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RESILIENCE IN FATHERHOOD: EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF ABSENT FATHERS ON BLACK AMERICAN MEN'S PARENTING NARRATIVES AND PRACTICES

Ericah Thomas

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RESILIENCE IN FATHERHOOD:
EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF ABSENT FATHERS ON BLACK AMERICAN
MEN'S PARENTING NARRATIVES AND PRACTICES

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Social Work

by
Ericah Thomas
May 2024

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the role of Black American fathers and how they parent in the absence of their fathers growing up. Though a common narrative frames Black fathers as largely absent in the lives of their children, recent literature has aimed to demystify societal factors that may lead to this judgment. Influences such as media representation, welfare policies, and child support laws may contribute to the preservation of this trope (Rambert, 2021). Considering this misconception, it is important to advance the knowledge regarding Black fatherhood through their lived experiences despite circumstances that may perpetuate this myth.

The primary goal of this study will be to illuminate the challenges that Black fathers may face and identify what influences have contributed to their successful engagement in their children's lives. This qualitative research study utilized an inductive exploratory approach. Participants were recruited using a non-probability snowball sampling method which yielded six eligible respondents from various metropolitan cities across the U.S. Within a neutral setting, qualified participants were interviewed using open-ended questions about their experiences, and responses were analyzed utilizing conventional content analysis to identify common themes and subthemes (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). This study yielded several themes including Black fathers' perspectives on fatherhood, revealing a commitment to stability, protectiveness, and dedicated

support for their children. Fathers highlighted the value of modeling behaviors they did not see in their childhood and the benefits of having a village in support of their efforts despite the many barriers they face. This study highlights the value of Black fathers' presence in the lives of their children and the importance of creating equitable approaches to support, specifically in societal systems that often leave Black fathers feeling ostracized instead of empowered.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to acknowledge the participants of this study. The Black American community is historically apprehensive to participate in studies such as these. Therefore, I would like to acknowledge the vulnerability of these fathers who willingly shared their experiences in order to contribute to this valuable research. Without them, we may continue to hold blind spots regarding their journey. I am truly grateful for their participation and celebrate their commitment to their children.

I would also like to acknowledge the CSUSB staff and my Pathways Cohort for all the guidance and support they have provided throughout this process. This experience was one that I did not expect to be easy, yet at every turn, I was reaffirmed my abilities and encouraged to continue on. I would specifically like to thank Dr. James Simon, Dr. Stephanie Schnieder, and Professor Denise Rodriguez Bowman for their guidance, and clarity, and for making this project easier to complete.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this research project to my family. They have been my motivation and have supported me throughout this project. To my children, thank you for being patient and allowing me the time to get through this. Now, we have all the time in the world. To my partner, you truly inspired me to celebrate the hard work and accomplishments of the Black American father through the love, attention, and dedication that you show our children every day, and for that, I am forever grateful.

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CHAPTER ONE

ASSESSMENT

Introduction

This chapter is an introduction to the research statement, providing an understanding of the value of a father's involvement in the life of their child. This is followed by an explanation of the post-positive research paradigm and the rationale for its application to this research. Next will be a brief literature review concerning how Black fathers understand fatherhood in the absence of an example in their own lives. An exploration of what serves to motivate and support Black fatherhood, as well as identification of potential barriers and circumstances that have impacted the experience will also be addressed. Critical race theory (CRT) was used as a guide for orientation to the framework of this study. This chapter also explores the potential contributions to macro and micro social work in practice, concluding with a summary of the information presented.

Research Statement

The objective of this research project was to expand the knowledge of how Black American fathers from inner-city communities perceive and develop fatherhood roles in the absence of a consistent father figure of their own growing up. Mothers and other female-identifying caregivers have generally been viewed

as primary providers of nourishment, care, and developmental support to their children while fathers have not historically been held to the same expectations. According to the 2019 U.S. Census, over 49% of Black American children lived with a single mother which is more than double that of children of Hispanic origin who are in the next closest ethnic category at just over 23% (US Census Bureau, 2022). Studies have shown how the presence of a Black father in their child's life has a protective effect against criminality (Coley & Medeiros, 2007) and higher academic achievement in school-aged children than those of non-involved fathers (Nord & West, 2001). These are only a few reasons why it is important to understand what implications, if any, not being raised with a father may have played in how Black fathers see themselves in the lives of their children. Social science literature lacks depth in its exploration of Black men's experiences with fatherhood, thereby hindering a comprehensive understanding of this demographic (Robinson, 2021). The objective of this research has been to develop this knowledge through interviews with Black fathers who are actively involved in the lives of their children, assessing their conceptualization of their role as a father. By eliciting the buy-in of individuals who identify as Black biological fathers, stepfathers, and adoptive fathers, this research may provide insights into what influences their commitment to their children and what impact not having a consistent father figure in their life may have had on their experience of fatherhood. This valuable data may enable opportunities to

develop programs that can more intentionally support fatherhood involvement for future Black American families.

Paradigm and Rationale

This study employs the post-positivist paradigm. The nature of reality as it relates to the post-positivist paradigm is that reality is objective. This means that researchers are a part of reality and cannot ever completely separate from it. Though the researcher can utilize methods similar to the positivist paradigm, post-positivist researchers acknowledge that such methods may not capture the full complexity of the human experience (Morris, 2013). For this reason, it was essential to observe the environment without manipulation, focusing on qualitative data. The researcher remained neutral with the understanding that by sheer implementation, the researcher could influence findings and therefore attempted to mitigate their impact (Morris, 2013).

The post-positive paradigm was selected for this research because it allowed for the natural exploration of how Black American fathers see themselves in the role of fatherhood after having limited to no engagement with fathers of their own. Understanding what factors may have influenced their engagement in the lives of their children can help shape the development of programs that may empower fathers who come from similar situations. This research may also help identify what therapeutic interventions could strengthen the well-being of fathers who may identify abandonment-related challenges. Additionally, without the rigidity that some of the other paradigms

employ, there is an opportunity to dispel stereotypes applied to Black men which can lead to stronger fatherhood support and engagement.

Literature Review

Introduction

This literature review further discusses how fathers have engaged in their roles in the absence of a father in their own lives. As previously stated, the role of the father in the life of a child has been shown to be beneficial to the overall well-being of the child (Cabrera et al., 2007). Historically, however, fathers have been treated as ‘nonessential participants’ and are often left out of the larger conversation when it comes to addressing parenting and familial structure (McLanahan et al., 2013). This section addresses the prevalence of this issue, its contributing factors, the implementation of interventions and preventative measures, and in what ways they may be improved if needed. The section concludes by connecting the literature findings to the research statement of this study.

Prevalence

The American Dream is often portrayed as a married mother and father, two kids, and a four-legged friend all living in a single-family home with a white picket fence. This has served as the Anglo-centric marker that one has reached the pinnacle of success. This socially normative U.S. misconception largely

influences the misunderstanding of families who do not fit into the application of this structure.

In 1997, the United States Census Bureau shared a report that discovered that Black children were much more likely to live in a fatherless home than White children with Black American males spending a large part of their childhood years in homes without a father figure present (Bryson & Casper, 1999). In 2015, a study by Child Trends discovered that Black mothers accounted for 69% of non-marital births (Child Trends, 2018). Bolstered by a headline-grabbing narrative of black women as “welfare queens” as expressed by former President Ronald Regan in years prior, statistics such as these have helped to perpetuate the perception of the broken Black family structure, upholding the idea of the Black fathers’ unwillingness to engage in the lives of their children (Levin, 2019). Yet, many Black fathers are in fact involved in the lives of their children albeit through cohabitation, visitation, caretaking, and/or by providing financial and in-kind support. In such cases, the fathers were simply not legally married to the mothers (Coles & Green, 2009).

A 2006 study found that some young Black men positioned themselves ideologically to mimic this narrative and constructed their identities around the absence of their father in a reflection identified as “father loss” (Hunter et al., 2006). Young men may identify what it means to be a “good father” from the engagement with their own father; however, in their absence, that learning opportunity can be vastly reduced. Studies have shown that when a child is

raised in a home without a father, they are at a 4 times greater risk of poverty, more likely to suffer abuse, abuse drugs or alcohol, and more likely to have behavioral challenges that can lead to a higher risk of incarceration (National Fatherhood Initiative, 2019). In contrast, children who have involved fathers, regardless of whether they live in the home, have a stronger foundation for childhood well-being and are at lower risk for a host of poor outcomes (National Fatherhood Initiative, 2019). Other scholarly research has pointed to the fact that the intentional inclusion of the father does contribute to the well-being of their children, encouraging career stability, along with the improvement in spousal relationships (Cowan et al., 2007).

Causes and Contributors

The antiquated belief that Black American fathers commonly disengage from their families and children can be linked to many historically relevant contributing factors. Throughout the over 400 years that Black people were enslaved in America, families were repeatedly separated without warning, and any attempts to keep their families together could result in social isolation, vicious beatings, and even death (Akbar, 1984). After being legally emancipated in 1863, many Black families continued to endure harsh and abusive forms of racial discrimination by way of the “Black Codes” which actively sought to lawfully restrict the rights afforded to free men. In 1865, freed Blacks were restricted from employment outside of roles that mirrored enslaved conditions, such as farmers, laborers, or servants. Black children were enlisted in unpaid “apprenticeship

opportunities” that were simply veiled forms of free and abusive child labor (Robinson, 2017). Simultaneously, Jim Crow laws ushered in an additional form of legalized racial segregation and degradation against Black Americans which lasted over a century (Hansan, 2011). Designed to control the Black labor forces, families were subjected to severe socioeconomic constraints which weakened their ability to maintain familial obligations.

Although America purports the end of the “Jim Crow” era, many social scientists, legal scholars, and political activists have identified current social structures that parallel these discriminatory policies in more inconspicuous ways. In researching police-community relations in predominately Black cities, Weitzer, Tuch, and Skogan (2008) explains how “dominant-group attitudes toward other racial groups are shaped by a sense of superiority over racial others and by a desire to defend dominant-group interests against threats, whether real or perceived” (p.400). This is currently exemplified through the overrepresentation of Black people in institutionalized structures such as the American legal system and child welfare agencies. In Los Angeles County, for example, Data USA shows that Black Americans make up 7.6% of the county’s population, yet their families make up almost 24% of child welfare cases (LA County DCFS, 2022). It is in these ways that the dominant culture’s perspective continues to indoctrinate barriers that constrict the advancement of marginalized groups in the greater society.

Existing research regarding Black families in America has continued to be limited and often applies a deficit-based lens that upholds skewed perceptions of the Black father. Political and social policies built upon the historical idea of limiting Black Americans' advancement continue to shape the conditions Black families must endure even in the present. J.R. Carey explains how practices such as redlining (restricting people of color from purchasing real state in certain areas), broken window theory (that visible signs of disorder and misbehavior encourages further disorder), and mass incarceration just to name a few, continue to impact the viability of the Black family to this very day (Carey, 2019).

Collectively, these studies point to contributing historical factors as well as ongoing structural barriers that continue to serve as an additional hurdle that Black families must overcome, especially Black fathers. As such, it is important to also review interventions, measures, factors that can serve as a buffer against these obstacles.

Existing Interventions and Preventative Measures

A 2021 study of Black American single fathers identified two overarching themes related to the conceptualization of the fatherhood role. (1) Fatherhood and being a father require a personal commitment and dedication regardless of obstacles that might arise, and (2) being present and active in a child's life is a way of acknowledging one's role as a father (Robinson M. A., 2017). Fatherhood initiatives such as the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse (NRFC) and the Fatherhood Promotion Movement have developed programs that support

attaining these goals. NRFC is a national resource for fathers, practitioners, programs/Federal grantees, states, and the public at large who are serving or interested in supporting strong fathers and families (Fatherhood.gov, 2022). NRFC's goals include helping to facilitate and disseminate current research and proven innovative strategies that encourage and strengthen fathers, families, and providers. This is accomplished through media campaigns, social media engagement, and outreach efforts, including a national call center for dads and practitioners to access direct information at 1-877-4DAD-411 (Fatherhood.gov, 2022).

Another agency that is working to support the stabilization of fatherhood engagement in Los Angeles County specifically is Project Fatherhood at the Children's Institute. Created in 1996 by Dr. Hershel Swinger, the program aims to engage fathers in the care and upbringing of their children by supporting parenting education and other services. Project Fatherhood helps fathers to make healthier decisions through individual and family counseling, group support, and therapeutic activities for children. The heart of the program is the Men in Relationships Group (MIRG), which provides comprehensive support at no cost for fathers from diverse backgrounds (Project Fatherhood - Children's Institute, 2022). Child welfare agencies are also taking note of this need and creating spaces for fathers to reinforce familial bonds when engaging the department.

Conclusion

In summary, this section analyzed peer-reviewed literature which addressed the pervasiveness of Black fatherless households in the U.S. and the importance of a father's involvement in the life of their child. In doing so, opportunities for data collected through the research were identified allowing for exploration of further ways to support the Black fatherhood experience. The analysis of the statistical prevalence of the Black family structure and the perceived causes and contributions may also create space to implement changes in supportive programs to better engage fathers and their value. This was followed by a dissection of what current interventions and preventative programs are currently supporting the role of the father in the lives of their children.

Theoretical Orientation

An essential part of post-positivist research is to limit theoretical assumptions prior to engagement of the study as the goal is to uncover potential theories as the research evolves and develops. Traditionally, however, a deficit model has been applied when addressing the role of a father in the lives of their children (CalSWEC, n.d.). This is largely based on a socially accepted perspective of Black fathers as absentees. Wilson and Thompson (2020) propose that is not by accident that this assessment is widely accepted, but rather it has been intentionally perpetuated by way of restricted studies that may uncover the alternative ways that Black fathers engage with their families,

reinforcing dominant culture societal influence and control. It is because of this that critical race theory (CRT) serves best as a guide for how to see beyond these limitations allowing for an exploration as to how historical familial interactions, structures, and cultural factors may impact the trajectory of the clients' actions (CalSWEC, n.d.).

CRT explores the intentional framework used to manipulate power access in the favor of dominant (white) culture and its repercussions. CRT proposes the following tenets: (a) that societal racism is normalized in the lives of people of color (specifically in American society as it relates to this research), (b) that racism advances the interests of the dominant culture which reduces any incentive to eliminate it, and (c) that race is a “product of social thought relations” with no objectively biological or genetic reality (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017) . The literature explains how CRT frames how dominant culture has encouraged a deficit-based perception of Black fatherhood and how Black fathers show up despite that. This theoretical orientation applies to the research topic in that identifies how historical, structural, social, and cultural factors may affect participant's lives and whether the “expected” absence of a father has impacted how they assume their fatherhood role. This is especially important in the lives of individuals who have historically been impacted by societal ills and barriers.

Potential Contribution of the Study to Micro and Macro Social Work Practice

This research endeavors to contribute to the knowledge base in both micro and macro social work practice. On the micro level, the research has the potential to support the empowerment of fathers who actively seek to be involved in the lives of their children through the efforts of peer mentorship. The shift in self-perspective could further mitigate the prevalence of fractured generational perspectives regarding Black American fatherhood. Additionally, it could create space for progressive impact in other facets of the father's life. At the macro level, this research could provide vital input regarding the value of fatherhood roles in the lives of children. Advocacy towards a more opportunity-focused lens may result in a shift in how family units are seen at the societal level and could encourage better outcomes for children as they mature.

Summary

This chapter helped to draw attention to how the role of the fatherhood role is enacted by fathers who were raised without an example of how to execute the role. Post-positivist research paradigm was introduced and explored it has been applied to this research. A brief literature review was included to provide a perspective on the prevalence of this topic. This was then followed by an explanation of the theoretical orientation that served as a guide to this research and the potential benefits the research will have in the micro and macro areas of social work.

CHAPTER TWO

ENGAGEMENT

Introduction

The initial engagement phase for this research study is discussed in this chapter. An overview of the study site, the scope of services available, as well as an understanding of the participants and the community that is being served, is provided. This is followed by an introduction to gatekeepers and the strategies used to engage their willingness to support. The researchers' preparatory activities are addressed as well. The next section provides information regarding how diversity, ethical, and political issues were addressed. In consideration of the need for technological support over the last few years, it is essential to address the role it has played in the research. This chapter concludes with a summary of the information presented in this chapter.

Study Site

Large metropolitan cities served as the study site for this research as the opportunity to identify participants that met study eligibility was greater. No specific study location was identified as the eligible participants were self-identified and scheduled for interviews conducted by the researcher via Zoom. Potential participants were also referred by CSUSB representatives (students and staff) and were contacted by the researcher via phone or email to determine eligibility. Additional participants were respondents from local community

outreach efforts via referrals, posted fliers, and social media outreach. Interested participants will contact the researcher by email to schedule a time that accommodates the participants' interview availability.

Engagement Strategies for Gatekeepers at the Research Site

The primary strategy for engagement was to seek respondents residing in urban metropolitan cities. This was accomplished by way of social media solicitation and through community outreach within the identified research areas. In this way, the researcher was able to source organic and robust variation in participation. Potential respondents were also able to ask any necessary questions and gain a deeper knowledge regarding the purpose and proposed benefits of participating in this research project.

The secondary strategy for engagement was through contact with CSUSB Social Work students and staff. CSUSB representatives were contacted via email and virtual messaging regarding the purpose of the proposed study and provided fliers to share the research opportunity with any potential eligible participants.

Self-Preparation

To ensure that the research was conducted properly, it was necessary that the researcher thoroughly explore the challenges that participants may have faced. The researcher developed an in-depth awareness of the community the participants live in, inclusive of cultural norms, implications associated with ethno-socio frameworks, class structure, and family composition. This includes

the family structure that fathers were born into as well as their present family structure. Additionally, it was important to understand what implications mental health and substance challenges may occur within this group. An extensive literature review was conducted to understand these needs and the role of a father living both in and out of the home.

The researcher prepared questions that addressed the needs of clients and reviewed them with fellow students, associates, and friends prior to implementation. Adjustments were made based on the feedback that was received. Throughout the study, the researcher remained sensitive to the fact that the research topic could have the potential to trigger emotions and reactions that may be adverse or may stagnate the outcome of the research. In acknowledgment of that, the researcher remained cognizant of the participants' overall well-being, ensuring that they were aware that they may leave the study at will.

Diversity Issues

Metropolitan cities are often home to very diverse populations, which is the primary reason that these areas were identified as having the optimal population for this research. Black Americans however, have been known to shy away from research studies largely due to mistrust of systems that have historically taken advantage of participants of color in appalling ways. For this reason, it was imperative to establish a genuine, trusting relationship between

the participant and researcher and stress the value the resulting data could have to empower Black fathers beyond their perceived societal role.

Ethical Issues

One of the primary ethical concerns when engaging participants was obtaining informed consent and ensuring confidentiality. All participants were informed that participation in the research was optional and that they could end their participation at any point. The researcher provided informed consent at the beginning stage of the research and was sure to reassess as the scope of the research unfolded. Names were not associated with research collection or dissemination and all data collected through interviews was stored on a computer in a password-protected file; furthermore, participants were instructed to refrain from using any identifying information during their Zoom interviews. Participants were also offered a resource list of community and mental health services should any concerns arise related to the interview process.

Political Issues

The researcher did not encounter any significant political issues throughout the research study process. By upholding strict confidentiality of participant information, opportunities for political implications directed toward participants are highly unlikely. Also, any association of the research with the study location should not result in political implications as the services that are

being provided are already in line with the goal of the research. CSUSB, therefore, was not asked to step outside of the normal services provided and will not be held accountable for research results.

Role of Technology

This qualitative research study applied an inductive exploratory approach. Within a natural setting, the researcher virtually utilized a series of open-ended questions to elicit specific reflections allowing for the identification of common themes and patterns in response to the participants' experience with fatherhood. Participants were able to use a QR code that directed them to a Google form which was used to screen for eligibility. Once eligible participants were identified, the researcher contacted each respondent and arranged a convenient time to conduct an interview via Zoom. Each respondent was provided with an informed consent either prior to or at the start of their interview. All communication notes and data were encrypted and password-protected to ensure confidentiality was maintained.

Summary

To summarize, the research was conducted with self-identified respondents from U.S. metropolitan cities and through referrals from CSUSB students and staff. Additionally, potential respondents were permitted the opportunity to contact the researcher for additional information as requested. The researcher prepared for the study by taking time and care to understand the

cultural and socio-implications associated with the members of this group. The researcher also conducted thorough literature reviews regarding research pertaining to fatherhood in the Black American community and the impact fatherhood absence may potentially have. All participants received informed consent and information obtained was stored securely and confidentially. Lastly, all interviews were conducted virtually which limited risks specifically as related to the recent Covid-19 pandemic.

CHAPTER THREE

IMPLEMENTATION

Introduction

This chapter identifies who the participants of this research were and how their buy-in was obtained. This is followed by an introduction into how the participants were engaged, including how informed consent was addressed as well as how the research was conducted, inclusive of timeline and goals. This continues with a brief overview of how the data was collected and analyzed. Lastly, an explanation of how the research study was terminated as well as a description of how the information may be used to tailor programs in support of fatherhood roles is provided. This chapter concludes with a summary of the information presented.

Study Participants

For this study, it was essential to select participants who identified as Black American biological, stepdads, or adoptive fathers. The participants had to also identify as having a limited or nonexistent relationship with their father growing up meaning the absence of an influential male figure who was emotionally engaged, physically accessible, and who would have assumed responsibility and material support for them consistently throughout childhood. Respondents needed to also be 18 years of age or older.

The recruitment method for this study used non-probability snowball sampling (Morris, 2013). This method of sampling seeks to understand the

benefits and drawbacks fathers may experience when identifying opportunities in their fatherhood role. The data has the potential to identify occasions to improve upon the services that have been made available to or could potentially benefit future fathers. This may also allow for understanding of what obstacles may limit successful engagement in family structures which can help to guide future initiatives that support these needs.

Data Gathering

As stated previously, eligible participants included fathers who identified as Black/African American, over 18 years of age, who were raised without a stable influential male figure who was emotionally engaged, physically accessible, and who assumed responsibility and material support for them consistently throughout childhood. All participants resided in a populous metropolitan area and were either respondents from local community outreach efforts or had been referred by CSUSB representatives (students and staff). The majority of participants utilized a QR code to reach the eligibility screen form. Others were referred to the researcher and eligibility was determined via phone. Eligible participants were scheduled for a Zoom interview at a time that is convenient to both the participant and the researcher.

Phases of Data Collection

Once participants were identified as eligible and scheduled for the Zoom interview, participants were provided with an informed consent that was reviewed and accepted prior to the start of the interview. At the start of the interview, the

researcher reviewed eligibility and demographic information with the respondent. At the next stage, each participant was asked a set of pre-developed questions that addressed the participants' experience as a father and how they understood fatherhood in the absence of a father figure growing up. Open-ended questions were used to allow participants to express themselves fully, ensuring that the data collected exemplified a robust perspective of their fatherhood experience. It was essential to the research that the participants felt comfortable sharing their experiences in a space free of judgment. In this way, the researcher would be able to elicit specific experiences and identify recurring themes and patterns across the spectrum of participants' perceptions of fatherhood

Data Recording

The interviews were recorded and transcribed via Zoom with the participants' consent which allowed the researcher to review responses in depth. The initial review of the data analyzed the participants' accounts of what was happening in the study. This includes information gathered through the assessment, engagement, and planning stages along with notations from participant responses. The secondary review allowed for the notation of reflective perspectives regarding the structure of the research plan and any discoveries or adjustments that are determined necessary as they occur.

Data Analysis

As this is a qualitative study, the data gathered was analyzed using conventional content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). This form of analysis

best serves this study as it accommodates for the limited information regarding the focus of the data and can help to identify unique complexities experienced by the participants beyond theories that have been majorly based around a deficit-focused model. Data collected seeks to uncover barriers that fathers may face from a high-level perspective that will allow the researcher to draw into specific areas that may be improved upon. By utilizing this method, the research can establish patterns of strengths and barriers that may impact their level of engagement. After reviewing participant responses, the data were transcribed by the researcher in an attempt to identify common verbiage regarding participants' experiences. From this, the research structured a framework to analyze, creating common dimensions that can be used to structure the meaning of the data gathered (Morris, 2013). These data were then compared against literature previously available concerning this topic. The intersection of the information gathered will be used to help develop strategies that future change makers can utilize to create opportunities to advocate change that is supported by the research.

Termination and Follow-Up

The termination plan of a research study was an active topic throughout this study to keep the focus of the data geared toward a greater understanding of the conceptual actualization of fatherhood without an example growing up. It was the goal of the research to utilize the data sourced from the study to build upon the training and guidance being provided to Black American fathers by way of

revision and creation of support programs. The hope is that this research can contribute to knowledge that can challenge society to seek understanding beyond popularized perception.

Summary

This chapter provided an overview of what processes were used to enact this research study. As discussed, the researcher utilized the non-probability snowball sampling method as described in the reading to identify participants eligible participants and obtain their consent. Next, data collection was initiated via an online eligibility survey completed by potential respondents who identified as Black American fathers who did not have a father in their lives growing up and their experience in identifying in the role themselves. This was followed by a virtual interview conducted via Zoom regarding their experiences. As the study progressed, the researcher maintained awareness of the data collected, notating any changes or developments to the research as they occurred. The researcher ensured that the participants were aware of the goals, and the timeline for the research, and informed participants as to where the finding will be published once concluded.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

This study included six participants who were recruited over a six-month period (October 2023 through March 2024). Three of the participants were identified via a Google Drive demographic survey where their eligibility was verified and were then scheduled for an in-depth interview. The other three participants were referred by the community outreach efforts and utilized the Calendly app to schedule an in-depth interview at a time that satisfied both the participant and researcher's schedule. As noted in Table 1 below, all participants self-identified as Black American fathers residing in major U.S. cities, who had not been raised with their biological father present or actively involved in their lives. Their average age was 48 ($SD = 11$), two participants had two children with the remaining participants having four or more children. Four participants stated that they currently lived with their partner. Four participants reported having biological children only with the other two having a combination of biological and non-biological children.

TABLE 1

Demographical Characteristics of Study Sample

	M	S.D.
Sex		
Male	6	
Race/Ethnicity		
African American/Black	6	
Age	47.66	10.68
Number of Children	3	
One (0)		
Two (2)		
Three or more (4)		
Living with a Partner	3	
Yes (4)		
No (2)		
Family Dynamic	3	
Biological Children Only (4)		
Non-Biological Children Only		
Combination of Bio/Non-Bio Children (2)		

The qualitative data was analyzed by the researcher through a comprehensive reading process seeking out similarities and differences leading to the identification of recurring themes and subthemes discovered within the data. These themes were then reviewed and discussed with the research advisor to ensure the applicability of the identified themes. As shown in Table 2, three major themes emerged from the data: *Forging Fatherhood*, which described how they develop their roles as fathers, *Systems of Support* which describes the ways in which they receive both personal and societal support, and *Barriers to Fatherhood* which captures obstacles that have challenged their role in their children's lives. The participant's intonation and emotional response were also

considered and noted in the data review. The themes and subthemes are described further below and supported with relevant quotes from the participants.

Table 2

Themes and Subthemes	Description
Forging Fatherhood <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defining Fatherhood • Identifying Children's Needs • Setting Children Up for the Future • Measuring Success as a father 	This theme emphasizes core values and beliefs expressed by the interview participants and how these fathers have engaged in fatherhood without a model to guide them.
Systems of Support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proactive Supporters • Role Models • Environmental Supports 	This theme addresses how fathers feel supported in their roles and what has helped to shape how they embody their role as a father.
Barriers to Fatherhood <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Societal Barriers • Legal Barriers • Race-related Implications 	This theme addresses some of the barriers that these fathers have faced on their fatherhood journey and how it informs their role.

Forging Fatherhood

Defining Fatherhood

The participants were asked to share how they define fatherhood and what the role means to them personally. From this emerged the first main subtheme that centered around their core values and beliefs as it pertained to Black fatherhood. One value that came up consistently was the desire to be a stable presence in their children's lives. Though the participants' relationships with their children's mothers varied, they all recognized that their presence in

their children's lives was essential, especially in the absence of their own fathers growing up. As explained by one father in this study,

“Not having a father, I knew I didn’t want to do that to my child. I think that was one of the biggest things (for me). I didn’t want to do what was done to me.”

This perspective was echoed by another father as he shared his definition of fatherhood,

“I described fatherhood as being there. Most importantly...just being there as much as possible. Doing the necessary work to be there. Being responsible. Being safe. Being vulnerable.”

Another core value that was common among the respondents focused on the importance of being a protector. Many fathers shared that recognizing the importance of safeguarding their children from negative influences, distractions, and potential harm helped their children be better prepared for their experiences in the world. As stated by one of the participants,

“The presence of a father really is instrumental in (your children) knowing that protection, and feeling safe because when they do feel safe, they’re able to explore the world in a way that they know they can come back home and be safe and be secure. And I think that just the presence of a father in a home provides safety and security.”

Others also noted how their upbringing influenced their beliefs and practices as fathers, often drawing guidance from their life experiences and observations in childhood. One father explained this by sharing:

I mean going back to my brother. [pause] When I was a kid, I fell, and I was like freaking out. I don't remember why, but I felt like I was freaking out and he just walked over to me, and he told me what was going on wasn't that serious. 'The hardest part of what's going on is the fact that I haven't gotten up' and he's like 'That's why you're crying' or 'That's why you're feeling the way you're feeling because you think what's happening to right now is the worst when it's not. You're able to get up. So, if you fall, just get up and then think about what happened and see if it affects you the same way.' He never allowed me to fall and cry when you are still on the ground. He'd say, 'Get up and if you feel like crying, cry, but the first thing you need to focus on is just getting up.

Identifying Children's Needs

The second subtheme within the context of understanding fatherhood involved participants sharing their understanding of how they identified their children's needs. As explained through the data, fathers recognized the significance of their role and as such, sought to understand how to meet the needs of their children at any given moment. One father explained this through the lens of spending time with his daughter,

“I truly think it comes down to what’s needed at the time. Whether that’s, you know, a strong father figure or...a princess teatime with your daughter. I think it’s just knowing the role is needed and accomplishing it.”

Another father shared the importance of seeing your children as individuals to better understand their needs:

I have five kids so each one of my children, I have to deal with each one a little bit differently. I have one kid (who’s) more sensitive to certain things that I say. Another kid, he’s very logical. He wants to explain his point. He wants to make sure he’s understood and heard and then I have another child that, it doesn’t matter what’s going on, (they’re) crying, right? So, it just depends. So, you have to really learn each individual child and know what it is that child needs. And if you provide that, I think the relationship remains strong and you’re able to communicate.

All six participants elaborated on how their presence, their engagement, and their ability to communicate enabled them to better identify their children’s needs. One father explained it in this way:

When I first had my kids, I didn’t know (what they needed) ...but now, I know exactly what they need. You just keep spending that time. The more time you spend with them, the more you’ll know. ‘Oh, OK. So, this person likes things this way. I know he needs a little bit of attention here. I know I can’t

yell at him like this. I know he can't take this. He can't take that'. So, it's just experience.

Setting Children up for the Future

The third subtheme involved participants identifying the importance of setting their children up for the future as another important aspect of Black fatherhood. They emphasized the value of providing appropriate guidance to help shape their children's development into adulthood. One father described preparing their children for life in this way:

(Fatherhood)... I'd say it's a privilege and as a privilege, it's an opportunity to teach, to almost...I want to say, minister. I think it's a, it's a blessing. It's a privilege. It's definitely a responsibility. There's a lot of information you try to pass down, whatever you know to your children in hopes that they can avoid some of the mistakes you made and become successful individuals. And you want the best for the children that you're raising. So, you're just trying to provide the information to help them get there to the best of your ability.

Other participants focused on the importance of teaching their children how to be prepared for the demands of the greater society, such as education, employment, housing, and financial responsibilities. One father described the importance of financial literacy in this way:

I think what's important is trying to give your kids a little bit better start than you may have got...telling them how important it is to get a job. The biggest

thing is how important it is to kind of have some good credit and you know I didn't know about credit for a long time. I mean, my mom had mentioned it, but it was in one ear and out the other. I didn't realize it until later when I was like, "Why is that my stuff so high? Somebody else's (interest rate) is so low", and then this lady told me, she said, "You have bad credit, that's why". And so, then I was like, OK...I had to tell my son to because he is older. "You need a job...but you *need* a career. Having the little job you had, that was cool", I said, "But you *need* a career. So when you retire, you get money for nothing". I said, "That's where I'm now. I get money for nothing". I'm done.

Fathers also shared the importance of modeling behaviors that they felt would be beneficial to their children as adults. As one father shared, he had a specific interest in making sure that his son exemplified healthy masculine expression:

(Fathers) perform the role of defining the difference between unhealthy masculinity and healthy masculinity. They can define the role as an individual that is dependable. These types of attributes: Dependability. Responsibility. Depending on context, competitive. Courageous regardless of fear.

Measuring Success as Fathers

The final subtheme to emerge from the participants' description of their role as a father was in recognition of their success as a father. Most fathers felt

that this was best exhibited through their children's actions as they matured. As one father shared,

“You don't truly know. All you could do is just try your best. It'll be based on trial and error. And you'll get some things that you try to teach your kids. You'll see it in them.”

As stated previously, participants identified communication as a strong indicator that fathers have achieved success within their roles. One father explained:

You keep close connections with your kids. If you have that, then...they'll always call you and talk to you and check on you and they'll just call you when it's on their mind... and I have a good bond with all my kids, and they just feel like I'm a different kind of dad.

Systems of Support

The second theme to emerge involved systems of support that these Black fathers received that helped them to better navigate their parental path. This included three subthemes: proactive supporters, the impact of role models, and the ways in which their environments helped to guide them.

Proactive Supporters

Within Black culture, the African proverb “it takes a village to raise a child” is commonly used in reference to the idea that appropriate guidance, emotional support, and physical development all flourish through the proactive support of individuals in the community in which children are raised (Rubert et al., 2022).

This subtheme helped to contextualize how the intentional presence of those individuals who support these fathers has helped to ensure their success in fatherhood. One participant shared the encouragement he receives from his wife:

(My wife), helped me to become a better person which has influenced the way I am a father. She helped raise my daughter, so she was able to...see blind spots that I don't or might not want to recognize in the relationship with my daughter.

Another aspect of this idea was expressed in how others' recognition of his value helped him to be more deeply engaged in his role:

I would say the biggest support I have as a black father on, let's say for example, how I impact my children, I think it's supportive that I have people that value me. So, for example, if the things that I'm trying to teach my children are backed by the other folks in their circle, you know, aunties and mom and grandparents that are also, you know, that whole idea that it takes a village.

Role Models

The second subtheme to emerge pertains to the influence of male role models and how their influence has inspired them to prioritize their children's well-being over mimicking the intergenerational patterns that have plagued the social perspective of Black fatherhood. One participant shared how consistently observing other Black fathers in his community helped drive him to further develop his fatherhood skills:

Just kind of watching men who are fathers... who were fathers. Yeah, just seeing other men step up and do it even when the kids weren't theirs. You know, they stepped in, did what they needed to do to take care of those children, make sure those children were safe, make sure those children had everything that they needed.

Other examples included participants' recognition of positive fatherhood practices as represented through media they consumed throughout childhood. One father described how fathers on family sitcoms inspired his future role as a father:

My sources were the 'Fresh Prince of Bel Aire', and 'Family Matters'. Oh, the show with Alan Thicke... 'Family Ties', *Mr. Feeny* from 'Boy Meets World'. [laughs] Yeah, the father figures in those shows or the father-like mentor figures in those shows, *Mr. Feeny*, who is the principal. Their guidance is what kind of shaped me and shaped my understanding of what a father needed to be. Specifically, *Uncle Phil* [*"Fresh Prince of Bel Aire"*]. And *Carl Winslow* [*"Family Matters"*]. But *Uncle Phil*...he was firm. He was strict. You know, he was mean, but he had a heart and all of that was just love. No matter the form that he chose to show it, he treated everybody with love and affection, and protection, and he was dependable. So those are the sources that I use to shape what I believe a good father figure should be.

Environmental Supports

The third subtheme to emerge was reflected through a few participants who noted how environmental factors, including exposure to diverse perspectives

and experiences, helped to define their individual attitudes and behaviors as fathers, fostering tolerance and personal growth. One participant explained how a change in his environment helped him to be more open in his approach,

“Moving from where I was raised to Los Angeles...opened me up more to various and diverse ways of thinking and being...it made me more tolerant of people having different lifestyles.”

As the interviews progressed, participants shared how their community helped to support their efforts to be a healthy representation of a man in the lives of their children. As one father shared, members of his community helped him understand the changes that he needed to make in his life to be the best version of himself for his children:

(Mentors from the community) help me from recover from addiction based off my trauma. They showed me through their lives how important women in their lives were to them. How important it was to maintain those relationships based on the way you treated them. So, I was able to have healthy relationships.

Barriers to Fatherhood

This final theme addressed how societal barriers impact Black fathers' ability to assume their roles comfortably and confidently. This included the following subthemes: societal barriers, legal challenges, and race-related implications.

Societal Barriers

Throughout the interviews, participants expressed frustration over the lack of support and recognition they receive as fathers, noting that they often feel overlooked and unsupported by societal systems. Some fathers noted that they feel challenged when trying to identify programs and provisions that are specifically geared for fathers. One participant scoffed at the thought of being intentionally supported:

In what ways do I feel supportive as a father? [laughs]. I really don't feel like I get a lot of support.... see, we never get asked... I'm not going to say never. We don't get asked, "What do we need or what do we want" as fathers? You know what I'm saying? Like, there isn't much support. You know most of...If you look at like the governmental stuff, it's all catered toward the mothers.

This perspective was echoed throughout many of the interviews, noting how both cultural and interpersonal barriers, such as societal perceptions, relationship dynamics, and gender-based challenges within the welfare system, hinder effective fatherhood. A participant explained his experience stating:

I think that for one there's just a divide when it comes to things that are posted on social media, the way that things are handled from the aspect of just relationships because a lot of times a mother and father relationship can ruin the parent-child relationship...just in general men and women that don't get along and their children are suffering I think those are some of the

barriers. You know, people have talked for years about how the welfare system is and how that can somewhat create a barrier because it's easier for mom to be on welfare and just leave dad than for them to work things out or try to figure things out together or whatever the case may be. So, there are systemic barriers. As I said, there are cultural barriers in how we're raised and we are not always really taught how to be a father, how to be a husband, be a wife, be a mother. I think there's something missing in our culture and in some homes.

Legal Barriers

Another common subtheme noted as a barrier for many fathers pertained to how the involvement of judicial systems shapes their ability to be present in the lives of their children. Participants expressed frustration with how the court processes perpetuate societal norms that marginalize the role of fathers within black communities. One father shared his experience with the court highlighting inequities in decisions regarding child support:

It was important to me to be in my child's life which was not her mother's point. I just wanted to make sure I was accessible to my child. Long story short, there are things I think that don't pertain to the judicial system that they kind of just entered themselves into. Like child support to me is weird. I think that child support should just be based on the cost of living for a child and then that should be cut in half and then for just pure necessities, so learning, shelter, food. Whatever the average (cost) is on the zip code

where the main parent lives. It should just be based off of that. You know, the bare necessities should be provided to the child and then an agreement should be had on whether more is needed for something else. Whatever the case, you don't put these large percentages on the pay of the father trying to be in the child's life. Making it more difficult for them to be in the child's life. Let alone, you know, going through the system, it was very blatant to me that a child under 6 years old... the father truly doesn't have any say. The mother does. I mean, unless you can prove that the mother is an unfit mother and that had would have to be extreme circumstances of drug or abuse...provable drug or physical abuse. So that's another issue for me. I think, being a father honestly, it was said to me in court off record, that the unfortunate thing is the fathers who try to be in their kid's life, especially under the age of 5 or 6, actually suffer more than the fathers who didn't try. So, getting a court involved wasn't the best decision."

Race-related Implications

Racism in America has deeply shaped the parenting experiences of Black fathers, influencing how they navigate issues of safety, identity, mental health, education, and community support for their children. In response to being asked how he was supported as a Black father, one participant exclaimed,

"No! You mean as a Black man?! As a Black father?! As a Black father in this society, I am not supported at all because I'm a Black male. Before I'm a father, I'm a Black man."

This sentiment was reiterated throughout the interviews. Many participants elaborated on how racial marginalization has impacted not only their perception of themselves as fathers but in how they parent their children. As a participant shared his experience talking to his son about how to engage the world as a Black male, he appeared to be almost at a loss for words:

It's hard as a man when you're trying to tell your kids, especially your son, certain things that you don't want to have to tell them about being a young black boy, and that's hard, real hard because, when you see certain things, it kind of hurts your soul a little bit.

Summary

This section discusses the nuanced understanding of fatherhood among Black men, revealing core values and experiences that shape their roles as fathers. Participants emphasized the importance of stability and presence in their children's lives, stemming from their own experiences of their father's absence in childhood. Protectiveness emerged as another significant value, with fathers aiming to shield their children from negative influences. Drawing from personal upbringing, participants highlighted the need to understand and cater to their children's individual needs, fostering strong bonds through communication and engagement. Additionally, fathers viewed their role as preparing their children for the future, imparting life lessons, and modeling behaviors for success. Despite their commitment, fathers expressed encountering societal barriers, including a

lack of support systems and systemic biases within legal and cultural frameworks, compounded by racial discrimination.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

The objective of this study was to explore how Black fathers engage in their own fatherhood journey in the absence of their own fathers growing up. Using the data gathered through this research, this section discusses how the emergent themes and subthemes align within the context of existing literature. This is followed by an interpretation of any unexpected results and their potential causes. Limitations within the research are addressed followed by suggestions for future research that may build upon the focus of this project. This section concludes with a restatement of the most significant findings and their implications within social work practice and policy.

Discussion

As stated in the previous chapter, one of the first themes to emerge from the research explained how the participants defined fatherhood. Participants shared a profound commitment to fatherhood grounded in their own experiences of paternal absence. The fathers explained how they prioritized a commitment to their children which was rooted in core values such as being present, providing stability, resilience, and responsibility which bolsters their perception of what a father should exemplify in the lives of their children. These core values and beliefs were generally consistent across the interview group. This contrasts with

prior literature that suggested that Black fathers construct their identities as fathers ideologically around the idea of being an absentee father (Hunter et al., 2006). By enacting these values, Black fathers seek to combat the risks associated with fatherhood absence (National Fatherhood Initiative, 2019).

As participants shared their experiences as Black fathers, it was apparent to the researcher that each participant held a lot of pride in being able to provide for the children's needs in the hope that they appropriately prepared them for the future. As one participant shared about his fatherhood journey:

“It means the world. You know, they are people who depend on you for several things. Mentorship, wisdom, protection. I just feel that it's a very, very important role that needs to be taken seriously.”

This aligns with prior research which highlights the importance of the intentional inclusion of the father in the life of a child and how that can contribute to their overall well-being (Cowan et al, 2007).

When discussing how to measure one's success as a father, participants consistently acknowledged that their children's ability to make sound decisions and flourish into maturity is the only true measurement of their success. This appears to be reflective of a dedication to their role in a selfless way. This theme aligns with a study of Black American single fathers who identified the importance of having a personal commitment and dedication to their children regardless of any obstacles that might arise (Robinson, 2017).

The second theme to emerge from the research addressed the support Black fathers receive as they embark on their parental journey. As one father mentioned, the African proverbial notion of "it takes a village to raise a child" frames the collaborative endeavor of nurturing and guidance of the next generation. These fathers noted how they are able to draw strength from intergenerational connections, leveraging collective wisdom, and support to navigate the complexities of parenthood. Participants noted how their mothers, uncles, partners, and even faith-based communities helped to support their ability to care for their children. As discussed in a previous study, extended family support promotes a collective approach to fatherhood, distributing the responsibility of raising and nurturing a child beyond the biological father to include other male relatives like brothers, uncles, and grandfathers (Mkhize, N. 2004, as cited in Ncayuyane & Nel, 2023).

Like the preceding theme, Black fathers expressed how they draw inspiration from male role models within their communities, observing responsible fatherhood as demonstrated by family members, friends, and even fictional characters on TV. In reviewing the literature regarding this theme, there is a parallel between fathers' connection to the stories viewers consume on television and the influence these characters have on Black fathers' perception of their role within the world they live in (Cantor, 1991; Ward, 2004 as cited in Boddie, et al., 2024). Considering this, it is important to capitalize upon opportunities to highlight positive representations of both Black males inclusive of their roles as fathers.

However, this continues to remain a challenge in American media as it continues to perpetuate stereotypes of Black males that influence the societal perspective of who these men really are. A 2011 study titled "Media Representations & Impact on the Lives of Black Men and Boys" underscored a compelling correlation: negative depictions of black men in mass media significantly correlate with diminished life expectations within this demographic (The Opportunity Agenda, 2011 as cited by Donaldson, 2015). These portrayals, pervasive across various mediums, not only erect barriers to societal progress but also insidiously normalize and perpetuate biases. In response to literature and research studies that seek to understand Black fatherhood, one father explained his relation to societal identity in this way:

Being born a black father or being born a black child with no father, you're a statistic now. You're in the common misconception statistic, I guess, I'll label it that. And then you have a child out of wedlock and, you know, if you're not present, that child will continue that. So, just knowing or reading an article like that and knowing that you're not the bad guy. It's kind of cool to know that, you know, being without a father, it happens. And even though you didn't have a father, you had, you know, mother figures in your life that showed you how to be empathetic. Something you might not have learned if you were living in a home with a father, you might have just tried to align with that father figure in your home. So, I thought that stood out.

It's good to know you're not just a statistic. A negative statistic, I should say. Statistics are fine but negative...yeah.

The last theme identified barriers that fathers encountered on their journey. Participants discussed multifaceted challenges within societal, legal, and race-related realms. Societal barriers that stem from a lack of support and recognition, compounded by systemic flaws that prioritize mothers and how they hinder effective parental roles for Black fathers. Highlighted was the blaring absence of accessible community support systems for fathers and societal structures that create upheaval that limits their ability to be present. Marred by this frustration, one participant shared:

Being in a System of white supremacy that undervalues and marginalizes black men *and* black women. Black trans people, regardless of community. The marginalization of black boys in the school-to-prison axiom and or pipeline. I can go on and on and on. But let's just leave that right where it's at.

Most participants scoffed at the idea of feeling supported by society, noting the absurdity of the question. This speaks volumes to the lack of support fathers feel they are provided when attempting to care for their children. This was especially the case when discussing co-parenting relationships. Some fathers noted how legal barriers through the judicial system tend to favor mothers, restricting fathers' involvement, particularly with younger children. Participants explained how legal decisions related to custody and child support held them in a space of

disparity which limited their ability to not only care for their children but in some cases, limited their ability to even spend time with them. Studies such as those conducted by the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services note the disparities experienced by Black families and pay special attention to the fact that intentional focus needs to be given to Black fathers who are forced to engage in the child welfare system (DCFS, n.d.).

Moreover, race-related barriers permeate experiences, affecting safety, identity formation, and community support, shaping Black fathers' perceptions and abilities to parent effectively amidst systemic prejudices. As they expressed a desire to break generational cycles of fatherlessness, participants felt limited by societal perception of their role. This perception coincides with the deficit-based lens that research and reports often place against Black fathers. Viewing them as 'nonessential participants' when it comes to addressing parenting and familial structure (McLanahan et al., 2013). This also highlights the ongoing systemic barriers that continue to affect Black fathers (Rose, 2024).

Unexpected Results

It should be noted that, as the interviews developed, there was a notable shift in the intonation and engagement of the fathers. This usually occurred shortly after the midway point. The researcher observed an eagerness to share their stories in a way that could not be fully encapsulated in the limited scope of this project. It was interpreted as the participants having the opportunity to share

a part of themselves that they are rarely asked about, often leading to more elaborate responses to the second half of the questions. It is recommended that future research explore this phenomenon as it may yield a more robust understanding of black fatherhood. It also highlights the importance of engaging Black fathers genuinely as the stories likely emerged after they felt heard and valued, which is not commonly experienced based on what they described in the themes and subthemes.

Limitations

One obvious limitation of this research was in the researcher's ability to obtain the buy-in of eligible participants as Black fathers were not easily enrolled in the study. As noted earlier, historically Black Americans, regardless of gender, have a justifiable aversion to these types of studies, specifically studies that seek individuals of a certain demographic. Studies such as the Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment, which unethically sought black Americans as study participants only to not appropriately provide consent and then intentionally withheld treatments that were widely available is just one example of this valid fear (CDC, n.d.). It is recommended that there be a greater focus on building trust through an agency or community agency that may already have an established relationship with eligible clients enabling a more trusting relationship to be built.

Given the small sample size, the generalizability may be limited to Black males in large urban cities like the ones that participated in this study. More

qualitative studies should be done using larger representative samples to examine whether similar patterns emerge.

Implications

Micro Level Implications

At the micro level, this research may enable a deep-rooted commitment of Black fathers, shaped by their experiences of paternal absence focusing on their dedication as characterized by the core values identified by the data. Using this, social workers must engage directly with Black fathers in acknowledgment and support of these values, recognizing the significance of their presence in their children's lives. Additionally, understanding Black fathers' definition of success in fatherhood, centered on their children's well-being and development, which can inform interventions that aim at strengthening father-child relationships. Social workers can incorporate these insights into therapeutic approaches and goal setting with Black fathers and their families, fostering a deeper understanding of their unique perspectives and aspirations.

Mezzo Level Implications

At the mezzo level, this research emphasizes the importance of social support networks in Black fathers' parenting journeys. These networks, including extended family and community connections, play a crucial role in providing resources and guidance as well as support groups for Black fathers. Mezzo-level interventions should focus on facilitating and strengthening these support systems, recognizing their significance in helping Black fathers navigate the

challenges of parenthood. Moreover, addressing systemic barriers, such as legal processes that disadvantage fathers and societal perceptions that marginalize them, requires collaborative efforts and advocacy at the mezzo level. Social workers can work alongside legal and policy advocacy organizations to address these disparities and promote equitable treatment for Black fathers within the legal system, ensuring that they have the support and resources needed to fulfill their parental responsibilities.

Macro Level Implications

At the macro level, the research identifies the need for systemic changes to address societal and institutional barriers that hinder Black fathers' ability to parent effectively. Macro-level interventions should focus on advocating for policy reforms that promote father-inclusive practices within social service agencies, legal systems, and community support services. Additionally, challenging deficit-based narratives about Black fatherhood is essential at the macro level. Social workers can advocate for more inclusive and empowering representations of Black fathers in research, media, and public discourse, challenging stereotypes and promoting positive narratives that reflect the diverse experiences and strengths of Black fathers. By adopting a strengths-based approach and addressing systemic inequalities, social workers can better support Black fathers and promote positive outcomes for their children and families at all levels of intervention.

Summary

In summary, this research highlights the commitment of Black fathers to fatherhood, challenging stereotypes of absenteeism. It emphasizes the importance of social support networks while identifying significant societal, legal, and race-related barriers. Despite limitations in participant recruitment AND generalizability, the study suggests avenues for intervention at micro, mezzo, and macro levels to support Black fathers and promote positive outcomes for their families. Overall, it underscores the resilience and dedication of Black fathers and calls for comprehensive efforts to address systemic inequalities and uplift their invaluable contributions.

APPENDIX A
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD LETTER

CSUSB INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Administrative/Exempt Review Determination

Status: Determined Exempt

IRB-FY2023-387

James Simon Ericah Thomas
College of Social & B Sciences, CSBS - Social Work
California State University, San Bernardino
5500 University Parkway
San Bernardino, California 92407

Dear James Simon Ericah Thomas:

Your application to use human subjects, titled "RAISING A FATHER: HOW BLACK AMERICAN DADS ENGAGE FATHERHOOD IN THE ABSENCE OF THEIR OWN FATHERS" has been reviewed and determined exempt by the Chair of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of CSU, San Bernardino. An exempt determination means your study had met the federal requirements for exempt status under 45 CFR 46.104. The CSUSB IRB has weighed the risks and benefits of the study to ensure the protection of human participants.

This approval notice does not replace any departmental or additional campus approvals which may be required including access to CSUSB campus facilities and affiliate campuses. Investigators should consider the changing COVID-19 circumstances based on current CDC, California Department of Public Health, and campus guidance and submit appropriate protocol modifications to the IRB as needed. CSUSB campus and affiliate health screenings should be completed for all campus human research-related activities. Human research activities conducted at off-campus sites should follow CDC, California Department of Public Health, and local guidance. See CSUSB's [COVID-19 Prevention Plan](#) for more information regarding campus requirements.

You are required to notify the IRB of the following as mandated by the Office of Human Research Protections (OHRP) federal regulations 45 CFR 46 and CSUSB IRB policy. You can find the modification, renewal, unanticipated/adverse event, and study closure forms in the Cayuse IRB System. Some instructions are provided on the [IRB Online Submission webpage](#) toward the bottom of the page. Failure to notify the IRB of the following requirements may result in disciplinary action. The Cayuse IRB system will notify you when your protocol is due for renewal. Ensure you file your protocol renewal and continuing review form through the Cayuse IRB system to keep your protocol current and active unless you have completed your study.

- **Ensure your CITI Human Subjects Training is kept up-to-date and current throughout the study.**
- **Submit a protocol modification (change) if any changes (no matter how minor) are proposed in your study for review and approval by the IRB before being implemented in your study.**
- **Notify the IRB within 5 days of any unanticipated or adverse events are experienced by subjects during your research.**
- **Submit a study closure through the Cayuse IRB submission system once your study has ended.**

APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Black Fatherhood Eligibility Questionnaire (Will be issued via email/QR code and collected via Google Forms)

Please read the questions below carefully. If it is determined that you are eligible to participate in this research, you will be contacted to schedule a formal virtual interview.

Thank you for your interest.

Eligibility/Demographic Questions:

1. Are you at least 18 years of age? **Y/N**
2. Do you live in a metropolitan city? **Y/N**
3. I am a Black American father to: (choose all that apply)
 - a. My biological child/ren
 - b. My step/bonus child/ren
 - c. My adopted child/ren
 - d. A child within my social group or community
4. Growing up, I had limited or no engagement with a biological or father-like figure in the home (i.e., an influential male figure who was emotionally engaged, physically accessible, and who assumed responsibility and material support for you consistently throughout childhood)? **Y/N**

** If the participant's answers identify them as ineligible, the survey will thank them for their time and automatically conclude.*

Fatherhood Interview Questions

Thank you again for your participation in this research. We ask that you answer as many questions as you feel comfortable answering. Please be sure to respond thoroughly and as honestly as possible. There are no right or wrong answers. Your beliefs, perceptions, and experiences are most important in this process. Therefore, I would like you to respond to the questions with YOUR OWN BELIEFS without worrying about what others might believe.

1. How many children do you have?
2. How do you define fatherhood?
3. What does being a father mean to you?
4. What roles do you see fathers performing in children's lives?
5. Are there people who have influenced you as a father? If so, who are they? (List the people and explain how they have influenced you. There is no limit on the number of people you can list).
6. What are some of your strongest beliefs about being a father?
 - a. What are the sources of those beliefs?

- b. Are there any of these which you consider more influential than others?
- 7. Describe your relationship with your father (or father figure)
- 8. Describe your relationship with your grandfather(s). Please specify maternal or paternal grandfather.
- 9. How have your childhood experiences affected you as a father?
- 10. What do you feel children need most from their fathers?
 - a. How does a father know what a child needs?
- 11. How do men learn to be fathers?
- 12. How does someone know if he is a good father?
- 13. Besides the people and beliefs you have cited, has there been anything else important that has influenced you as a father?
 - Is there anything more you would like to share?

**Interview questions were developed by the researcher in advance.*

APPENDIX C
EMAIL SAMPLE

Subject Line: How did you learn how to be a dad?
Subhead: You can contribute to Black Fatherhood Research
Body Copy:

Hello,

My name is Ericah Thomas, and I am a student in the social work graduate studies program at California State University, San Bernardino, conducting a study regarding Black fatherhood. We are currently recruiting biological fathers, stepfathers, bonus dads, and other Black males who have assumed a fatherhood role in the life of a child but did not grow up with a father in their life.

This research aims to gain a greater understanding of how Black American fathers in inner-city communities have assumed the role of fatherhood without necessarily having a role model to guide them. We would like to understand how fatherhood is approached; the motivations, and challenges, and how fatherhood success is determined by you!

Are you eligible?

Participants must be:

- 18 years or older
- Must be a Black/African American biological, step or bonus father, or have taken on a father figure role in the life of a child in your community.
- Grew up without an active father figure in the home (i.e., an influential male figure who was emotionally engaged, physically accessible, and who assumed responsibility and material support toward their child)
- Live in a metropolitan city
- Have access to a computer with a camera.

What's Required?

Eligible participants will be interviewed virtually. The interview will consist of questions about your experience with fatherhood. This may include influential factors experienced throughout childhood and what impact, if any, your experience has shaped your role as a father.

If there are any questions regarding this project, please do not hesitate to contact me. We thank you for your support in building upon this knowledge base regarding Black fatherhood.

All the Best,
Ericah Thomas, MSW Student
007567996@coyote.csusb.edu

APPENDIX D
PARTICIPATION FLIER

IRB IRB-FY2023-387
Date Approved: PENDING
Expiration date: PENDING



BLACK DADS

Are you a Father, a Step/Bonus dad, or in a fatherhood role,
but did not grow up with a father who showed you the ropes?

This study may be for you!

What is this study about?

We are looking for Black American men who are fathers, stepfathers, or Black men who have assumed the role of a father in their community and were not raised with a father growing up.

The aim of this research is to gain a greater understanding of the experiences, successes, and limitations, that have shaped their experience with fatherhood

Are you eligible?

- 18 years or older
- Reside in a Metropolitan city in the US
- Must identify as a Black/African American father, step/bonus father, or have assumed the role of a father figure to a child in your community
- Grew up without an active father figure present
 - (i.e., an influential male figure who was actively and emotionally engaged, physically accessible, and who assumed responsibility and material support toward their child)
- Have access to a computer with camera access

What's Required?

- Participate in a scheduled virtual interview
- Questions**
- Ericah Thomas, MSW Student
 - Email: 007567996@coyote.csusb.edu



**Please use the QR
code to participate.**

*This study has been approved by the California State
University, San Bernardino Institutional Review Board*



APPENDIX E
INFORMED CONSENT

**PROJECT TITLE: How Black American Dads engage Fatherhood
in the Absence of their own Fathers.****Invitation and Purpose:**

My name is Ericah Thomas, and I am a MSW Student at California State University, San Bernardino. You have been invited to participate in a study to understand how Black American dads engage fatherhood in the absence of their own fathers growing up. The aim of the research is to learn about what experiences and actions have shaped how you show up as a dad without having a model to guide you.

Description of the Study:

The proceeding questionnaire includes questions about fatherhood, your experience growing up, and what role the role of fatherhood means to you today. With your participation, the goal is to grow the knowledge we have about Black fathers which may lead to better family support programs within the community.

Participation:

The questionnaire is anonymous and should not take longer than 15-20 minutes to complete. Some of the questions may ask about personal topics and the risk to you is minimal. Participation in this study is completely voluntary and you do not have to answer any questions you do not wish to answer. Also, you may withdraw from participation at any time. Although there is no direct benefit to you from taking part in this evaluation, I hope that the research will provide information that will contribute to our knowledge in this research.

Privacy, data storage, and future use of data

This questionnaire will be anonymous and no identifiable information will be collected. However, a code will be assigned to responses for reference. The data collected will be downloaded by the researcher to a password-protected computer and responses will be transcribed to be included in the research findings.

Research Results:

This study will be published at the university scholar works (<https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu>) website and it will also be disseminated at the school of Social Work Research Symposium at the end of the 2024 academic year.

Question/Contact:

This study is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Rigaud Joseph, BSW, MSW, PhD, California State University, San Bernardino. This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board, California State University, San Bernardino.

CONFIRMATION STATEMENT:

* I understand that I must be 18 years of age or older to participate in your study, have read and understand the consent document and agree to participate in your study.

APPENDIX F
RESOURCE GUIDE

Resource Guide

Project Fatherhood (The Children's Institute)

This unique program provides comprehensive parenting skills to men in caregiving roles—including fathers, stepfathers, foster parents, and relative caregivers—using an innovative support group model. Get in touch by clicking the link below or reaching out at 213-260-7604 or nvasquez@childrensinstitute.org. <https://www.childrensinstitute.org/project-fatherhood/>

Fathers Uplift

Fathers' UpLift provides mental health counseling, coaching, advocacy, and resource support to assist fathers with overcoming barriers (racism, emotional, traumatic, and addiction-based barriers) that prevent them from remaining engaged in their children's lives. <https://www.fathersuplift.org/>

Black Infants and Families – Los Angeles

The Los Angeles County African American Infant and Maternal Mortality (AAIMM) Prevention Initiative is a coalition of the Department of Public Health in partnership with First 5 LA and the LA County Department of Health Services, Department of Mental Health, community organizations, mental and health care providers, funders, and community members. We are united in one purpose: to address the unacceptably high rates of Black infant and maternal deaths countywide and ensure healthy and joyous births for Black families in LA County. <https://www.blackinfantsandfamilies.org/about>

Black Visions of Wellness (BVOW) at "UMMA" Community Clinic.

This program provides mental and physical health services designed to encourage healthy growth and development in underserved African/African American communities. Through the utilization of African-centered philosophy of treatment and education, the program aims to promote wellness and rally resources in the interest of health initiatives, cultural recognition, educational reinforcement, family building, and community revitalization. Qualifications include being black and African American and living in LA County. Provide counseling, holistic treatment (reiki, yoga, poetry, etc.), and case management, and create new services based on community needs. www.ummaclinic.org

The Black Mental Health Task Force

The Black Mental Health Task Force is a coalition of California mental health professionals, clients, non-profit organizations, community-based organizations, educators, community leaders, entrepreneurs, students, and artists who have united to support mental health wellness within the African American community. In addition to connecting with community-based organizations not yet in partnership; we are looking to positively impact Individuals who are looking to re-

identify with who they are and develop a healthier sense of whole-person wellness and community. <https://www.blackmentalhealthtaskforce.net/our-vision>

Fathers Incorporated

Fathers Incorporated is a national, non-profit organization working to build stronger families and communities through the promotion of responsible fatherhood. Established in 2004, FI has a unique seat at the national table, working with leaders in the White House, Congress, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Family Law, Business, Faith-Based, and the Responsible Fatherhood Movement. FI works collaboratively with organizations around the country to identify and advocate for social and legislative changes that lead to healthy father involvement with children, regardless of the father's marital or economic status, or geographic location. <https://fathersincorporated.com/about-us/>

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