refer to fathers who are unmarried, not the legal guardian, and do not reside in the same household with the child as nonresidential and/or noncustodial. Therefore, the terms are used synonymously.

*African-American and Black*

The terms African-American and Black are used interchangeably as well. The mixed use of terms is acceptable because of the transitional self-identification era that Blacks are encountering (McAdoo, 1998). Further, many scholars and most of the participants in this study used the latter term as a self-referent.

# CHAPTER 2

# LITERATURE REVIEW

The body of scholarly literature on Black men generally and fathers specifically is at best scanty. As noted earlier, the majority of empirical work that has been conducted has concentrated on a pathological and deficit perspective. I have synthesized bodies of literature that offer a somewhat more balanced picture of the Black nonresidential father.

*Webster's II New Riverside University Dictionary* defines *father* as simply the male parent of a child. Society, however, traditionally has defined fatherhood in particular and manhood in general in terms of provider and protector. Social scientists frequently take both definitions a step further by outlining characteristics of fatherhood. Such attributes have included (a) legal and genetic endowment, (b) provision of food and shelter, (c) protection from harm, (d) caregiving, and (e) contribution to the child's character and personality (Tripp-Reimer & Wilson, 1990). These characteristics describe a *good father* according to the dominant culture. But what does being a father mean to those who are not members of the dominant culture? And specifically, what does it mean to those who do not reside in the same household with their child or children?

## Historical Context of Black Men

African-American history is unique, unlike that of any other immigrant group that has come to the United States. It is simply impossible to discuss current issues regarding African-American fathers without examining the historical context of these men. For this reason, a brief historical overview is provided. Likewise, contemporary demographic trends are discussed.

A vast proportion of all Africans brought to the Caribbean and North America were enslaved. Slaves resided both in the northern and southern regions of the United States. However, enslavement varied to some extent according to geographic location. Landowners in the north often worked alongside slaves in the fields. Conversely, slaves in the south most often worked alone. Black males and females alike performed enslaved work in the fields, frequently under supervision of an overseer/master. (McAdoo, 1998)

Black males were assigned an inferior position relative to White males. Freedom from slavery for the majority of Black males was not obtained until the Emancipation Proclamation. In the times both before and after emancipation, Blacks faced long-term poverty and displacement. (McAdoo, 1998)

New opportunities emerged for Black men after emancipation. Many men separated from their families and kin ties in an effort to capitalize on the possibilities that followed their move from an agrarian South to the industrialized North.

The Civil Rights Era of the 1960s also produced new educational and occupational opportunities. Despite new opportunities, the African Americans made their shift to the workforce at a slower pace than their European American counterparts; this staggered position occurred primarily because there was a relative lack of vocational prerequisites available to them and there were discriminatory hiring and promotion practices that worked against Blacks (Allen & Connor, 1997).

For Black men, the role of protector and provider was limited during the slavery era, the post-Civil War Years, and even during the Civil Rights Era. In fact, they continue to encounter greater challenges than their White counterparts today in terms of their ability to enact these responsibilities because of opportunity differentials.

## Contemporary Demographics

I have summarized some of the contemporary demographics that are relevant to African-American men. These characteristics will help place the results of this study in a larger context.

### *Education and Occupation*

A man's role as a father in the context of the family and society is seen as most closely associated with that of a provider and protector. Unfortunately,

many Black men face huge obstacles to fulfilling those roles today, just as many were unable to fulfill them in the past. Part of the reason that this reality continues to hold true is the historically lower-paying jobs that Black men have access to in the labor market.

Numerous factors determine who gets a job. Educational attainment is one of the most crucial factors in predicting who is in what occupation. The Black-White gap in high school educational attainment has decreased. However, for Black men, there has been little fluctuation in college enrollment, which means a relatively constant 30% of Black male high school graduates enroll in college classes. (Farley, 1996)

Many working class individuals lack access to educational and occupational opportunities, thus they tend to be employed in low-paying positions. The working-class generally are concerned with at best stagnant, if not decreasing, wage earnings; greater employment uncertainty and instability; and fewer job opportunities because the economy has a growing need for individuals with specialized skills (Farley, 1996).

The 1980s in the United States was a time of increase in both low-paying and high-paying jobs. Because of this trend, many unskilled men currently are still employed. The Black-White gap in unemployment was as large in 1995 as it had been in 1970, in spite of a more prosperous economy. Among employed men, non-Hispanic whites work the most, with Asian men in close proximity.

Blacks, foreign-born Hispanics, and American Indians typically spend 6 or 7 fewer hours at work each week (Farley, 1996). Such figures could be interpreted easily as the unwillingness on the part of minority men to invest more hours in the workplace. However, the reality often is that many minority men are not in positions of prestige and power and therefore increased amounts of time at work may be inaccessible to or denied them.

*Marital Statistics*

In 1991, only 44% of African-American adults were married, compared with 64% in 1970 (U.S. Census, 1993). Marriage trends for Black men were as follows: 44.4% had never married, 38.5% were married, 8.3% were divorced, 5.5% had separated from their wives, and 5.3% were widowed (Sudarkasa, 1993).

Many explanations for the decline in marriage rates among African Americans exist. There is some evidence that suggests that African-American women benefit less from marriage than any other group (Steil, 1997). The high rate of maternal employment, even in marriages, is one of the primary reasons that this relational arrangement is perceived to be less beneficial. The alarmingly high unemployment rate and unstable work history of African-American fathers also contribute to the absence of marriage in many families (Steil, 1997). Sex-ratio imbalance (McAdoo, 1998) is yet another explanatory factor. The number of

marriageable Black women simply outweighs the number of marriageable Black men.

## Father Involvement

The primary context in which many think of father involvement is economic support. This is reflected in the stiff penalties assessed for missed child support payments. Father involvement occurs in other ways as well, however. Lamb et al. (1987) conceptualized involvement beyond financial support to include (a) accessibility, namely father contact; (b) engagement, or the roles that fathers play in their children's lives (e.g., nurturing activities, role model, teacher); and (c) responsibility, which includes support and care for children beyond monetary contributions. In an attempt to refine and extend Lamb et al.'s conceptualization, Palkovitz (1997) identified 15 general categories of father involvement. Some of these include thinking about children, planning, teaching, and sharing activities.

## Child Socialization

Families in general, and parents in particular, are the primary socializing agents for their offspring. The socialization process includes the teaching of gender-related, cultural, and in the case of ethnic minorities, racial socialization. Also of primary importance is the instillation of values, morals and guidance. This process can be and in fact usually is implemented by the custodial as well as

the nonresidential parent. Extended family members also help guide this process; this is especially true of ethnic minority families.

*Parenting Style and Discipline*

As aspects of the child socialization process, discipline and parenting style are two components of parenting that are not contingent on whether or not a parent lives in the home. The classic parenting typology contains three types: authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive parenting (Baumrind, 1968). Authoritative parents are warm and nurturing and provide logic and reasoning for their children. Conversely, parents with an authoritarian orientation are harsh and punitive (including being prone to administering physical punishment), and do not encourage a child's "questioning" a parental decision. Finally, permissive parents have a more laissez-faire approach and typically are neither directive nor instructive. Scholars of color question applying such an analytic process (Hill, 1999) and assuming data generalizability beyond the White, middle-class family (Cauce & Gonzales, 1993; Chao, 1994). Indeed, the context of the family, which includes race, ethnicity, and family configuration, can play an important role in both the perceived and actual parenting process.

*Father-Child Relations*

It has been estimated that African-American children have only a 20% chance of growing up with both parents until the age of 16 (Bumpass, 1993). Because of this reality, a majority of African-American children see their fathers less and receive decreased economic, physical, psychological, and emotional support compared to children with two parents in the home. There are several explanations for this decreased level of paternal involvement. In some cases, fathers simply are not interested in involvement. In other cases, however, challenges/barriers inhibit father involvement.

There are various factors that affect father-child involvement. Some fathers simply want no contact postdivorce or once the couple's relationship dissolves. Other fathers, however, want contact with their children but face obstacles at multisystemic levels that deter them from higher levels of involvement. In the next section, such challenges/barrier to father-child interaction are presented and discussed under three major headings (a) individual characteristics of the father and mother; (b) interpersonal relationships, including newly formed relationships with other partners; and (c) institutional structures, primarily the court system. The data provided are illustrative, not comprehensive, and in no way suggest that other obstacles are not equally as relevant.

*Individual Characteristics*

A number of personal characteristics of the mother and father can affect the parenting process. I have highlighted several of the most salient issues in the scholarly literature. These factors are provided for illustrative purposes and in way are a comprehensive list of hindrances to effective parenting.

*Relationship with the mother of children.* The quality of nonresidential fathers' relationship with the mother(s) of their children is very important. One of the most crucial variables that influences fathers' involvement with their children is the nature of the relationship with the mother (Hamer, 1998; Fox & Blanton, 1995). Hamer's (1998) investigation of inhibitors to fathers' involvement with their children revealed that when relationships with their children's mother(s) were viewed as antagonistic (e.g., they felt a strong dislike for the mother, they were feeling used), the fathers' level of involvement with their children was affected. Teen fathers also have reported that a strained relationship with the child's mother is their number one obstacle to visitation (Allen & Doherty, 1996).

*Geographic location/Physical distance.* Within an increasingly mobile society, physical and geographic distance can act as a barrier to fathers spending time with their offspring. If a father and child live in separate cities, counties, or states, the physical distance could very well influence the amount of physical and face-to-face contact that the dyad experiences. If proximity was not an issue,

in some cases fathers would increase contact (Arditti & Keith, 1993; Hamer, 1998; Seltzer et al., 1989). Indeed, economic issues that relate to costs of traveling and calling on the telephone could serve to hinder involvement and contact as well.

*Multiple sets of children.* Births outside of marriage are prevalent in the African-American community. Because this is a reality, it is more likely that Black fathers will have children from more than one relationship. The number of women with whom men have children and live apart from influences their paternal involvement. Fathers are more likely to have contact with their children when multiple siblings reside together (Seltzer & Bianchi, 1988). Fathers report that having more than one set of children makes it difficult for them to see everyone on an equal basis and feelings of guilt can arise when they spend more time with one child than another (Hamer, 1998).

*Interpersonal Relationships*

As mentioned earlier, the dynamics of the interpersonal relationship between the mother and the father can play a major role in the parenting process. This can be especially difficult if and when a new partner becomes involved.

*Problems caused by new relationships.* In many cases, a divorce or breakup is followed by a subsequent relationship for one or both parents. New relationships can present additional obstacles to father involvement. When a father enters into a new relationship or remarries, he may feel less committed to

his children from previous relationships (Lowen, 1988; Seltzer et al., 1988; Teybor & Hoffman, 1987). Even fathers who do not remarry but do cohabitate find it a challenge to balance time between two families. The attitudes and behaviors of both his current partner and the mother of his children can affect his fathering (Hamer, 1998). For example, the current partner may have an issue with the father visiting the child in his/her residence because of the presence of the child's mother. Conversely, the biological mother may have quarrels with the fact that their child is "in another woman's house." These concerns may serve to decrease fathers' involvement with their children (Seltzer & Bianchi, 1988).

*Institutional Structures*

Finally, institutional structures can be a barrier to effective father-child relations. These obstacles can be at the micro or macro level. Two of the most salient hindrances for men are employment/work schedule and access and visitation issues. Therefore, these are discussed in further detail.

*Employment.* Many Black men are working class and lack specialized skills and training (Farley, 1996). Sometimes, they hold two jobs concurrently. Their schedule may involve working evenings, weekends, and rotating shifts. Inflexibility of work schedules appears to cause difficulties for fathers picking up their children and coordinating with children's school or vacation schedules

(Hamer, 1998). These demands limit when, where, and how fathers see their children.

*Access and Visitation Issues.* The access and visitation issues that nonresidential parents face appear to be one of the most pervasive of all barriers to father involvement. Nonresidential parents have argued for many years that the "increasingly aggressive enforcement of child support obligations has not been matched by an equally zealous enforcement of visitation rights" (Pearson & Thoennes, 1997, p. 4). When visitation does occur, access disputes often arise. Issues include but are not limited to (a) difficulties/disagreements with scheduling visitation, (b) difficulties with drop-offs and pick-ups (including fights), and (c) not getting enough time (Pearson & Thoennes, 1997). Levant (1990) hypothesized that "many men call it quits with visitation because they cannot tolerate feeling so powerless in the face of unremitting conflict" (p. 87).

In sum, there are various issues hindering father-child involvement that seem to be related to the father's relationship with the mother (Allen & Doherty, 1996; Hamer, 1998; Pearson & Thoennes, 1997) physical distance (Arditti & Keith, 1993; Hamer, 1998); multiple sets of children (Hamer, 1998; Seltzer & Bianchi, 1988); and access and visitation issues (Levant, 1990; Pearson & Thoennes, 1997). While most of the factors mentioned are barriers confronting fathers, these obstacles inadvertently affect their children and in fact may serve to reduce time and attention, visitation, and amount of economic, physical, psychological, and

emotional support the fathers can and will provide. The historical and contemporary message that society sends is that African-American men in general are not interested or actively involved in parental and familial roles. The real issue may be that these men have had little, if any, encouragement and support to enact full fatherhood and face barriers that limit positive interaction.

# CHAPTER 3

# METHODOLOGY

## Research Perspective

Close examination of the literature suggests that many social scientists continue to employ quantitative methods, even when the ultimate goal is an understanding of perception, definition, and meaning. In an effort to gain rich, detailed insight into participants' lives, I selected a qualitative approach for this study. Qualitative methodologies involve carefully gathering empirical evidence in the form of words, symbols, pictures, tapes, or other sources that generally have not been reduced to survey questions (Maxwell, 1996). Qualitative inquiries take a holistic approach. In-depth and detailed information about interactions, perceptions, understandings, and meanings are vital to rich descriptions of personal experiences. The central tenet of qualitative research is understanding the intrinsic meanings of phenomena. This research method relies largely on interpretation by both the actor/participant and the researcher. Although qualitative research is descriptive in nature, it also addresses the interrelationships that exist between phenomena that a statistical test could not examine in the same manner.

## Tradition of Inquiry

The tradition of inquiry used in the present study was phenomenology. Phenomenology began its history with the German mathematician Edmund Husserl (Creswell, 1998). Philosophical perspectives in general and phenomenological philosophy in particular were the topic that Husserl wrote most extensively about.

Four philosophical tenets undergird a phenomenological perspective (a) revisiting the traditional roles of philosophy, specifically a return to the Greek concept of philosophy as a search for wisdom; (b) philosophy without presuppositions and suspension of all judgments about what is real until established on a more solid basis; (c) intentionality of consciousness in which reality of an object is linked with an individual's consciousness of the object; and (d) refusal of the subject-object dichotomy in that the realness of an object is only perceived within the meaning of the experience of an individual (Stewart & Mickunas, 1990).

This tradition seemed particularly appropriate for this study because I was interested in the individual and collective experiences of nonresidential fathers. Research questions were designed to explore the meaning of the experience for each individual. These questions allowed participants to describe their everyday experiences. Such descriptions fulfilled the ultimate task of phenomenology: a description of the meaning and the essence of lived

experiences for multiple individuals about a concept or phenomenon (Creswell, 1998).

## Research Method/Design

I selected the in-depth, face-to-face, semi-structured interview as the method of data collection. The interview is one of the most powerful methods of qualitative research. For unique descriptive and analytic purposes, no other method of inquiry is more revealing (McCracken, 1996). The researcher's ability to receive firsthand a respondent's viewpoint of a specific phenomenon is by far the most valuable asset of the in-depth interview. It is impossible to understand a phenomenon without directly consulting the individual experiencing it. This method draws on how individuals perceive themselves and their experience in the context of the larger society. The interview embraces diversity and culture, not assuming that everyone reacts similarly to the same situation. Allowing an individual to share his/her narrative has obvious advantages, particularly for participants who are not of the dominant race, culture, or gender. This particular methodology allows the researcher to appreciate the richness and depth of individual and shared meanings that exist within particular contexts and cultures. In this study, the strategy gives voice to phenomena experienced by members of a group who otherwise may have been overlooked. Finally, because the phenomena were not reduced to researcher-constructed variables, the

participants richly and fully described in their own words the experiences and meanings that have contributed to their current reality.

Despite the fact that there is a narrow usage of qualitative methods in the family science field, this approach can be both descriptive and informative. In reviewing the literature, I found it surprising to witness the uneven distribution of quantitative and qualitative research methods employed. The body of empirical knowledge on minority families was equally disheartening in this regard. The present study is an attempt to address some of these gaps in scholarly work.

## Research Instrument

When conducting qualitative research, the researcher is the research instrument. An interview guide was the research tool used. The primary purpose of the guide was to ensure that I covered some of the same content with each participant. The instrument was not a mandatory plan for interviews. However, it did specify general lines of inquiry. The interview guide did not detract from the responses that participants gave. In fact, the emergent design was flexible enough to address new themes or topics that emerged from the responses of participants.

## Methodological Procedures

I have outlined the methodological, sampling, and recruitment procedures used in this study.

*Sampling and Recruitment*

Knowing that it can be particularly difficult to obtain data from men, I recruited a convenience sample. To do this, I employed the snowball sampling technique. Snowball sampling-- also known as network, chain referral, or reputational sampling-- is a method for identifying and sampling or selecting cases in a network. This does not mean that each individual directly knew, interacted with, or was influenced by every other individual in the network. Rather, it refers to the interconnected web of linkages frequently based from one person (Neuman, 1997). I identified the first participant. At the conclusion of the first and each subsequent interview, I asked the participant to "suggest another nonresidential father of your age and background who might be willing to talk with me." Thus, I networked among actual participants in an effort to recruit further participants. This procedure was used until all participants were recruited.

Potential participants were be given a brief description of the project and asked if they would agree to participate. Upon receiving verbal agreement to participate, I scheduled an interview time and location. These places included a local church, the university, and, in two cases, the participants home.

## Sample

The research methodology greatly influenced the sample size. Because my focus was on in-depth data, eight participants were interviewed. Eight respondents are considered sufficient to identify recurrent themes (McCracken, 1996) if the sample if homogeneous. The number was small enough to obtain life narratives, yet large enough to paint a picture of the lives of African-American nonresidential fathers under varying conditions and experiences. The sample was not be chosen to represent a section of the larger world but rather to gain an understanding of what experiences mean to a specific population. The primary purpose of qualitative research is not to determine how many and what kind but instead to gain access into a culture (McCracken, 1996).

This sample was extremely homogeneous. Participants' ages ranged from 26 to 31 years old. All of the men were high school graduates, and, with the exception of two, all had some college with 3 pursuing college degrees at the time of the interview. All were employed full time with annual salaries ranging from $15,000 to $34,000. Five were under a court order to pay child support. Children's ages were between 3 and 8 years. Three of the fathers had more than two children. With the exception of one father, even those with more than one child had only one set that is--the children had the same mother. Only one father had been previously married. Even though the others fathers' martial status was continuously single (never married); all of the fathers had cohabitated with the

children's mother with the exception of one. All fathers reported face-to-face and phone contact with their children, with many of them reported seeing their sons and daughters daily or at least several times per week. As it relates to religion, two participants reported being moderately religious; 4 strong; 1 included a category not on the demographic sheet, which was "radical"; and 1 reported being inactive. All of the men lived in a mid-size Southeastern city. (One criterion for the project was to be unmarried at the time of the study, only 1 had been married and was now divorced).

## Pilot Interviews

I conducted pilot interviews with two men approximately 1 year before this study began. This process gave me the opportunity to clarify objectives and goals, identify leading or ambiguous questions, and establish rapport-building strategies.

## Data Collection

I conducted in-depth, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews. Most interviews lasted between $1^{1/2}$ and 2 hours with one lasting almost 3 hours. The time it took for participants to read and sign the informed consent, complete the demographic sheet, and build rapport are included in the total interview time.

## Data Analysis

The data were approached inductively. Inductive analysis refers to the building of emergent patterns, themes, and categories as they were produced by the data from the interviews. Each interview was tape recorded and transcribed verbatim. After the transcriptions were completed, I read every transcript while simultaneously listening to the taped interview to ensure that the data were accurate. Transcriptions were read again several times thereafter to begin formulating themes. Emergent themes and categories were evident as early as the third interview. Preliminary categories and themes from the interviews were refined and sometimes collapsed to create broader categories of interrelated data.

The data from the interviews are presented thematically. Quotes that describe and offer a better understanding of a particular theme or concept are used to support themes and categories. Blauner (1987) made the distinction between the preservationist and standardized approaches as they relate to using quotes and excerpts as illustration and evidence (Weiss, 1994). The preservationist approach includes things such as participants' hesitancies and non-grammatical constructions and pronunciations. Conversely, the standardized approach "cleans up" the data by eliminating speech distractions and ambiguous statements that may confuse the reader (Blauner, 1987). I used a combination of the two philosophies. I chose to eliminate communication fillers such as "uh" and "you know." However, I did keep some of the language that

highlights the cultural variation in linguistics. For example, I chose to use the original statement "I ain't gonna whoop 'em" rather than "I'm not going to whip them."

## Information Saturation/Redundancy

The formal means of ensuring that I had collected sufficient data was information saturation/redundancy (Weiss, 1994). Because the sample was very homogeneous, I reached recurrent themes by the third interview.

## Standards of Verification

Qualitative researchers rarely have the benefit of formal comparisons, sampling strategies, or statistical manipulations to rule out the effect of certain variables. Therefore, qualitative researchers refer to validity as the correctness or credibility of a description, conclusion, interpretation, or other sort of account (Maxwell, 1996). I used several standards of verification outlined by Creswell (1998). A primary threat to fieldwork is inaccuracy or incomplete data. In an effort to alleviate these problems, each interview was recorded and verbatim transcriptions were created. Next, peer reviews with my doctoral committee chair were held. This method gave me an external check of the project. I then presented rich, thick data in a way that allows the reader to feel like they are in the context that the participants described. These guidelines were used to meet

some of the standards for verification of qualitative research, particularly establishing trustworthiness and credibility.

# CHAPTER 4

# RESULTS

In an effort to give the reader a sense of who each participant is as an individual, I have provided a brief biographical sketch of each father. I sought to capture the uniqueness of each man's life specifically and, at the same time, to define and describe principles that seem to shape Black nonresidential fathers' lives generally. A summary of sociodemographic characteristics of each father is provided in Table 1. Names and other information have been changed to protect each participant's and child's anonymity.

TABLE 1. Characteristics Of Men Interviewed

| Name | Age | Marital Status | Occupation | Number of Children | Age of Children |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Fred | 26 | Single | Computer Operations Supervisor/Student | 2 | 5, 2 |
| KRS | 28 | Single | Office Manager/ Student | 2 | 6, 4 |
| Pete | 27 | Single | Hospital Transporter | 1 | 7 |
| John | 27 | Single | Air Conditioner Tech | 2 | 8, 4 |
| Jason | 29 | Single | Customer Service Representative/Student | 2 | 8, 7 |
| Robert | 29 | Single | Computer Graphic Tech | 1 | 7 |
| Gerald | 31 | Divorced | Counselor | 3 | 3, 2, 1 |
| B B | 28 | Single | Carpet Tech | 3 | 7, 5, $1^{1/2}$ |

## Participants

*Fred*

Fred, a never married 26-year-old father of two daughters was a full-time computer operations supervisor and part-time student seeking a Baccalaureate degree in Organizational Management. Fred's parents divorced during his formative years. Many years later, they were remarried to each other. Some anger and resentment appeared to linger in Fred despite the conciliation of his parents. My assessment is supported by Fred's statement "Now everything's supposed to be o.k. because they're back together, it don't work like that...you can't make up for the time that you were gone."

*KRS*

Adopted by his aunt and uncle due to the untimely death of his mother, 28-year-old KRS, was a former city official candidate and the father of two sons ages 6 and 4. KRS was extremely vocal about his concerns as they relate to nonresidential fatherhood as well as social inequality and injustice. After the dissolution of the two relationships with each of his sons' mothers, the two women became friends. "It was almost like they were trying to team up on me." This "baby mama drama" had kept him from seeing his sons for over 8 months. KRS holds the position of office manager and is pursuing a Bachelor's degree in Environmental Studies.

*Pete*

Pete was the father of a 7-year-old son. His parents divorced when he was very young. In fact, his first recollection of his dad was at age 8. As an athlete, Pete recalled "looking on the side line, seeing my mother and stepfather cheering for me and wondering why my dad wasn't there." Pete vowed that if he ever had kids, he would "do things different." Thus, his experience is somewhat different from most nonresidential fathers. Despite the fact that he does not reside in the household with Jimmy, his daily routine includes drop off and pick up from school, assistance with homework after school with a journey to football practice or a game to follow.

*John*

John a 27-year-old father of two boys was an air conditioner technician. He resided in a townhouse with his girlfriend and recently had agreed to allow his oldest son to live with them because he had been "acting up in class" the previous school year. In fact, the week prior to his interview he had received several phone calls from Terry's teacher and had to make an appointment to go and meet with her. He attributed Terry's difficulties to the "transition to a new home and school."

*Jason*

Twenty-nine-year-old Jason was a full-time customer service representative and part-time student majoring in Finance. He is the father of two sons ages 8 and 7. Jason was the only participant that I interviewed with his children in the home as the interviewed occurred. Even though the boys were very respectful, the atmosphere was very typical of children being around—that is they came and asked questions, made comments, and at one point, were directed by this dad to do their chores.

*Robert*

Robert was a mild-mannered 29-year-old father of one. He had a 2-year Associate's degree and had worked as a computer graphic designer for 3 years. At the time of the interview, he resided with his new girlfriend.

*Gerald*

Gerald was the only previously married father among study participants. He is a 31-year-old counselor and the father three children, two daughters and a son. His mild disposition and poise made it easy to see why his son was described as "laid back like me." He was headed to his youngest daughter's birthday party once we completed the interview.

*B B*

A father of three, 28-year-old B B was a carpet technician. After high school, in an effort to better himself and be close to his pregnant girlfriend, he relocated to the mid-size Southeastern town that he resided in from a small town in a bordering state. B B was the only father to voice concern about the negative home life and living conditions that his children were being reared in.

## Conception, Pregnancy, and The Birth of the Child(ren)

Because my interest was in the entire fatherhood experience, I focused on pre- and postnatal experiences, processes, and behaviors. I asked participants to share how they learned about the pregnancy and to describe what that experience was like. Only one father reported a planned pregnancy. All of the other men "found out" about the pregnancy from the child's mother, with the exception of one who learned from a family member. When asked to describe their thoughts and feelings in that moment, feelings of ambivalence, devastation, and even denial were prevalent. Fred gives an account of his experience that represents his initial reactions and how they were affected by the birth of his daughter.

> *Tia's mother called me. I was 19. I think I was hanging out at McDonald's when she paged me. She said, "I missed my period and I think I'm pregnant." At that age, you're thinking "Yeah right, are you sure?" She said " I think I am." So I went and got her a home pregnancy test at Wal-Mart or Walgreens or*

*somewhere. She took that and it was positive. At 19, you are like "Oh, man, I just can't go through that yet." I was young, just got out of high school. I had an O.K. job, but you don't be thinking about nothing like that at 19. That's an experience that you just can't explain. Childbirth is amazing, just watching it happen. I took her [to the hospital] and I was there until the time that Tia came out. It was 3:43 in the morning. I was right there with her with a video camera. At first I was cool. It didn't really hit me until the first time I held her. I was looking at her, that's when it hit me, man, I'm looking at myself. I've got somebody else to take care of. That's when I had a whole different perspective on life. I was a man then. I got somebody depending on me now, forever.*

KRS recalled his envy for the seemingly immediate attachment and maternal bond that his son's mother had with their child. He described his awareness of how his attachment to his son developed and influenced his feelings of responsibility.

*My first son who is now 6 years old, I found out that he was about to be born after me and the mother had broken up for a few weeks. She came and told me that she was pregnant with my child. My second child, who is now 4, I lived with his mother up until he was about one or two so I knew he was coming. [Childbirth] that experience was memorable. I remember when she got that epidural shot in her back, I about fainted when I saw that. It was a really moving experience just seeing life come into the world, not just watching it on TV, being there and knowing that he was all right, that he was healthy. I saw them cut the umbilical cord. It was something that I've never seen before. It really made a impact on me. I don't know if every male feels this, but for me I didn't feel as attached as I do now. I didn't have that instant attachment to my son. It just grew on me after being around him so much. I kind of envy that for women. They automatically have that attachment. When I didn't have that instant attachment, I didn't feel*

*completely responsible. It was a funny kind of eerie feeling. I guess I wondered if I was going to be able to be around forever even at that point because when she first got pregnant I was going through some things and I was really wanting to leave her. Her thing was you're only leaving because I'm pregnant, but I was like no, I really don't want to be with you, it just so happened that you are pregnant. It was so much that I was going through during that time that it really didn't hit me until later just how important it was and how much of a difference it made in my life how much of a value that children make. At the time, it was kind of like, yeah I've got to take care of it, but it wasn't like I'm going to take care of it because I was attached. It was more like I'm going to take care of him because I'm supposed to.*

Jason described how he "stepped right in" despite the breakup that he and his ex-girlfriend had gone through. He also commented on trying to "distance" himself right about the time that the second pregnancy occurred and the ambivalence of the contrasting feelings of devastation and joy.

*The first time I didn't have a clue that she was pregnant. We had separated or broke up. She told me that she was pregnant. At that point I stepped right in and tried to handle my responsibilities. The second pregnancy, we were actually living together, and I felt that we wasn't getting along. I felt like we wasn't going to be able to work as a couple. I was really trying to distance myself, and she got pregnant. Honestly, I was devastated. At the time, I was feeling screwed, and I didn't think that we needed any more children. I was happy that she was pregnant, but by the same token I was saying to myself am I really going to be with her now or can I just leave her with two kids? I was contemplating a whole lot. Subconsciously, I really knew where we needed to go from there. I was thinking maybe we'll make it, maybe we'll be together. I started to change. I was real young. I was like twenty when I had my first son. At that age, men are still*

*immature to a degree. I really had to do a lot of changing. I didn't never have no steady job. I was working part time. I was like, wow I need to work two jobs now. I have to put school [college] on hold. So that's why I had to get me another job. We moved and got put out of there and moved again. It was growing time for sure.*

~ Jason's labor and delivery experience ~

*I was in there both times. My oldest son was premature. We actually had to leave him at the hospital. That was real hard. He was like 3 lbs. We didn't know if he was going to make it or not. We had to leave him there on Christmas. I worked at the hospital. Everyday at work I was thinking my son is upstairs, and I'm not sure if he's going to live or die. It was real hard. The second time around it was real cool. I was in there as well. I was into it. I didn't really know [the gender of the child] 'cause the doctor couldn't tell if it was going to be a boy or a girl. When they said it was a boy, it was like a relief. Even though I wanted a daughter, I knew that having a son would be a little easier because we already had another son. It was a joy, a joy that I can't even really explain.*

John described his initial denial but assurance and acceptance once he saw the baby.

*My first one, my family told me, and I kind of like denied it. I was kind of scared, young. I denied it, like I said, over and over again until she brought him home and he looked just like me. I guess I had to fess up to that one. My second child, she told me about that one. I was a little bit mad, I was a little bit happy. With my second one, Tyler, I went to the hospital with him and saw him get delivered. I didn't do that with Billy, my first son. It's the first time that I seen it live. It was alright, Super Bowl Sunday. It worked out pretty good.*

Gerald, the only father previously married, was not present when his children were born. However, he described his feeling of knowing about conception as well as labor and delivery.

> *I've known before my partner has known. I always have. When I go to her, she looks at me kinda' strange like this is the furthest thing from my mind. Lo and behold, bam my ex-wife at the time would be pregnant. It's kinda weird that I just knew. I can't put no explanation to it except I just knew. [At the time of delivery] we had a severed relationship. I was going about my normal day, and all of a sudden I became deathly ill. It's very odd that I get sick. I looked down at my pager. It was 8:12 in the morning. I pulled over, called around to all the hospitals. I finally messed around and found the hospital where she was, and my wife had delivered at 8:12. That's just kinda weird. [The second and third pregnancies] again, I just knew. All of a sudden late that night I knew. I gotta connection too, from conception to the birth, we're intertwined from end to end.*

Robert explained how he learned of the pregnancy during a dispute with his ex-girlfriend.

> *[I found out about the pregnancy] from the mother. It was during a dispute that I found out. We had been together probably three years when it occurred. That particular day, I know where my feelings were at, pretty much at a stand still. So we were arguing, very typical young couple argument. She was being smart when she told me. When she said it, she was threatening. "Since we ain't gonna be together and I'm pregnant, then I guess it's up to me what I do with this?" I was like do with what? She said, whether I keep it or if I don't. Since we're gonna be apart, you ain't gotta feed it. My initial reaction was, whatever you want. Then I said that I'm gonna have to rethink my decision, marriage or break-up.*

*The delivery was incredible. I think that every man should witness that. It was feelings of joy.*

BB shared his suspicion of being "trapped" into fatherhood while still a senior in high school.

*In high school I was the kind of guy that I might go with you for a couple of days so I don't know if she was trying to get pregnant or not. The first time she was faking, dipping the pregnancy test in the water trying to fool me. Then she took a test and really was pregnant. I was scared. We was still in high school. I was somewhat like the black sheep in the family. I was rebellious so I was scared to tell my family because they don't believe in shacking. My mother had lupus. She passed with lupus. After I finally did tell her, she was happy because she wanted a chance to see a grandbaby. After that, I was happy because my mom said it was o.k. To make her happy was enough for me. She got to see my daughter, but she didn't get to see my son. The second pregnancy is when I moved here. She moved down here first. Her dad got a better life down here. She didn't wanna leave me so I came on down with her. I stayed with them for about a year until we got our own place. Then we moved, and the second pregnancy came along. It wasn't planned. I was in and out of town. I had moved to another state for a minute, about eight months, and when I came back she was pregnant. People was like the baby probably ain't even yours so I had mixed feelings about that. Even if I was to find out [that I'm not the father], I'm the only father that he know so he my son. It's kinda touchy, but it's true. I got a little boy, that's the bottom line.*

~ The labor and delivery experience ~

*It was amazing. She had to have an emergency C-section because the baby's heart rate was dropping. They were like get out, get out now. Then they let me come back in. It kinda bugged me out, I was watching them cut her and seeing somebody's insides. I was like wooo!! They bought her out, I cut the cord. I was*

*so glowed up I don't even know who was with me. Then I named her on my own. I heard them call some nurse's name on the intercom, Nurse Melissa, come to the such and such. That's what I named her, and my ex was like how you gonna name the baby without me? With my little boy, it was a natural birth. It bugged me out completely. It was wild to watch. It's kinda like a UT-Florida football game, all the hype, then it finally happened! It was nice though. Ain't nothing like that feeling when your child is first born. The doctor just cut the cord and be out 'cause they so used to doing it. I'm running down the hall with cigars and stuff, chasing him like man you just made me the happiest man on the planet.*

Pete, the only father whose pregnancy was planned, shared his experience while in the labor and delivery room.

*Our pregnancy was planned. It wasn't nothing that just popped up. You plan to have a son or daughter, and it happens. It was great because she had a Caesarean. They cut her stomach open, and he had flipped around in there and started using the bathroom so they had to hurry up and get him out. It was gross. It was nasty. It was an experience though. I would rather see a natural birth.*

It was not until the past of couple decades that fathers were allowed to accompany their partners into the labor and delivery room. These fathers took full advantage of the opportunity to begin the bonding and relationship-building process by witnessing and participating in birth of their children.

Despite initial feelings of ambivalence, devastation, confusion, and paternity concerns, these men were able to establish and cement a concrete bond with their children. It is noteworthy to mention that only one of the fathers reported a planned pregnancy. In fact, most of the men and their ex-girlfriends

were broken up, separated, or having some really rocky times when they learned of the pregnancy. Contrary to what the media and others may suggest, one can witness first-hand their struggle in the decision-making process to "hang in there and make it work." All too often, the perception is that if the couple is unmarried, the man simply vanishes. This is the reality for some. However, for this sample and probably countless other men, this was not the case.

## Factors that Influenced Perceptions, Ideas, and Choices Related to Fatherhood

Whether directly or indirectly, positively or negatively, fathers impact a male's perception of manhood in general and fatherhood in particular. The single most influential factor that affected the participants' ideas, choices, and perceptions of fatherhood was their own father. Interestingly, their fathers were not an integral part of their lives, yet this encouraged them to "do something different." Gerald, Fred, and Robert respectively described their desire to stop the generational cycle of absent fathers.

~ Gerald, thirty-one, divorced father of three ~

*My lack of having a father is the number one influence that has shaped me into being a hands-on father. I'm 31 years old and my father wasn't around until my mid to late 20s. Because he wasn't there, it shaped my attitude and outlook. My greatest motivation is to not drop the ball, to pick it up and to break certain cycles that will perpetuate and continue until someone makes it stop.*

~ Fred, father of two daughters ~

*His dad wasn't there for him so I can kind of understand why he was never there for me. He was never taught. It was passed down from generation [to generation]. I kind of understand now, but I didn't then. My dad is a good person and has a good heart. He does provide. He's just got certain hurts from the past that he probably hasn't given up or has suppressed so far, but it's there and really gets to him. I just don't see how a man wouldn't want to see his children or wouldn't want to spend time with his kids. I just don't understand that. I don't want to have that with my kids. From the time that they were born until however many years God will give them, I never want them to say, well my daddy was never there or he was there part of the time or I only saw my daddy when I got to high school. I want them to know that my daddy has been there since I was born as far back as they can remember.*

~ Robert, Computer Graphics Technician ~

*I think that it starts with that individual. It's really a cycle. At some point, a man say I'm gonna break that cycle. I don't know anything about my father. I don't know if his father was in his life, but usually, it's a pattern that goes on. I said I'm gonna break the cycle.*

Implying breaking the cycle rather than stating it overtly, Pete, Jason, and John expressed their desire to father differently than their own fathers.

*What influenced me was not having a father and knowing how it feels not to have your biological father there. I guess it's stuck to me because that's all I've thought about, if I ever had a kid, I would do the best things that I can to be there for them. What stands out most is when I would look on the sideline when I was playing ball and see my mom cheering, my step dad cheering, but my dad wasn't never there. When he did come around, he wanted to holler "My son this and my son that" and he hasn't even been a father to me to say his son. That really hurt a*

*whole lot. That's about the only thing that really influenced me to be off into it like that [very involved] because I knew the situation that I was in.* (Pete)

*It got to the point where my mother took him [my father] to Juvenile Court and he had to come and get me every other weekend from Friday to Sunday. When I was in high school I don't think I ever went over there except every other weekend. He gave me that choice if I wanted to come I could come and if I didn't, I didn't. It had been like a two-year span where I didn't even speak to him. When I had my first son, I didn't take him over until he was like 8 months. I just wanted to be the opposite of that. I try to be with my sons more. I don't want my sons to grow up to be like me. I want them to have a stronger back than me and my father had. Maybe, he can be better than I am.* (John)

*Since he [my father] wasn't around, it makes me want to be that much more of a father to them.* (Jason)

Uncles, step dads, and mentors had been an influential part of these participants' lives, however there was simply no replacement for their biological fathers and the desire for their presence. Gerald stated this point eloquently "I went to father-son banquets with my uncle-- nothing wrong with my uncle but there's no substitute for your father. "

Father's education and income are two good indicators of involvement (Arditti & Bickley, 1996; Coley & Chase, 1999). Those with more education and higher incomes tend to be more involved and those in the lower echelon tend to be less active. It is noteworthy to mention that these participants' fathers were neither educationally nor economically challenged. In fact, one father held a

medical degree and was a practicing physician, and several others were serving in the military. The question then becomes what is the reason that ties with the child were severed once the marriage or relationship with the mother ended? Another question of great importance is what influenced these fathers to "re-write" rather than repeat the script that had played out in their own childhoods? I believe that these men had faced the agonizing hurt and pain related to their biological fathers' absence and were determined to play a consistent and active role in their children's lives. They verbalized with ease, simplicity, and clarity various hypotheses that may help explain their fathers' absence. Many individuals who have not confronted their painful past and unresolved issues in their families of origin remain trapped in a stagnant and, in some cases, regressed position.

## Child Socialization

Parenting practices of these men were reflective of many fathers. A typical day included preparing breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Chores were a part of the daily routine. Activities and outings were part of the agenda. Finally, helping the child or children with homework, class assignments and projects also were frequently mentioned.

Even though these fathers are not living in the child's home, they were quite aware of their role and responsibility in the child socialization process.

They shared with ease the various ways that they prepared their children to have morals and values and demonstrate good citizenship.

*Modeling, Teaching/Guidance*

Participants were very aware of their significant position as role models and teachers. Because this awareness was frequently interwoven with the importance of instilling morals and values/providing social guidance, I have made a distinction between the two for the purpose of highlighting direct modeling/imitation and the subtle, yet pertinent ways that values and morals are addressed. Pete and Robert explained the importance of being a good role model because their sons' "look at" everything they do.

> *He looks at everything that I do because he is around me most of the time. I am the father figure. He's a boy and he wants to do man things. I've got a lot to do with how he is growing up. I try to keep it on a straight path, try to keep everything clean cut in front of him and let him know the bad things not to do.* (Pete)

~ Twenty-nine-year-old Robert, father of one ~

> *I tend to think that kids look for something to be proud of themselves at. As far as my son, you ask him what he wants to be when he grows up, he says everything that I'm doing. "I want to be a rapper." I rap in church. He says, I want to be basically everything that he sees me doing. He hasn't actually thought about his likes. If I wasn't in his life, then maybe whatever man would be in his mother's life, he might want to be that. They look for something to grab. I don't try to pressure him or push him either way. I wanted him to play football this year, but*

*he didn't want to so I didn't put pressure on him. If I told him that I played, then it probably wouldn't be a problem. Whatever he do, I want him to do for him.*

BB was very aware of the significance of adult influence. He stated, "What my kids see at home [is not good]. It's a bad environment. You got people coming in and out. There are no role models." He thought that such a context in their mother's home heightened the need for him to be a positive role model.

Social learning theory emphasizes imitation/modeling as the primary basis for learning behaviors, both appropriate and inappropriate. It is frequently referred to as observational learning because an individual may exhibit a particular behavior after witnessing, retaining, and later producing it. These children had discovered behaviors that were acceptable and pleasing and in fact displayed positive and appropriate behaviors. It is noteworthy to highlight the fact that these participants could have imitated the same inappropriate behaviors that their fathers had modeled (absenteeism). However, they chose to re-write the script and exhibit more socially acceptable behaviors. Perhaps their desire to be a positive role model for their children was motivated by their realization of the inadequacies of their fathers as role models for them.

*Instilling Values/Morals*

Gerald and BB shared their view on the importance and instillation of values and morals.

*My son, he thinks his daddy can do anything. He doesn't realize that daddy is as frail as anyone else. With that and knowing that, I try consciously and subconsciously to be there. I try not to drop the ball. With my son, I'm like, I'd rather discipline you now than some corrections guard or some judge to have to discipline you and give you a 20 year time out. If I wasn't around, they would miss a lot. Their mother is so overwhelmed she can't get them to church so I take them with me. They put on a concert 'hallelujah, amen', that's a good influence. That seed is being planted early.* (Gerald)

*[In the past] when they'd come over, I'd try to have something fun to do- - go to the park or bowling. Now, I have 'em doing chores... raking leaves, cleaning the car. They're so spoiled at home. Over there at their mom's they got it made. I'm trying to teach them morals, but at the same time, if I don't get no help, it's hard. I'm trying to teach them to say yes sir and no sir. At home they just say yeah and no, so it's hard.* (B B)

Teaching a child right from wrong, good from bad, justice from injustice is a major parental responsibility. It is during the stages of human development in early and middle childhood that one begins to engage in moral reasoning. These fathers were committed to the overall socialization process by modeling appropriate behaviors, instilling morals and values, guiding their kids in the "right" direction, and helping to develop and mature their personality and character.

*Discipline*

Discipline is a critical component in the socialization process. Children are given guidelines and boundaries, and when they are violated, consequences follow. Fathers were asked how they handled discipline. The most common strategies employed were logic and reasoning, loss of privileges, a combination of the two, and occasional spankings. John, Gerald, and BB explained the ways that logic and reasoning coupled with loss of privileges were effective.

> *I ain't going to try to whoop 'em or anything. Go to your room. No TV. No outside. I talk to 'em and let 'em know what's right and wrong.* (John)

> *I found that talking to 'em works better than anything. They do get occasional spankings.* (B B)

> *Me and my ex-wife work together. I still handle all of the disciplinarian roles although I don't live in the household. Timeout is very effective. The ability to take certain toys away or gifts,...deny them certain pleasures that they're seeking. My job as a disciplinarian, as a father, is to be able to chastise them and to get them back into the parameters of being a child. Spanking is the last resort.* (Gerald)

Another approached mentioned was "the look" (of intimidation). Fred explained the look of intimidation as follows: "I don't even have to whoop him. I can just look at him." Gerald also spoke of the look: "With my girl, just to give her a stern look can snap that back [inappropriate behavior] into reality."

Even when a parent is enforcing limits, relationship-building is occurring. Many parents communicate to their children expectations, guidelines, and behaviors that must be followed and explain the consequences that will follow should inappropriate behavior occur. Contrary to the widely held notion that African-American parents tend to be more strict and authoritarian in nature, these fathers were warm and nurturing and communicated with their children about the discipline process.

*The Role of Gender in Parenting and Discipline*

Participants in this study were very cognizant of the sharp gender differences that exist between males and females even in early and middle childhood. Sons were held more accountable and were expected to "be tough," explore, and get prepared for the real world, whereas daughters were more protected and were treated like a "little lady." Those fathers who did not have daughters were asked to speculate on if and how they would parent and discipline a female differently. Their responses are reflected below.

> *There is a difference, but I got love for my girls and my boys. I'm tougher on my boys cause they hard-headed. With her, I'll take her on a date, buy her roses.* (B B)

Pete and John explained that boys should navigate through life roaming freely to see what's out there. Conversely, a shield of protectiveness should be provided for girls.

> *A man can't really tell a woman a whole lot about woman things, you need a woman for that. You can sort of teach them from what you hear or talking to a woman. Some things you can't teach 'cause they would rather hear it from a woman's perspective. I have a niece [my brother's little girl]. I help take care of her a little bit and try to show her the right way and what's she's doing wrong. I think you need to be a little more protective with women and little girls because there is a whole lot going on and women can be easily enticed into anything. So you've got to be a little more protective. You gotta let a man sort of roam and let him find his own destiny. Let him figure out how to take care of things on his own.* (Pete)

> *If I had a girl, I would be worried and shaken up. I want my son to grow up and learn the streets, learn the school and books. I would want my daughter to be strictly in school, headed for college. I don't want her to be out in no streets. I feel men need a certain amount of street smarts for the simple fact that men are rough. I think that I would be more protective of a daughter.* (John)

~ Robert sums it up ~

> *You tend to raise boys and girls differently. From birth to 7 it's the same. Once they get around 7, you start raising them into their roles. Boys can be active in little league sports, you teach them about sportsmanship. You teach them so-called man things: Be tough, don't cry. With a girl you teach her how to be a little lady. Those sex factors determine how you raise them. I wanted a king and queen. I wanted a boy first so he could be a big brother to look out for his sister.*

## Social, Emotional, and Cognitive Development

Participants were asked how they thought their children were developing in the context of growing up in a single-parent household. All of the men responded "average or above average." When asked to explain how they assessed social, emotional, and cognitive development, various responses were shared. Pete shared his assessment.

> *He's an average kid. He does well in school. He's very outgoing. He loves to have fun, joke around. He has a good sense of humor. If you got a good sense of humor, everybody's going to love you.*

Interviewer: "When he's got something on his mind, can he come talk to you?"

> *He'll come and talk to you and tell you what's going on and ask you questions and why is this happening, why is that happening? He asks questions. If he has something on his mind, he ask you.*

John, Robert, and BB referred to the educational/academic successes as their measure of growth and development.

> *I think he's average to above average because he is smart. He follows directions regarding his homework. He reads the directions and he'll figure out how to do it. If he needs some help, I'll give it to him.* (John)

> *The teacher says that he is one of the favorites and that he tends to be a leader.* (Robert)

*She's doing good. She made the honor roll so I took her out on a date. I took her to Baskin Robbins and let her get a great big banana split.* (B B)

~ Gerald, father of three ~

*My kids are very bright and that's not just saying that because they're mine. My son's teacher has said that he's above average. My oldest daughter is a diva. She has princess-like qualities. She carries herself that way. No one's teaching her these qualities. She's very animated. Some of the faces that she makes, it's like "You should be in movies, girl." Because she is the middle child, I think she looks for extra attention. She has the quickest fuse. I consciously try to make sure that she gets what she needs.*

I believe that several factors contributed to such positive views of their children's development. These include but are not limited to (a) the lack of behavioral problems in school, (b) good peer relations, (c) age-appropriate academic development, and (d) appropriate family interaction. One sees signs of conduct disorder and other defiant behaviors very early in an individuals' life; for these children, no such warnings existed.

Psychological, cognitive, and emotional development during early and middle childhood can be a good indicator of an individual's general course of life. Even though there is no way to truly know the outcomes of these children without conducting a longitudinal follow-up study, it is reasonable to speculate that they will continue to do well with consistent and positive father-child (and mother-child) interaction, support, and guidance.

## Challenges and Rewards Associated with Being the Nonresidential Parent

### *Challenges*

Even though these fathers have established a solid bond with their children, they are still faced with challenges. I asked participants to elaborate on challenges as well as rewards associated with not being in the home. The most notable response was the absence of day-to-day contact and interaction. Money issues and the children's negative home-life with their mothers also were reported. Gerald, Jason, Pete, and Robert described the lack of face-to-face contact as the greatest challenge.

> *The biggest challenge is lack of direct daily contact. If something goes on, it might take me some time to get over there and deescalate, if it can be deescalated.* (Gerald)

> *The biggest challenge is not having that one-on-one relationship with them everyday.* (Jason)

~ Robert, Computer Graphic Technician ~

> *Everyday situations that might occur that I could be there for is the biggest challenge. I talk to him everyday, but he'll call me sometime and be like, I can't get this toy to work. That is something that most sons look for the father's to do. I would say, did you ask your mother? He'd be like no. It didn't dawn on him to go ask his mother. I would love to raise him in the same household. I didn't have that.*

*First my biggest challenge was not waking up to see him, really being a family, but I've learned to live without that family. We were a family for 7 years, and we [me and my ex-girlfriend] were together 12 years. Those 7 years you get close. This is your baby's momma, your son, but you know life goes on. I learned to deal with it now. I just leave it in the hands of the Lord and ride with it.* (Pete)

Fred discussed his issue with his child support payments and what the money is being spent on.

*The biggest situation is the money. You always wonder what is she doing with that money? What is she doing with that $200 every two weeks that she's getting from me for the kids? And then she calls and says such and such needs some diapers, or such and such needs a pair of shoes, the first thing a man thinks is I'm paying you child support, so what are you doing with the money? I think that's the biggest thing. After awhile, I saw that child support alone sometimes don't get it. Sometimes, you have to go that extra effort. I pay child support, but I still issue out money outside of that for things like shoes, clothes, and sometimes pull-ups.*

John shared the way that his youngest son pushes limits. He attributed this to his never having lived in the same home with the child.

*My oldest son, he stayed with me, and we were all in the same home for about 4 years, therefore, he had respect for me. Right now, my youngest son has respect for me but I have never stayed in the same household with him. So he'll try you just a little bit. Then I have my oldest, so he go tell him you better not do that. The biggest challenge is, I guess, just respect. You know, he respects me and everything, but he is with his mother all the time. I don't know what she says about me.*

KRS described his powerlessness as it relates to the mother as a gatekeeper and his inaccessibility to his children as the biggest challenge.

> *I think that the greatest challenge is you don't have that control that you won't. The control that I really want over my kids, I can't have. You feel powerless in a way. Whatever I think I can have, it always gets interjected by, well, what is it that their mom have to say about it? They can do anything without a question of what I've got to say about it.*

As stated earlier, even though these fathers are highly involved, they still are faced with challenges. The obstacles however, do not, keep them from maintaining involvement with their children. The most frequently reported challenge was lack of daily contact.

*Rewards*

The overwhelming response to the question of rewarding experiences associated with not living in the same household with the children was,"There are none." The fathers however, did share with ease the rewards of being a father despite their nonresidential status. Fred and KRS described similar experiences with the feelings that they receive knowing that their children "know" them.

> *The court always sides with the mother unless you can prove the mother is unfit or unless she signs over custody. So by the court and by the law there are no rewards. The only reward that I feel is knowing that my kids know who their daddy is. Knowing that when I come over to their house to pick them up, they*

*run to me saying, "Daddy, daddy, daddy, daddy." They run to me. Ain't none of this, "I don't want to go with my daddy" or "Do I have to go?" They run and pull on my arm, "Let's go, I'm ready to go." That's the biggest reward .* (Fred)

*There are some rewards when you do get to see your sons, knowing that your children know that you're their father. They know about you. They know your name. They know where you live. Seeing them grow.* (KRS)

Robert shared his newfound intimate time that he shares with his son now that he's not in the home.

*One reward is that it taught me to cherish the time that I have with him. I can remember when we did live together, a typical day would be come home, go in and spend 5-10 minutes with him, and then go on about my day. Once I stopped living with him, when I first went to get him every other weekend, I cherished it. I made sure that I incorporated having fun or something constructive. Now I appreciate the time that I have with him. It's easy to take it for granted when you see somebody everyday.*

~ Jason, father of two and Gerald, father of three, sum it up ~

*I don't see any rewards. I can't be content with them not around me.* (Jason)

*A selfish parent would say yes there are rewards, with the kids here all the time that get on my nerves. But me, I'd rather have that than not having them everyday. It's kinda difficult when you love somebody and their not there.* (Gerald)

## What Creates Obstacles for Fathers

Access and visitation issues (Levant, 1990; Pearson & Thoennes, 1997), physical distance (Arditti & Keith, 1993; Hamer, 1998; Seltzer et al., 1989), and multiple sets of children (Hamer, 1998; Seltzer & Bianchi, 1988) have been found to be deterrents to paternal involvement. For this sample, these issues were not cited as problem areas. However, for some, the relationship with the child(ren)'s mother had been a major obstacle in the past. Hamer's (1998) investigation of hindrances to fathers' involvement with their children showed that relationships with their children's mother(s) viewed as antagonistic (e.g., a strong dislike for the mother, feeling used by the mother) affected the fathers' level of involvement with their children.

### *Nature of Relationship with the Mother*

Robert explained how the very thought of hearing his ex-girlfriend's voice would deter him from calling his son.

> *In the past, the things that did keep me away from him was the relationship with me and his mother. I don't know why but every now and then it still goes back to I don't want to deal with his mother. As he gets older, those things change. But when the child is young, even the phone calls, he ain't gonna answer the phone. I didn't want to see her. I didn't want to hear her voice. That kept me from calling, which means I couldn't talk to him. If I wanted to see him, I had to see her. In the past, that kept me from him.*

KRS shared his experience with feeling used and like an idiot when it comes to dealing with the mother of his children.

> *It was so disturbing for me to have to just visit my son. At first I couldn't pick him up. I couldn't take him nowhere, I could just go visit him. She would be wanting this or wanting that, or she would want pampers, and 9 times out of 10, I would deliver it to him that wasn't an issue. It made me feel like an idiot, you know what I mean? It was like a piece of somebody that you're being held responsible for, but you don't get to reap the rewards. You don't get to share in none of the rewards or get any other rewards in terms of being able to see your son everyday and being able to mold him and being able to shape him, being able to instill in him what you feel is right. It's hit by the bottom line, "I'm the momma, I take care of everything, I know what's right for him, you don't, you just do this, this, this, this, this, then you'll be o.k. You can come and get him, and then you can't come and get him, you can see him and you can't see him." Eventually, I had kind of given up.*

Fred explained his theory on why the mother of his children attempts to "play mind games."

> *We've had times where she'll say I'm a good dad, and the next day she might say I'm a part-time father. I look at that as saying she's angry, she's hurt. I understand that women are more emotional than men, and I know that she probably wants me to marry her and for us to be a family, but I've gone through that where we could have gotten married. I was ready to get married and do the right thing, but she was still wanting to party and club, and I was like "No, it can't be like that." Now she's ready and God's done took me up on a higher level, and we are just totally opposite. She ain't never really caused a problem, like try to key my car up, make prank calls, try to key the other female's cars. She's never*

*done nothing like that. She'll try to do stuff out of spite to get back at me through other ways. She tries to play mind games with me.*

Despite the fact that these fathers have not always had amicable relationships with their former partners, they had stood firm in the face of adversity to ensure that they remained an active part of their kids' lives. They have done this by establishing and securing a paternal bond, being actively involved in parenting, discipline, and extra-curricular activities even when the relationship with their former partners were problematic.

*New Relationships*

The formation of new relationships also can create barriers. Twenty-eight-year-old KRS explained his experience with this issue and how he would "let go" to avoid dealing with his children's mothers.

*If I had them and their momma called and wanted speak to the kids, then I'd have a little drama with my girl. Then say if my girl answer the phone they get into some drama, then the baby's momma want to all of sudden say bring them home. It got to the point where my second baby's momma accused my girl of hitting my son in the stomach, which was a lie. She was just trying to make up a fabrication to always put me in a either/or situation. It's either your girl or your son. From the first child to the second child to the other girlfriend, I've always tried not to play too much into that. Then they look at that as he don't care from both ways. I don't play in it. I put it out as soon as it start trying to surface either in terms of staying away, not answering the phone, or trying different ways to deal with it. It got to the point where my second baby's momma was close to my first baby's*

*momma, so not only did it impact the relationship with my second son, but I couldn't see my first son for about 6 months. During that time, me and my girlfriend separated for a minute. I am in so much disarray and so much pain for not being able to see my youngest son, I ended up messing back with his momma, and that wasn't even what I wanted to do. Knowing that deep down inside that was not supposed to happen. I was just able to be around my son. The issues were when I became involved with another female. It was kind of like, oh, you can be with that female, but you can't be with your son, blah, blah, blah. Or you can come and see him, he just can't go nowhere with you as long as she is around. He likes her, but she [the mother] had been instigating him every since then, hate her, hate her, she been trying to get him to hate her. She's been trying to get him to hate me for liking her. One time, she was on the phone just last month, 'Tell your daddy that you don't want him to ever want to come and get you no more or ever see you no more!' So they put that on there. So in order to try not to fall into any of their traps, any of their devious little plots, I would just let go.*

B B described the issues that can surface from new relationships from both the mother's and father's perspective.

*When me and my ex broke up, she went on and I went on. Once I was with my new girl, I had to through all the White girl this and White girl that. It was sparks when we first hooked up. In the beginning, it was some issues with the children being around her and eventually she [the children's mother] had to deal with it. I didn't want my kids around the dudes that she was with either.*

~ Gerald, divorced father of three ~

*Initially, when I began dating, it was an issue. I recall a time where I had gone to pick up the kids for church, and the young lady that I was dating was in the car.*

*Their mother didn't appreciate her being in the car, so she said they couldn't go. And they didn't go.*

Finding resolve with seemingly unresolved issues from past relationships can be especially difficult when children are involved. Even though these men were moving forward in their lives, setbacks would sometimes occur, and thus the father-child relationship would be affected. Despite these obstacles, participants emphasized remaining true to the commitment to their children.

## "Daddy is for Daddy, There's Only One"

A theme that emerged from the data was the notion of "Daddy is for daddy, there's only one." In the first as well as second interview, this idea of having "only one father" was apparent. Therefore, I included a question about this subject in subsequent interviews. KRS shared his thoughts on this topic, "The only thing that I resented from my second baby momma, besides her trying to jump on my momma, is that she told me that my son had a 'new' daddy."

~ Fred, father of two ~

*From a man's point of view, the first thing you think about when you're not with the mother or she has her own place is what other guy is in there with her? Or what other guy is she exposing my kids to? Or will my kids being calling this other guy daddy? Or will the kids think this other guy is my real daddy? Don't be having them call him daddy! It's always conflicts with that. I used to wrestle with that all the time.*

~ Twenty-nine-year-old Robert ~

*Daddy is for daddy. I'm not with that [letting my son call someone else daddy]. I know that my situation, his mother have a live in boyfriend. They are not married, but I get on him because he calls him by his first name. I try to teach him always to put a title in front of somebody's name. I don't think that I would be comfortable with him calling him daddy just for the fact that I don't feel like his daddy is absent. In a situation where the child's father is absent and somebody stepping into their role, then even though I feel like that term is just for biological fathers, if somebody else is taking upon that role, then I guess that's cool.*

Pete and Gerald explained how the mothers should make sure that this never becomes an issue.

*If he got a daddy and he know who his daddy is, then he shouldn't call that other man daddy. I think that's stepping over boundaries because I think that he [the other man] would feel the same way if he had a kid somewhere else. He wouldn't want his kid calling nobody else daddy, and he knows his daddy. I think that the mother or whoever is there should correct them because that's not their daddy. I could understand if their daddy has passed away and she remarried and they did the adoptive thing.* (Pete)

*I don't ever see that being a problem because I stay hands on. If another man step into that situation, it is the mother's responsibility to make sure that the biological father is not denied. She's the real go between. She's the bumper between the two men. She the different shocks on the different sides, so that person has to be the buffer in between. She has to explain to the kids, "Even though this person has come into our life, he's not your biological father." But as a father, you can't deny that individual. Me personally, I would have problems with that [calling someone else daddy]. That's a dagger, that's an emotional dagger to hear that come from your child.* (Gerald)

For these participants, being known as and called daddy was a very important aspect of their lives. Many of the fathers discussed displaying consistent and nurturing parenting to ensure that their role and identity as father would be clear in their children's lives. The only time that these fathers felt that it was appropriate to call another man daddy was if the biological father was uninvolved or absent or if his mother remarried and her husband adopted the children.

My overall perception of the participants was very positive. Even though these fathers were not teen fathers in the sense that we normally think about (early and middle adolescence), several were 19 and in their early 20s when the pregnancy occurred. This placed them in a truncated position because of their developmental, financial, and educational status. Despite these issues and even though most of them were unexpectedly thrust into the role of being a father, they have handled the responsibilities of fatherhood with pride and dignity. Additionally, they have continued to prosper economically, aspiring to be at the higher echelon of the socioeconomic hierarchy by pursuing college educations and going into professional fields that require highly technical skills. Finally, their positive self-perceptions of being men and fathers added credibility and power to the influence that fathers can have on their children's lives. Their desire to re-write the script of fatherhood gives hope for the millions of men who

are fathers and do not know how to enact those roles and for the children who may be longing for their dads.

# CHAPTER 5

# DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATONS

Results from this study challenge the deficit model frequently used to describe Black families generally and fathers specifically. There are several conclusions frequently found in the literature and popular press that these data contradict. First, the negative connotations associated with the deficit model that imply that most Black men abandon their children and or have little if any contact is refuted. Second, the assumption that African-American men do not place a high value on fatherhood or family in the ways that their cohorts in other ethnic minority groups do is rejected. Data suggested that there are African-American nonresidential fathers who are in fact interested and involved in their children's lives. This father involvement was evident in more ways than just monetary support. These men exemplified components of fatherhood involvement outlined by Lamb et al. (1987) such as being a role model and teacher. They also planned and shared activities and did cognitive fathering work such as thinking about their children frequently (Palkovitz, 1997).

Many nonresidential fathers ignore their court-ordered child support and visitation arrangements. The fathers who were interviewed in the present study were adamant about being a positive and active personal, emotional, and economic resource in their children's lives. They were actively involved in the

child socialization process, fostering a loving and warm environment undergirded by parental and moral guidance. Bright and Christopher's (1996) investigation on child rearing and education in urban environments also found that Black fathers' paternal beliefs and approaches were warm and nurturing as opposed to the stereotypically described distant and authoritarian parenting.

According to the United States Census (1993), 44% of African-American adults were married. Most of the participants' fathers had been married to their mothers at some point during their formative years. However, once the marital bond had been severed, the father's connection to their children was cut as well. With the exception of one participant, the fathers in this study had never committed to the mothers of their children through marriage, yet they were committed to being an active, influential person in the lives of their children.

Similar to the devotion the participants showed to their children was their dedication to education and a better quality of life. Even though only 30% of Black male high school graduates enroll in college classes (Farley, 1996), education was a very important factor in these fathers' lives. Three of the men were pursuing Baccalaureate degrees at the time of the interviews and, with the exception of two, all had some college. Similarly, all were employed with at least modest annual salaries. These findings are consistent with other research reports that indicate that both paternal education and income are associated with increased involvement (Arditti & Bickley, 1996; Coley & Chase, 1999).

In sum, these fathers seemed to be genuinely committed to their children despite the fact that their own fathers had been absent. They re-wrote the script of father absenteeism, breaking from a heritage of absent fathers. Their actively involved, vital role in the parenting and socializing process and their continuous support of their offspring all suggest that the journey to generative African-American fathering has begun.

## Strengths and Limitations

By far, the most notable strength of this study was capturing the subjective perceptions and experiences of the fathers interviewed. Life narratives of these participants, described as only they have experienced it, was rewarding and also at times frustrating. Allowing a father to share his story has obvious advantages, particularly for those who many times have been perceived as unconcerned, irresponsible, and lacking the skills to be an adequate provider for their children. This study gave participants the chance to share experiences, ideas, and perceptions of fatherhood that otherwise may have been overlooked.

All of the men had only one child except two. For those who did have more than one child, both children had the same mother. This may help explain the active and involved role of these dads. Fathers are more likely to be involved when multiple children live in the same home (Seltzer & Bianchi, 1988). Next, with the exception of one father, all had cohabitated with the child and their

mother for at least 2 years before they were separated from the child/children. The bond that was formed most certainly could influence the vested interest in the child's life. Further, the ages of these children were such that they could initiate contact, make and receive phone calls, and encourage involvement without their mothers as the gatekeeper. Additionally, these were all relatively well-educated, employed men. It is possible that the results may have varied if the men in the sample population were less educated and un- or under-employed. Finally, the fact that these men volunteered to be a participant in the study suggests that they were highly functional and concerned with their voices being heard to influence the future of America and American families.

Despite these limitations, there was much to be learned about roles and responsibilities of fathering and breaking the cycle of father absence. One of the most notable strengths of the present study was that these fathers shared with me the stories of personal experiences that shaped their desire to be a "hands on" father, which occurred for many of them during their own childhood years.

## Implications for Research

The in-depth interviews in this study allowed participants to give voice to perceptions, ideas, and behaviors that related to parenting and father-child relations. The words of the participants gave us a closer look at the various ways in which fathers reason during decision-making processes, develop fathering

attitudes and perceptions, and, perhaps most importantly, the ways in which they behave. There remains a great need for more qualitative as well as quantitative research in the area of father involvement among nonresidential and residential fathers alike. Questions that need to be addressed include the following: How do co-residential fathers experience fatherhood? What do they see as their roles and responsibilities? How important is it to re-write the script of father absence whether you co-reside or not? What are the quantitative and qualitative differences in the cognitive processes of men who re-write the script versus those who live out the legacy of father absence? The qualitative paradigm has several advantages for these and a host of other questions such as: (a) how an individual can explain his/her experiences and self-constructed realities as he/she perceives and experiences them, (b) how it can give voice to phenomena that may otherwise be overlooked or ignored, and (c) how it can offer a practical, real-life side to variables, hypotheses, and statistics, highlighting the interconnection between sociodemographics and other factors and the myriad of explanations that can help us describe and understand human behavior. These advantages are particularly important for research with members of marginalized groups.

Until fairly recently, fathers and father involvement were either described as peripheral or ignored entirely in much of the parenting literature. Recently, however, scholarly and lay investigations of fatherhood have gained national

attention. This slowly forthcoming change is reflected in the special chapter on "Marital Processes and Parental Socialization in Families of Color: A Decade Review of Research" featured in *Understanding Families Into the New Millennium: A Decade in Review* (2001). Similarly, books written to enlighten and inform such as *Becoming Dads: Black Man and the Journey to Fatherhood* (Pitts, 1999) and *Generative Fathering: Beyond Deficit Perspectives* (1997) assure that this area of inquiry is important. Finally, articles featured in the popular Black magazine *Essence* entitled "Why We Need Father Figures" (1992) coupled with those in the renowned magazine *Ebony* such as "Fathers and Sons: The Critical Connection" (1990), and "To Dad with Love" (1990) highlight the importance of father involvement. It is my hope that social scientists will continue in the quest to portray a more balanced view of fathers in the context of families as both co- and nonresidential fathers. Fatherhood has been explored fairly well when inquires on the consequences of father absence are the topic of concern. Scholarly inquiry must begin to make an equally zealous attempt to acknowledge the positive psychological, physical, social, and emotional rewards rather than the consequential effects that fathers have on their children.

## Implications for Practitioners

There are many challenges and obstacles faced by nonresidential fathers. The obstacles are not offered as excuses, but as explanations for why some men

detach financially, emotionally, and physically from their offspring. Helping professionals must begin to recognize the various ecological as well as psychological factors that play a role in fathering. Knowledge of these dynamics may help strengthen programs and support for African-American men and their children. Needs that should be addressed when dealing with this population include: (a) understanding the current and sociohistorical context of the population, (b) recognizing the individual, personal, and familial barriers that may exist, and (c) acknowledging the boundaries and parameters enforced by mothers, especially those who serve as "gatekeepers" and use money or other financial criteria to determine and regulate access (Halle, Moore, Greene, & LeMenestrel, 1998). A working knowledge of factors that can keep a man from being involved (level of education, income, his own family background, geographic location) also should all be taken into account. Challenges that men face such as lack of control on how child support payments are spent and feelings of powerlessness should be considered. Finally, professionals should encourage men to attend community workshops and seminars designed to inform, educate, and enlighten fathers on current parenting topics, communication skills, and other information that may aid in the fathering process. For a sample workshop and prevention-based recommendations developed for nonresidential fathers and their children, please see Appendix F.

## Implications for Policy Makers

Several very important implications can be drawn from the study's results. I have outlined those particularly salient in recognition of the fact that in the African American community, there remain a large number of births outside of marriage and in many cases to teenage parents.

### *Cohabitation vs. Marriage*

With the exception of one father, all of the men had resided with their children at some point during their lives. In fact, nearly half of Americans in their 20s and 30s have cohabitated (Booth, et al., 1991). In 1994, 3.7 million United States couples cohabitated (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1995). In the majority of cases, cohabitation shares some of the attributes of marriage (Brown & Booth, 1996). This living arrangement involves sharing a residence and personal resources and in a significant amount of cases having a child (Brown & Booth, 1996). Brown and Booth's (1996) investigation on cohabitation versus marriage is particularly salient to the population under study. They found that cohabitation was more prevalent among Blacks than Whites and is most common among individuals with low levels of education. Their results also indicated that the majority (76%) of cohabitators were no different than married persons with respect to relationship quality. Plans to marry were not associated with the perceived quality of the relationship. Not surprisingly, having plans to marry

was greater among cohabitators with higher incomes (Bumpass, Sweet, & Cherlin, 1991). These data imply that perhaps the commitment to legal marriage has declined, but not a dedication to family, sharing resources, and having two parents in the household.

*One vs. Two-Parent Household*

The gradual decrease in marriage (Cherlin, 1992) is one of the primary reasons for the increase in fathers' absence from the home. The number of single-parent families with children under the age of 18 doubled from 3.8 million in 1970 to 9.4 million in 1988 (United States Bureau of Census, 1992). Single-parent families now account for 27% of all families with children and 60% of African-American families. Indeed, racial differences were as large or larger at the beginning of the 1990s as they had been a generation earlier (Bianchi, 1995).

Researchers, politicians, helping professionals, and even the lay community continue the long-lived discussion about Black family structure. A primary area of interest is the increased proportion of Blacks who divorce and the decrease in the proportion that marries (Cherlin, 1992). There are several implications concerning one and two-parent households. Theoretically, one could argue that these factors decreased Black, two-parent families. Realistically, this may not be the case. Indeed, cohabitating relationships/unions (with both biological parents) are "two-parent" families even though census data do not

accurately reflect it. According to census questions, these households are still categorized as "female-headed households" when in reality a union and indeed a family exists. Many women continue to cohabitate with their partner and children and never marry. Evaluations of the divergence between Blacks and Whites marriage patterns in the future may be altered by a consideration of cohabitation. Research suggests that race differences are dramatically reduced when cohabitation is taken into account (Manning & Smock, 1995). Perhaps there should be a wider range of questions on the census survey concerning the situation of the family. This would give individuals the opportunity to describe their family more accurately. Indeed, inclusion of cohabitation and marriage as union types reduces by nearly 50% the race disparity in the proportion of women establishing a union by age 25 (Raley, 1993).

*National Fatherhood Initiatives*

For reasons too numerous to name, all families do not remain intact. Because of this reality, the need for national programs such as the National Fatherhood Initiative, Dads at a Distance: Incarcerated Fathers, and other fatherhood projects is crucial. These fairly new grass roots programs strive to offer public awareness to fathering issues, promote responsible fathering, and provide education and training to fathers, community, and national leaders. These programs can be quite useful. It is likely, however, that these initiatives

were derived from an Anglo-American perspective. Racial, cultural, and ethnic sensitivities may be an area that needs to be addressed to allow minority fathers to fully describe their experiences and concerns.

*Moving Beyond Economic Contributions as a Measure of Involvement*

Measuring a father's involvement solely on his economic contribution is flawed. Only one half of the fathers in this study were under a court order to pay child support. However, all of them contributed financially to support their children. More importantly, they invested in their children emotionally, psychologically, and physically. To get a more accurate picture of nonresidential fathers, all of these factors must be described and taken into account. Indeed, it is time to place value on the priceless aspects of fathering such as love, nurturance, physical, emotional, and psychological support. I realize that these intangible variables do not aid in the financial component needed to raise a child. They do, however help assist in the production of upright citizens, caring communities, and more people committed to generative fathering. Policy makers and those who influence the process should consider conducting ethnographic research such as interviewing and focus groups to "hear" the concerns and needs of the target population. Similarly, methodologies such as participant observation allow one to "see" the circumstances and issues of a specific population. For a full list of policy implications for children and

families, see Redefining Family Policy: Implications for the 21st Century (Mercier, Garasky, & Shelley, 2000).

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# APPENDIX(ES)

# APPENDIX A
# INFORMED CONSENT

## INTRODUCTION

My name is Javiette Samuel. I am a Doctoral candidate in the Department of Child and Family Studies at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville conducting research on nonresidential fatherhood among African-Americans. You are invited to participate in the study.

## INFORMATION ABOUT PARTICIPANT' INVOLVEMENT IN THE STUDY

First, we will complete together an information sheet. This form includes background information such as age, occupation, and number of children. Next, I will turn the tape recorder on and begin asking you a series of questions that relate to your experience as a nonresident father. The interviews will be audiotaped solely for the purpose of producing verbatim transcripts. Once I have completed transcripts, the tapes will be erased and destroyed. Finally, I will ask you to suggest other noncustodial fathers that might be willing to talk with me about their experiences. The entire process should take approximately $1^{1/2}$- 2 hours. The information you share will only be presented in written form using a pseudonym (false name) rather than your real name. The typed record of your interview will be stored in a locked office for three years (university policy) and then destroyed.

## RISKS

Participation in this study poses minimal risks for participants. Due to the nature of the topic it is possible that issues may surface that could evoke emotions such as anger and resentment. Participants may wish to talk about these issues further with a trained professional. Should this occur, I am prepared to make a referral to professional agencies in the community to provide such services.

**BENEFITS**

Capturing the experience of noncustodial fathers is very important. A greater understanding of fathers perceptions about these issues may help professionals that serve this population identify important challenges and rewards of noncustodial fatherhood. In addition, this project will contribute to the limited body of literature on Black noncustodial fathers.

**CONFIDENTIALITY**

Information in the study records will be kept confidential. Data will be stored securely and will be made available only to persons conducting the study unless participants specifically give permission in writing to do otherwise. The consent forms will be stored in a separate locked file cabinet from the transcripts in a locked office for three years and then destroyed. Data will be used in my dissertation, research reports, journals and books and at professional conferences. However, no reference will be made in oral or written reports that could link participants to the study.

**CONTACT INFORMATION**

If you have questions at any time about this study or the procedures, (or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study,) you may contact the researcher Javiette Samuel at 115 Jessie Harris Building, Knoxville, TN, 37996-1900 or at (865) 974-5316. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, contact Research Compliance Services of the Office of Research at (865) 974-3466.

**PARTICIPATION**

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at anytime without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

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**CONSENT**

I have read the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Participants signature _____ Date_____

Investigator's signature_____ Date_____

# APPENDIX B

## INTERVIEW DISCUSSION GUIDE

**Central Question**

How do African-American men experience being a noncustodial father?

**Grand Tour Questions:**

When you look back over your life what are some of the things that you are most proud of?

As you look back over your life what would you do differently?

When you think back and reflect on your life experiences, how would you evaluate your past?

Tell me about how you found out about the pregnancy.

Tell me about what the birth of your child/children was like.

What type of contact do you have with you children?

Tell me about a typical day spent with your child/children.

If you do not have contact, describe what you think a typical day would be like.

**Issue-Oriented Subquestions**

Who influenced your ideas and choices about fatherhood?

When you think about your dad, what things stand out most?

What impact does your father have on you as a father?

What does it mean to be the father of a son?

What does it mean to be the father of a daughter?

What challenges are associated with being a noncustodial father?

What rewards are associated with being a noncustodial father?

As a noncustodial father, what resources do you have to help you deal with the demands that you face?

Are there other resources that you think would be helpful that are unavailable? What are they?

**Topical Subquestions**

How do you handle discipline?

How would you describe the development (social, emotional, academic) of your child as he/she is growing up in a single-parent family?

As a noncustodial father, how do you assess the development of your child?

How does your relationship with your child/children influence his/her development?

## APPENDIX C

## DEMOGRAHIC/BIOGRAPHICAL SHEET

---

Date:
Place:
Time:
Interviewer's Name:

---

Participant's Name (Pseudonym):
Age:
Birth Place:

**Residence Pattern:** Please circle one of the following living situations that best describe your residence.

House
Apartment
Duplex
Condo
Townhouse
Other_____

Are you the head of your household? Y_____ N_____

Who else resides in your household besides you? Please do not include names just the person(s) and their relationship to you (e.g. girlfriend, girlfriends children, brother, sister)?

_____

**Number of Brothers:** ____ **Number of Sisters:** ____

**Birth Order:** Please circle the place you hold among your brothers and sisters.
1st
2nd
3rd
4th
5th
Other:

**Parents:**
Mother's Age:____ Mother's Occupation _____

Father's Age:____ Fathers' Occupation: _____

**Marital Status:** Please circle the one that best describes you.
Never Married
Separated
Divorced
Widowed
Other (Please explain)_____

**Marital History:**
Never married _____
Married what year _____
Separated what year _____
Divorced what year _____
Remarried what year _____
Remarried what year _____

**Education:**
Highest Grade/Degree completed_____

**Current Occupation:**_____

**Number of years with current employer:**_____

**Number of hours worked per week:**_____

**Approximate annual income:**_____

**Children:**

Age:_____ Gender:_____
Age:_____ Gender:_____
Age:_____ Gender:_____
Age:_____ Gender:_____
Age:_____ Gender:_____
Age:_____ Gender:_____

**Communication with Children**
How often do you communicate with your child/children?
Daily
Weekly
Monthly
Several times a year
Never

What type of contact do you have with your children?
Face-to-face
Phone
Letter
E-mail
Other (Please explain)

---

Do you have children that you do not have contact with?
Yes No

How did this come to be?

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---

**Financial Support**
Do you pay child support?
Yes No

Is it under a court order?
Yes No

How often do you make payments?
Weekly
Bi-weekly
Monthly
Other (Please explain)

---

If you are currently paying child support or have paid it in the past, how do/did you feel about paying it?

---

---

**Religion:** Please circle the one best answer of these questions

**How religious would you describe yourself being?**
Strong
Moderate
Inactive
Indifferent
Nonreligious

**How often do you participate in worship service?**
Daily
Weekly
Monthly
Several times a year
Once every several years
Never

Would you like a copy of the results? If yes, please include address below.

# APPENDIX D

## FAMILY LIFE EDUCATION MODULE

Needs Assessment: In 1991, only 44 % of African-American adults were married compared with 64% in 1970 (U.S. Census, 1993). Marriage for Black men was as follows: 44.4% had never married, 38.5% were married, 8.3% divorced, 5.5% had separated, and 5.3% were widowed (Sudarkasa, 1993). Thus, the number of single-parent families with children under the age of 18 doubled from 3.8 million in 1970 to 9.4 million in 1988 (United States Bureau of Census, 1992). Single-parent families now account for 27% of all families with children and 60% of African-American families. It has been estimated that African-American children have only a 20% chance of growing up with both parents until the age of 16 (Bumpass, 1993). Based on the demographics cited above, it is reasonable to hypothesize that noncustodial fatherhood is increasing, children see their fathers less, and receive a decreased amount of economic, physical, psychological, and emotional support.

Challenge Statement: I believe that it is important for everyone to be aware of the various demands faced by individuals in contemporary families. The challenges faced by children, as well as parents, custodial and noncustodial alike are crucial to fully understanding and enhancing family relations. Many nonresidential fathers do not enjoy their lives with their children to the fullest because of obstacles impinged by the custodial parent, work situation, court system, and other external factors. Family life education programs that assist individuals develop greater skills identifying obstacles to

parent-child interaction and make recommendations for increasing and maintaining involvement and connection can be linked with better family relations.

Goal: This workshop was designed to highlight barriers and challenges faced by African-American noncustodial fathers and their children and to offer recommendations for fathers and children in this context. Secondary goals include, but are not limited to, increasing healthy parent-child involvement and enhancing communication skills (in hopes of increasing and maintaining parental involvement and connection).

Audience: The target audience for this workshop is African-American noncustodial fathers and their children.

Objectives: Performance (behavior), conditions (when and where), and criterion are the components of measurable objectives (Morris, 1998). Thus, these factors will be evaluated. At the end of the workshop, fathers will be able to:

- List 5 barriers/challenges that noncustodial fathers are faced with 80% accuracy
- List 5 strategies to help deal with barriers/challenges with 80% accuracy
- Given a role-play exercise, demonstrate their knowledge of effective communication by applying the use of "I" language, being an active listener, disclosing, and summarizing with 80% accuracy

Children will be able to:

- List 3 ways to communicate with their parents with 80% accuracy

Learner Prerequisite: There are no formal educational prerequisites for this workshop other than a moderate degree of literacy. Have other expectations that are independent of educational attainment; these include but are not limited to: (1) being open-minded; (2) maintaining a positive attitude; and (3) being open to change based on the information presented.

Time Required: This weekend workshop will take approximately 4 hours Friday evening (5pm-9pm) and 4 hours Saturday morning (9am-1pm). The time allotted reflects 1-2 hours for each objective (Morris, 1998).

Introduction/ Anticipatory Set:

- Did you know that fathers are far less likely to have frequent contact with their children born outside of marriage compared with kids born within a marital relationship (Cooksey & Craig, 1998)?
- Did you know that Black men are more likely to visit with their children than nonblack men (Cooksey & Craig, 1998) yet that only includes 50% of fathers being highly involved at the time of birth and before preschool age with nearly 40% moving in and out of active parenting during that time (Coley et al., 1999)?

Defining healthy parent-child involvement: My definition of healthy parent-child involvement includes but is not limited to: (1) maintenance of the parent-child relationship with minimal conflict and stress; (2) frequent and consistent contact (i.e.

phone, visitation, letters, e-mail); and (3) nurturing the child emotionally, socially, and cognitively.

Lecture: This workshop was designed to highlight barriers that African-American noncustodial fathers and their children are confronted with. After discussing various obstacles, recommendations are suggested. A multi-systemic model is the theoretical framework on which the workshop was designed. Therefore, challenges are presented and discussed under three major headings: (1) individual characteristics of the father (and mother); (2) interpersonal relationships, including newly formed relationships with other partners; and (3) institutional structures, primarily the court system. This perspective is relevant for this workshop and topic because it highlights the interconnection of all parts of a system. Indeed, a systems' behavior affect its environment and in turn the environment affect the system (Klein & White, 1996).

Barriers/ Challenges

Individual Characteristics

(1) Relationship with the mother of children

The quality of noncustodial fathers' relationship with the mother of their children is very important. One of the most crucial variables that influences fathers' involvement with their children is the nature of the relationship with the mother (Fox & Blanton, 1995; Hamer, 1998). Hamer's (1998) investigation of inhibitions to fathers involvement with their children revealed that relationships viewed by the father as antagonistic (i.e. a strong dislike for the mother, feeling used by the mother) affected the

fathers' level of involvement with their children Men's teen counterparts also report that a strained relationship is the number one obstacle to visitation (Allen & Doherty, 1996).

(2) Physical distance from children

With an increasingly mobile society, physical and geographic distance can act as a barrier to fathers spending time with their offspring. If proximity was not an issue, in some cases, fathers could increase contact (Arditti & Keith, 1993; Hamer, 1998; Seltzer et al., 1989). Thus, economic issues that relate to cost of traveling and calling could serve to hinder involvement and contact.

(3) More than one set of children

Births outside of marriage are prevalent in the African-American community. Because this is a reality in the Black community, some fathers have children from more than one relationship. The number of children that men live apart from influences involvement. Fathers are more likely to have contact with their children when multiple siblings reside together (Seltzer & Bianchi, 1988). Fathers report having more than one set of children makes it difficult to see everyone on an equal basis and feelings of guilt arise when they spend more time with one child than another (Hamer, 1998).

## Interpersonal Relationships

### (4) Problems caused by new relationships

In many cases, a divorce or breakup is followed by a subsequent relationship for one or both parents. New relationships can present additional obstacles. When a father enters a new relationship or remarries he may feel less committed to children from previous relationships (Lowen, 1988; Seltzer et al, 1988; Teybor & Hoffman, 1987). Even fathers who do not remarry but cohabitate find it a challenge to balance time between two families. The attitudes and behaviors of the current partner and the mother of his children affect fathering (Hamer, 1998). These issues may serve to decrease fathers' involvement with their children (Seltzer & Bianchi, 1988).

## Institutional Structures

### (5) Employment

Many Black men are working class and lack specialized skills and training (Farley, 1996). Sometimes, they hold two jobs concurrently. Their schedule may involve working evenings, weekends, and rotating shifts. The inflexibility of schedules appears to cause difficulties as it relates to fathers picking up their children and coinciding with children's school or vacation schedule (Hamer, 1998). These demands limit when, where, and how fathers see their children.

### (6) Access and Visitation Issues

The access and visitation issues that noncustodial parents face appear to be one of the most pervasive of all barriers. Noncustodial parents have argued for many years

that the "increasingly aggressive enforcement of child support obligations has not been matched by an equally zealous enforcement of visitation rights" (Pearson & Thoennes, 1997, p. 4). When visitation does occur, many times, access disputes arise. Issues include but are not limited to: (1) difficulties/disagreements with scheduling visitation; (2) difficulties with drops and pick-ups (including fights); and (3) not getting enough time (Pearson & Thoennes, 1997). Levant (1990) hypothesized that "many men call it quits with visitation because they can not tolerate feeling so powerless in face of unremitting conflict," p.87).

In sum, there are various issues that hinder parent-child involvement that seem to be related to the relationship with the mother (Allen & Doherty, 1996; Hamer, 1998; Pearson & Thoennes, 1997); physical distance (Arditti & Keith, 1993; Hamer, 1998; Seltzer et al, 1989); two or more sets of children (Hamer, 1998; Seltzer & Bianchi, 1988); and access and visitation issues (Levant, 1990; Pearson & Thoennes, 1997). Most of the factors mentioned are barriers that fathers were confronted with. However, the obstacles inadvertently affect children and in fact may serve to reduce time and attention, visitation, and the amount of economic, physical, psychological, and emotional support.

Examples/Demonstration: Provide a demonstration of two different communication styles. The first should be a negative style (e.g., confrontational, blaming statements). A more effective and positive communication style should follow as an alternative. This will include using "I" language, avoiding blaming statements, being an active listener, disclosing, and summarizing.

Activity/Practice:

- Role play several scenarios (fathers and children) to give participants a chance to practice communication skills (i.e. taking multiple perspectives, using "I" language)
- Fathers- list 5 barriers that noncustodial fathers face/5 strategies to deal with challenges
- Fathers-list ways to increase and maintain involvement with their children
- Children-list 3 ways to communicate and maintain involvement with their father

Feedback: Some skills may be more difficult to acquire and use than others. Therefore, offer written feedback (on successes and corrective measures) as you observe fathers in their role play demonstrations. Anticipate that most participants will be capable of successfully implementing most of the newly learned skills.

Prevention-Based Recommendations for Fathers and their Children

My recommendations for fathers and their children are multifaceted. The multilevel, multifactor suggestions reflect the complex nature of individuals and systems and the environment they live in.

Fathers

1. Attend communication seminars designed to help individuals articulate more clearly issues concerning the former partner as well as the current one, express their feelings in a constructive manner, and listen to their children.

2. Attend skill-training workshops that offer a chance to role-play newly learned communication skills. After observing trained educators role play skills such as disclosure, summary, and empathy. I suggest that fathers role-play scenarios that depict the child/children (consider age and gender), the former partner, the current partner (if applicable), and finally themselves. These activities provide an avenue for fathers to incorporate multiple-role and role reversal perspectives in their current situation.
3. When communicating with children, use age and/or developmentally appropriate terms and consider the child's mental abilities.
4. Workshops highlighting the dangers of parental conflict are crucial for many divorced couples or couples whose relationship has dissolved. These programs can give individuals a greater understanding of the adverse consequences of conflict-ridden relationships and how they can adversely affect communication between children as well as former and current partners.
5. Attend parent education programs. These programs give the father an opportunity to learn parenting skills which include but are not limited to: (1) learning different parenting styles; (2) enforcing consistent and nurturing discipline; and (3) increasing their awareness of the developmental stage that their children are in, highlighting behavioral, cognitive, and emotional characteristics of that particular stage.
6. To avoid pitfalls and ambiguity that accompany the phrase "reasonable" visitation, arrange legal visitation schedules as opposed to "reasonable" through the court system. Visitation issues should also be agreed upon in the form of a legal/binding document.
7. If the father has more than one set of children, schedule all of children on the same weekend to help ensure that all of the children are seen.
8. Verbally reassure children that they are loved and wanted.
9. Focus on quality rather than quantity of time spent with children. Many fathers only see their children in the summer or during holiday breaks, seize the moment and make it the best that it can be.

Issues that need to be considered in terms of the recommendations include: (1) using age and/or developmentally appropriate terms; (2) considering the cognitive capabilities of young children (using concrete as opposed to abstract words and examples); and (3) talking with children using concepts that are androgynous/unisex, or those that are gender appropriate.

Evidence concerning the effect of the child's gender on father involvement is mixed (Cooksey & Craig, 1998). Some data suggest that fathers are more likely to maintain contact with same-sex children (Harris & Morgan, 1991) and be more involved with older children (Seltzer, 1991). Certainly, gender-specific patterns in various types of interaction exist (Cooksey & Craig, 1998). Fathers may be more likely to maintain same-sex contact because they can play sport activities with their sons and may talk on the phone with their daughter (Crooksey & Craig, 1998). Recommend visiting and maintaining a connection with children of both genders and at all developmental stages.

Children

1. Try to establish and maintain a relationship with both parents.
2. Both sons and daughters should talk with their mother and father or write a letter that expresses how they feel about things that make them happy and things that make them sad (e.g. lack of visits from father).
3. If children are uncomfortable talking with parents, talk to a grandmother, teacher, or other adult they trust.
4. Tape record what they want to say parent(s) and give the tape to their parent(s).
5. Draw a picture to describe how they feel and explain the picture to their parent(s).

Discussion: Allow workshop participants time to discuss and process their overall learning experience.

Summary/Key Learning: Review and reinforce the purpose of the workshop to help learners transfer their learning to practical and real life situations (Morris, 1998).

Evaluation: Ask fathers to give a formative evaluation of the workshop. This gives the participants an opportunity to evaluate process-oriented variables such as beliefs about the workshop, workshop materials, location, and time (Morris, 1998).

# VITA

A native of Knoxville, Tennessee, Javiette Vashann Samuel was born on May 8, 1973. She received her post and secondary education in the Knox County school system graduating from Austin-East High School in 1991. Ms. Samuel attended The University of Tennessee for her undergraduate and degrees. She received her Bachelors in 1996, Masters in 1999, and Doctor of Philosophy in 2002. During her graduate tenure, she worked in the mental health profession, as a graduate teaching assistant, and graduate administrative assistant in the Office of Minority Student Affairs.

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