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Strategies African American Stepfathers Use to Build Positive Relationships With Their Stepdaughters

Shauntele Peynado-Rogers
Walden University

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Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Shauntele Peynado-Rogers

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Review Committee

Dr. Sandra Harris, Committee Chairperson,
Human and Social Services Faculty

Dr. Kelly Chermack, Committee Member,
Human and Social Services Faculty

Dr. Garth den Heyer, University Reviewer,
Human and Social Services Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University
2020

Abstract

Strategies African American Stepfathers Use to Build Positive Relationships With Their
Stepdaughters

by

Shauntele Peynado-Rogers

MA, University of Phoenix, 2009

BS, Kean University, 2004

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Human and Social Services

Walden University

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Abstract

Researchers have shown that strained relationships between stepfathers and their stepchildren contribute to family dysfunction and stress. As the number of blended families in the United States continues to rise, it is important to determine how stepparents develop positive relationships with their stepchildren. The purpose of this study was to determine what strategies African American stepfathers use to develop positive, supporting relationships with their school aged stepdaughters. Family systems theory guided this research. The generic qualitative approach was used to conduct the study. Purposeful sampling resulted in data being collected from 7 participants using semi structured interviews. Colaizzi's 7-step method was used to analyze the data. Results from the background information revealed that participants: a) described their relationships with their stepdaughters as positive, b) expressed the desire to be ideal stepfathers, and c) described being a stepfather as a positive emotional experience. Findings further revealed that participants used the following strategies to develop positive relationships with their stepdaughters: a) began relationship with stepdaughters before marriage, b) accepts input from spouse, c) effectively manages conflict and tension, d) and takes actions to build trust and communication. The findings from this research make an original contribution to the literature by using a strengths-based approach surrounding stepfather-stepdaughter relationships in blended family homes. Human service professionals could use information from this study to promote social change by sharing with stepfathers, information regarding strategies they could use to develop positive relationships with their stepchildren.

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my parents. Years ago you migrated from Jamaica and had no idea where God was going to take you or your legacy. However, you prayed over your children and always wanted the best for us. As I am completing this journey I represent the outcome of your consistent prayers and fasting over the years. Your words and actions of love have not gone in vain and I am so blessed to have you as parents. Hence, Gloria and Wilbert Peynado just know WE did it! God be thanked!

I also dedicate this dissertation to my 3 amazing and beautiful children. CJ, Tori, and MJ always remember that with God and your family you can accomplish anything. Let this doctoral journey mom has completed, be a reminder that “The sky is the limit”! Each of you are gifted and unique and I am forever grateful that God chose me to be your mommy and to prayerfully see those gifts come to fruition. Never forget mommy believes in you and will always have your back. You all will be greater than I can ever imagine! I love you!

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“I want to say thank you Lord for all you have done for me!”- Walter Hawkins
Thank you God for giving me strength, wisdom, and the understanding to complete this journey!

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Secondly, to my family whom these mere words of expression will not suffice, I love you all. Specifically, to my husband Marcus thank you so much for your patience and understanding during these years. I know it has not been easy but your acts of love have not gone without notice. To my brothers, cousins, aunts and uncles for your unequivocal support, I appreciate you beyond words during this journey.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

The number of blended families in the United States is steadily increasing (Ganong & Coleman, 2017). A *blended family* is defined as a marriage between two people which include one or more children from previous relationships and who reside in the blended family home (Ganong & Coleman, 2017; Kumar, 2017). The blended family unit is different from a nuclear family as relationships must form between stepparents and stepchildren (Kumar, 2017). This formation can be quite complex. The blended family structure operates as a system with each person playing an important role (Kumar, 2017). One of the blended family subsystems includes the stepfather-stepchild relationship (Jensen and Pace, 2016). This relationship can be influenced by factors such as marital factors or even outside elements (Kumar, 2017). Blyaert, Van Parys, De Mol, and Buysse (2016) highlight the multiple roles that stepfathers play in the home to their stepchildren. These roles are important for stepfathers as they build relationships with their stepchildren.

The most recent statistical data shows that African American stepfathers are the most dominant population among blended families (Parker, 2011). According to Bryant Futris, Hicks, Lee, & Oshri (2016), African American stepfathers are the least studied population (Bryant et al., 2016). I was unable to locate empirical research to discuss the positive relationship between the African American stepfather and their stepdaughter.

This chapter contains background information on the topic, the problem statement, the purpose of the study, the theoretical framework, the nature of the study,

and definitions of key terms. Also included in this chapter is a discussion of the assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and significance of the study.

Background

There is research that discusses the structure and development of blended families. The background of this chapter presents information that discusses the dynamics of the stepfather and his stepchildren relationship. The information begins with the blended family cycle and continues with limited research about the African American stepfather.

Kumar (2017) provided insight on a blended family structure based on the blended family cycle. Some elements of the blended family cycle include developing relationships with a new partner, balancing a relationship outside of the parental role, handling external factors, and navigating children inside and outside of the blended family home. Elements that assist in the structure of the blended family unit include stepfathers understanding how to deal with ex spouses in relation to stepchildren, handling child related issues, and providing positive stepparent stepchild relationships. Ganong and Coleman (2017) synthesized literature on the blended family dynamics and its development into current society. Such topics included cultural context of blended families, effects of stepfamily living on children, and clinical perspectives on stepfamily dynamics. This current study addressed the development of the relationship between the stepparent and stepchild and highlighted interventions that could be used to support the relationship between stepparent and stepchild. Both studies by Kumar (2017) and Ganong and Coleman (2017) are relevant to the proposed study because the findings provided

insight on how the blended family cycle can work to promote a strong structure that can support a stepfather-stepchild relationship.

Several researchers have discussed how the success of the stepfather stepchild relationship hinges on the success of the marital relationship with the parents (Bryant et al., 2016; Jensen & Pace, 2016). Jensen and Pace (2016) conducted quantitative cross-sectional research to explore the association between stepfather involvement and the quality of stepfather-child relationships among diverse populations. The research revealed stepfathers can build a strong relationship with benefit assistance from the biological parent. The research further concluded that stepfathers benefit from the support of their partners as they begin to accept their new role of becoming a stepfather. The positive relationship building that occurs between stepfather and stepchildren are the same for diverse populations (Jensen & Pace, 2016).

Bryant et al. (2016) conducted quantitative research to identify associations between African American stepfather-stepchild relationship quality, depression, and quality of interactions in marriage. This research was one of the few studies that focused on African American stepfathers. Their findings revealed that the stepfather-stepchild relationship quality was positively associated with marital quality. These researchers concluded that the importance of the relationship between the stepparent and stepchild can be positively influenced if the marital relationship between the parents is positive.

There is research that also highlights how stepfathers view their adjustment of their roles within their new blended family. Blyaert, Van Parys, De Mol, and Buysse (2016) completed qualitative research about the stepfathers' experiences and the views of

their positions in the stepfamily. Blyaert et al. (2016) discussed their experiences within the stepfamily and how it affected the roles they adopted. The research further revealed that the stepfathers deemed themselves as friends or best friends to their stepchildren and not as parental figures. These findings provide insight on the stepfathers' perceptions of their roles as parental figures to their stepchildren. Jensen and Shafer (2013) completed a longitudinal study on stepfamily functioning and closeness based on the views of adolescents. Their findings indicated that the adolescents viewed their closeness with their stepfathers based on the outcomes of little arguments, their ability to have open conversations with stepparents, and the level of agreement between parents on parenting styles. These findings revealed that adolescents viewed their relationship with their stepfather based on the views given to them by their mothers. This research subsequently revealed that stepfathers were more likely to have a relationship with their stepsons than with their stepdaughters. Both Blyaert et al. (2016) and Jensen and Shafer (2013) studies connect to this study because their results provide a background of how positive and supporting relationships could be viewed by stepfathers and adolescents.

Problem Statement

The number of blended families is on the rise in the United States due to the increased number of remarriages (Jensen & Pace, 2016; Kumar, 2017). In the United States, more than 12%, or one in six, children in the United States live in a blended family (Ganong & Coleman, 2017; Parker, 2015). African Americans have higher rates of blended families than other ethnic/racial groups (Parker, 2011; Parker 2015). Sixty percent of African Americans have a step relative, compared to 39% Whites and 46 % of

Hispanics (Parker, 2011; Parker 2015). In addition, 21% of African Americans indicated they have a stepparent, compared to Whites and Hispanics with 18%. Lastly, 19% of African Americans revealed that they have stepchildren compared to Whites at 14% and Hispanics at 8% (Parker, 2011). These statistics revealed that, proportionately speaking, African American blended families are more prevalent than White and Hispanic families.

Members of blended families in the United States experience difficulties and challenges that contribute to family dysfunction and stress (Bryant et al., 2016; Kumar, 2017). Blended family members must learn to cohabitate and to function within the dynamics of their new family, which at times can be stressful for the family (Kumar, 2017). Stress in blended families has been linked to negative outcomes for children in those blended families (Bryant et al., 2016; Kumar, 2017). Some of the negative outcomes include children engaging in risky activity, and stunted growth and development of the children (Kumar, 2017). In addition, researchers have revealed that the divorce rate in blended families is higher than first marriages, likely due to the stresses and challenges endured by members in those families (Kumar, 2017). For instance, divorce statistics from 2012 showed the divorce rate for remarriages among blended families was 67% for second marriages and 74% for third marriages (Divorce Statistics, 2012). 2012 was the last year the United States census included divorce statistics in the census.

There is a body of research that has addressed the challenges and negative outcomes for blended families (Bryant et al., 2016; Kumar, 2017). Some of these challenges include high a divorce rate, undefined roles and boundaries within the blended

family, stereotyped family systems (Lucier-Greer, Adler-Baeder, Harcourt, Gregson, 2014; Kumar, 2017). There is also a body of literature which has examined the dysfunctional family dynamics between stepfathers and their stepchildren (e.g., Jensen & Shafer, 2013; King, Amato, Lindstrom, 2015; Amato, King, Thorsen, 2016; Blyaert et al., 2016, Van Parys, De Mol, Buysse, 2016; Jensen & Pace, 2016). The majority of the existing literature has focused primarily on the negative outcomes between stepfather and their stepchildren (e.g., Jensen & Shafer, 2013; Bryant, et al., 2016).

Several researchers have stated the need for further research to address the viewpoints and experiences of stepfathers regarding the development of relationships between their stepchildren (Ganong, Coleman, & Jamison, 2011; Jensen & Shafer, 2013). In addition, the body of existing literature has primarily examined the relationships between stepfathers and young children and/or adolescents (e.g., Jensen & Shafer, 2013; King et al., 2015; Amato et al., 2016; Jensen & Pace, 2016). Jensen and Shafer (2013) specifically discussed how stepdaughters are less likely to be close to their stepfathers than stepsons, highlighting the need for more information on these relationship dynamics.

There was a gap in the literature regarding articles that specifically focused on the development of positive relationships between stepparents and their stepchildren. In addition, I could not locate any literature in which researchers addressed the development of relationships between stepfathers and their stepdaughters, or specifically on how African American stepfathers in blended families build positive and supportive relationships with their preadolescent stepdaughters. This research focused specifically on African American stepfathers because statistically, African American men are more

likely to be stepparents than African American women and African American men are an understudied population (Parker, 2011; Bryant et al., 2016).

Purpose

The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to determine the strategies African American stepfathers used to build positive, supporting relationships with their school age stepdaughters. According to Bryant et al. (2016), African American fathers are an understudied population. Due to the increasing prevalence of African American stepfathers and the challenges they endure in developing and maintaining strong relationships in the blended family unit, there was a need for research that takes a strengths-based approach to determine strategies the stepfathers use to develop strong blended family relationships. Such information could potentially be used to inform the development of interventions that could be used to promote positive interactions among members of blended family units.

Research Question

What strategies do African American stepfathers in blended families use to develop positive, supporting relationships with their school age stepdaughters?

Framework

The theoretical framework for this study was based on the family systems theory. Family systems theory was created in the 1950 (Bowen, 1966). The family systems theory focuses on eight concepts which derive from the core belief that there is an emotional system within the family structure that influences the entire family system

(Bowen, 1966). The concepts most connected to this proposed study are the nuclear family emotional process and family projection process (Bowen, 1966).

The nuclear family emotional process emphasizes that there are four views for where tensions build within a family (Bowen, 1966). This concept was relevant to this study because it addressed areas where negative tensions may arise between family members including the stepfather and stepdaughter. Stepfathers can address the negative tensions by developing strategies based on understanding the nuclear family emotional process.

The family projection process emphasizes how parents transmit their problems and strengths to their children (Bowen, 1966). This concept was also relevant to this study because this study will attempt to identify how the positive emotions and strengths of stepfathers are transmitted to their stepdaughters. This transmission of emotions and strengths could likely provide positive impacts on their stepdaughters. Additional details regarding the principles of FST will be presented in Chapter 2.

Nature of the Study

The generic qualitative inquiry approach was used in this study. The generic qualitative inquiry is a useful approach to investigate individual attitudes and reflections of personal experiences of the outer world (Percy, Kostere, & Kostere, 2015). A generic qualitative approach was ideal for this research because it allowed me to frame the research and findings subjectively around the stepfathers' perceptions and reflections of what strategies they use to build positive relationships with their stepdaughters.

In qualitative research there are various sample sizes (Khalke, 2014; Percy et al., 2015). According to Percy et al. (2015) for generic qualitative research there is no specific sample size. However, the sample size is slightly larger to increase representation of the population (Percy et al., 2015). My sample size consisted of seven participants in order to gain a broad range of participant reflections of a phenomenon (Percy et al., 2015). Previous researchers have stated that generic qualitative data collection should include structured interviews (Khalke, 2014; Percy et al., 2015). The structured interviews should be inclusive of pre structured questions based on pre knowledge of the researcher (Percy et al., 2015). I used semi structured interviews in my data collection. The interview questions sought information rich responses. Purposeful and snowballing sampling assisted as the best way to recruit participants. Purposeful sampling is the method of recruiting participants by specific identifying information (Guest et al., 2006). I used this method by creating inclusion and exclusion criteria. Snowball sampling is the method for participant recruitment that happens when participants who know about the study refer other potential participants that fit the inclusion criteria to the researcher (Heckathorn, 2011). Data saturation is accomplished quickly by purposeful sampling (Guest et al., 2006). Purposeful sampling and snowball sampling can increase the likelihood of achieving data saturation (Guest et al., 2006). The more similar experiences the participants have the quicker saturation may be accomplished because the high probability of repetitive answers by participants (Guest et al., 2006).

Definitions

The following are common words and their definitions were used throughout this study.

Blended Family: A marriage between two people which include one or more children from previous relationships and who reside in the family home (Kumar, 2017).

African American: A person that self identifies as black, not white or Hispanic (Parker, 2011).

Stepfather: A man who is married to a woman and has accepted a parenting role over her child(ren); (Blyert et al., 2016).

School aged: A child between the ages of 6-12 (David, 2014).

Stepdaughter: A daughter of an individual's wife from a previous marriage or relationship.

Assumptions

One basic assumption that I made in this research is that there are stepfathers who have developed strategies for building positive relationships with their stepdaughters. Based on the research by Bryant et al. (2016), which indicates that African American stepfathers are an understudied population, I assumed that it was not going to be easy to find participants for my research. Social media, such as Facebook and Instagram, had African American social groups where I recruited participants. Another assumption was that each participant I interviewed would be truthful about their experiences with their stepdaughters. Another assumption is that once participants contacted me regarding participating in the interview, it would be easy to schedule them to complete the

interview. Furthermore, I assumed that participants would want to have a telephone interview because they feel more comfortable in sharing their experiences.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this study focused on strategies African American stepfathers use to create positive relationships with their school age stepdaughters. Negative relationships between the stepfather and stepdaughter could affect the entire blended family within any race. However, I only focused on the African American stepfathers and their positive relationships with their stepdaughters.

Previous researchers (Ganong, et al., 2017; Jensen & Pace, 2016) have shown that there are dysfunctional relationships between stepfathers with their stepchildren, in general. I only placed emphasis on the positive relationships between stepfathers and their stepdaughters. Other researchers have addressed the negative outcomes of the entire blended family as a unit (Bryant et al., 2016; Kumar, 2017). In this research, I did not explore the strategies and negative experiences of the entire blended family. This study only emphasized the stepfather and the strategies he used to create a positive relationship with his stepdaughter.

Cope (2014) defined *transferability* as the degree to which findings could be transferred to other situations or populations. This study only focused on married, African American stepfathers. Therefore, findings from this research may not be transferable to stepfathers of other races and ethnicities. The findings also may not be transferrable to unmarried African American fathers. In addition, findings from the study may not be transferable to the relationships between stepfathers and their stepsons.

Limitations

Limitations are interruptions and influences within the research that are outside of the researcher's control (Simon, 2011). There are limitations in all research, especially in qualitative research as this research is based on the natural settings of people (Simon, 2011). The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to determine the strategies African American stepfathers used to develop positive, supporting relationships with their school age stepdaughters. In this research a limitation was that I did not know how truthful the stepfathers would be in providing responses to the interview questions. The responses to the interview questions were based on self-reports provided by stepfathers. The stepfathers may have been embellished their responses.

Researcher bias is a possibility in qualitative research. I acknowledge that I have biases with this study. My husband is African American and has created a positive relationship with my daughter, who is his stepdaughter. I have watched the relationship between them, and this provides me with biased thoughts. However, during this study, I decided to use a journal for reflexivity and bracketing. The journal provided me the chance to document preconceived feelings and emotions during the data collection. In Chapter 3, I discuss, in depth, how I managed my biases.

Significance

This research was timely and clearly needed, as the number of blended family in the United States is increasing (Jensen & Pace, 2016; Kumar, 2017). This research makes an original contribution to the study of African American blended families. This research is meaningful to the human services field as human service professionals, social

workers, and family counselors could potentially utilize information from this research to promote strategies that can help blended families' build positive relational outcomes.

This research connects with Walden's mission on social change because findings from this research could potentially be used to inform the development of interventions that could build stronger African American blended families.

Summary

In Chapter 1, I provided information on the rationale I used for exploring the strategies African American stepfathers use to build positive and supporting with their school aged stepdaughters. In this chapter, I highlighted the relevant problems that African American blended families may encounter. Further, this chapter included a discussion of the significance of this research to provide assistance in the African American communities and for blended family therapy. In addition, this chapter provided the need for this study as there is a lack of research on this topic. In Chapter 2, I provide a comprehensive review of the literature that is relevant to the history of African American stepfathers, blended families and the importance of the stepfather-stepdaughter relationship.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Members of blended families must work hard to build strong relationships that can promote positive outcomes for the children of the family (Ganong & Coleman, 2017). The relationships between stepchildren and stepparents can become quite complex, which could lead to stress in blended families and sometimes lead to divorce between the parents (Kumar, 2017). Previous research has shown that relationships between stepfathers and stepdaughters can be particularly daunting because the stepfather and stepdaughter closeness is less likely to develop than the closeness between stepfathers and stepsons (Jensen & Shafer, 2013). The focus of this qualitative research was to determine what strategies African American stepfathers use to build positive and supportive relationships with their school aged stepdaughters.

I began this literature review by discussing literature on the prevalence of blended families in the United States. The discussion then moved to a section that addressed the ethnicity within blended family statistics. The following section was literature that examines the importance of stepfathers in the home. This will lead into literature that examines the stepfather-stepchild relationships. The final sections present literature that discusses stepfathers' views of their roles. It will also highlight the literature that discusses the positives of the stepfather-stepchild relationship.

Literature Search Strategy

The databases I used to search articles for this literature review were PsychINFO, PsychARTICLES, PsychEXTRA, PsychCRITQUES, SocioINDEX, and Sage Premier.

This research consisted of data and information found in peer-reviewed articles found on stepparent-stepchild relationships. The search for the term *blended family* only yielded a small number of articles, many of which did not pertain to married couples. The rest of the articles highlighted *stepfamily* as the key term, which is linked to *blended family*. According to Blyaert et al. (2016), the term stepfamily and blended family can be used interchangeably as they both have the same meaning. I had librarian assistance for locating terms; I used the following terms as search words or phrases: *stepfather relationship, stepfather stepchild relationship, African American Stepfather, African American stepfather stepchild relationship, black stepfather relationship, black stepfather stepchild relationship, blended family, blended family relationship, African American blended family, stepfamily, stepfamily relationship, African American stepfamily, stepfamilies, stepfather(s), and stepparent*. The research search range was restricted to articles published the past 5 years, from 2015-2019.

Conceptual Framework

Family systems theory was used as the conceptual framework for this research. Family systems theory was introduced by Bowen (1966), who developed the theory. Family systems theory describes how emotions of each family member govern the relationships within the family (Bowen, 1966). Bowen noted that the family is an emotional unit. Family systems theory uses systems thinking to describe the complex interactions within the unit (Bowen, 1966). Members of the family are intensely connected through emotions. Bowen noted that the members of a family unit solicit each other's attention, approval, and support. These family members also react to each other's

needs and expectations (Bowen, 1966). The way each family member connects and reacts to each other builds interdependent relationships within the family unit (Bowen, 1966).

According to Bowen (1966), a change in one person's functioning is predictably followed by reciprocal changes in the functioning of others. Family systems theory focuses on eight concepts, which derive from the core belief that there is an emotional system within the family structure that influences the entire family system (Bowen, 1966). These eight concepts include the following: (a) triangles, (b) differentiation of self, (c) nuclear family emotional process, (d) the family projection process, (e) multigenerational transmission process, (f) emotional cutoff, (g) sibling position, and (h) societal emotional process (Bowen, 1966).

Triangle

According to Bowen (1966), a triangle is a three-person relationship system. The triangle is considered the building block of larger emotional systems because a triangle is the smallest stable relationship system (Bowen, 1966). The triangle is the strongest system because a two-person system will not be able to handle a three-person system. A triangle can withstand more stress than a two-parent system because the stress can be maneuvered through three different relationships (Bowen, 1966). Bowen (1966) further states that a triangle can also spread into multiple triangles if the stress in one triangle is too high.

The triangle is considered the basic molecule of the emotional system in the family (Bowen, 1966). It is usually that everyone in the triangle feels comfortable at the same time and the movement from the inside and the outside positions is constantly

shifting (Bowen, 1966). This relationship concept highlights how family members within a blended family may react and be connected to each other based on the triangle system.

The triangle notion was not created to directly address stepfamilies, but it was relevant to my research. The expectation during my research was for the triangle concept to be used in the stepfamily. The stepfather-stepchild relationship could better manage conflicts by including a third person such as the biological mother, sibling or external parent. This third person may present as a neutral factor between the stepfather and stepdaughter to positively influence the relationship and alleviate tension.

Differentiation of Self

According to Bowen (1966), differentiation of self is described as the way a person manages the instinctual and automatic forces that drive the quest for individuality and in the context of togetherness. Automatic forces within a person may include families and social groups which have direct influence over a person based on emotional conflicts that arise within them (Bowen, 1966). Differentiation of self refers to a person's attempt to establish a sense of self identity separate from their family. As a person attempts to differentiate self from family, internal and external conflicts may arise within themselves and with family members (Bowen, 1966).

The level of differentiation from one person to another person is established early in life (Bowen, 1966). During infancy stages, people are completely attached to their mothers and they gradually separate to become a self (Bowen, 1966). The degree to which one becomes a self is not the same with all individuals in the family. Each member has a unique experience of becoming themselves because of the emotional processes that

happens within the family (Bowen, 1966). When a person positively differentiates themselves, they acknowledge their dependence on others (Bowen, 1966). This person can also handle conflicts well because they will seek to process the facts before emotionally reacting (Bowen, 1966).

It is my understanding that this premise is not for stepfamilies. However, this premise was relatable to my research because it may show how the stepfather-stepchildren relationship has the potential to grow based on the level of differentiation the child may be going through. There is also a possibility that stepfather-stepchild relationship could be negatively affected by the stages that the stepfather has gone through during his differentiation within the family. This may happen if the stepfather is relying heavily on acceptance and approval by the stepchild. A negative affect may also happen if the stepchild is struggling to differentiate within his family.

Nuclear Family Emotional Process

Bowen (1966) describes the nuclear family emotional process as the principle that governs the relationship between individuals in a family. This process begins with the marriage of the couple uniting and continues throughout the life spent together within the marriage. Each person brings to a marriage his or her own level of differentiation or individuality of themselves. In the nuclear family emotional process, the marriage functions in a way that the needs of one spouse complement the needs of the other spouse (Bowen, 1966). This nuclear family emotional process is also applicable to the relationships within the blended family; this would include the stepfather-stepchild relationship.

During the stages of the nuclear family emotional process, tensions may begin to arise from family stress from adjusting to new family members (Bowen, 1966). Bowen (1966) further noted that when anxiety increases and tension builds, there are four patterns for where the tension and anxiety is rooted: These include: (a) the dysfunction of one spouse (b) conflict within the marriage, (c) impairment of one or more children, and (d) emotional, physical, or social dysfunction of an individual (Bowen, 1966). Bowen (1966) reported that many of these symptoms occur in most families. This could include blended families which would make this concept applicable to this study because the stepfather stepchild relationship may have tension and anxiety that can be rooted based on one of the four patterns (Bryant et al., 2016; Jensen & Pace, 2016). This could assist a blended family counselor in helping the stepfather stepchild to develop strategies to make their relationship better.

The Family Projection Process

The family projection process describes the process in which the differentiation of one parent could be transferred to a child and the child becomes the main focus to the parent (Bowen, 1966). The impairment and clinical diagnosis of a child can occur during the family projection process (Bowen, 1966). Children begin to inherit and adapt positive or negative strengths from a particular parent during this process (Bowen, 1966). Bowen (1966) further states that the negative strengths that the children adapt can cause relationship sensitivities throughout their life. Bowen (1966) further suggests that family projection process occurs when a parent focuses on something being wrong with a child

out of fear. The parent interprets the child's behavior to agree with their fear and they treat the child as such.

This process was applicable to the stepfather-stepchild relationship because in this process a parent projects their feelings on to the child in a positive or negative way. In the stepfather stepchild relationship, the stepfather can project his positive feelings on to the stepchild and cause a positive relationship between the child and themselves (Kumar, 2017). The strengths of the stepfather can be inherited by the stepchild (Blyert et al., 2016). This may lead to the stepchild to having a more mature relationship with family members and socially.

Multigenerational Transmission Process

Bowen (1966) stated that the multigenerational transmission process occurs when there are small differences in the levels of differentiation between spouses and family member. Bowen (1966) further describes that transmission of differentiation over multiple generations happens in a family. This means that whatever is transmitted to the children from their parents is then handed to their children and their children's children and so on. The multigenerational transmission process occurs also on different levels (Bowen, 1966). The levels are consistent with conscious and unconscious and as relationally and genetically levels (Bowen, 1966). Another form of multigenerational transmission process occurs when a person picks a mate with the same level of differentiation of self (Bowen, 1966).

This process applied to the stepfather stepchild relationship because if the stepfather provides morals for the stepchild those morals will be passed down to the next

generation from the stepchild (Jensen & Harris, 2016). The other part of multigenerational transmission process is also applicable to stepfather stepchild relationship because the selection of a mate with the same level of differentiation may become important to the stepchild. The stepfather could assist in the process with his stepchild by seeing different levels of maturity and assessing if the stepchild should be with in a relationship with the other person.

Emotional Cutoff

Emotional cutoff concept describes people cutting off siblings, parents or other family members due to unresolved emotional issues (Bowen, 1966). Bowen (1966) further suggests the cutting off from the family can occur by reducing contact with the family member or completely moving away. During the emotional cutoff process the person may cutoff birth family members and they become more immersed into their spouse and children to fulfill emotional needs (Bowen, 1966). This concept can be related to the stepfather- stepchild relationship because the stepfather may not have a relationship with his biological family, and he begins to emotionally rely on the relationship structure of his blended family (Bryant et al., 2016). The relationship with his stepchild may fulfill his emotional needs and he will spend more quality time with his stepchild.

Sibling Position

The principle of sibling position states that two people with the same sibling position within their birth families will have the same characteristics and functioning (Bowen, 1966). The characteristics of each position are not greater than that of the other,

but each position carries important characteristic for functioning (Bowen, 1966). The positions are complementary to each other. For example, the first child may have leadership qualities which are stronger than that of a third child.

This was principle was relevant to the stepfather- stepchild relationship because the positions of the stepfather in his biological family are important. If the stepfather is a first child of his siblings, he could display strong leadership skills to his stepchild. If the stepchild is also a first child of his siblings, he will also have strong leadership qualities and can associate with common characteristics of his stepfather (Bowen, 1966). This may provide more of a relationship for the stepfather and stepchild as they will have many characteristics in common possibly causing positive functioning traits.

Societal Emotional Process

Societal emotional process identifies the same emotional process that a person feels within society is like the way they feel within the family (Bowen, 1966). Bowen (1966) noted that cultural forces explain the flow in how well societies adapt to the challenges that face them. Since both concepts are parallel the functioning of children within society becomes important to the family. The emotional systems govern behavior within society. Parents will tend to be lenient in the discipline of their child. This leniency will cause for parents to seek society to adapt to their children's negative behavior and operate in a sense of "*we love you no matter what*" (Bowen, 1966). As a result, parents can be blamed by the child for being distant and not discipline adequately.

In the stepfather-stepchild relationship, this concept could apply. The stepfather could understand how not to be lenient in his child- rearing or discipline with the

stepchild (Forehand, Parent, Golub, Reid & Lafko, 2015). If the stepfather is not lenient in his discipline on the stepchild this will cause for the stepchild to handle their emotions better within society (Bowen, 1966; Forehand et al., 2015).

More recently, researchers have used the family system theory to discuss the relationship between stepfather and stepchildren. Jensen and Shafer (2013) used family systems theory and the concept of nuclear family emotional process, to identify emotions of children in their view of how close they are with their stepfathers. Bryant et al. (2016) presented research that discussed the African American stepfather relationship with their blended families and the effects on his mental health. Bryant et al. (2016) used family systems theory to discuss how the subsystem of the strength of African American stepfather-stepchild relationship is correlated to the quality of marriage. This aforementioned research follows the family system theory, which discusses that all parts of the family system are interconnected into subsystems. The research of King et al. (2015) followed the same concept of family systems theory. King et al., (2015) suggested that the strength of stepfather adolescent subsystem is related to the strength of the stepfamily.

Family systems theory provides a general framework or studying stepfather stepchild relationships (Bowen, 1978). This perspective focuses on the closeness and communication between family members, and how these patterns of closeness are maintained over time (King et al., 2014; Gold, 2019). Family systems theory framework enables African American stepfathers on ways to use strategies to build positive relationships with their stepdaughters.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

Researchers have noted that, because there are numerous parents forming new partnerships or relationships, blended families have become a central feature of the American family system. King, Amato, and Lindstrom (2015) reported that almost 8% of children in the United States lived with a stepparent in 2009, and about 30% of children in the United States will live with a stepparent at some before reaching adulthood. In this section, I will present previous literature on key concepts of defining the composition of blended families, ethnicity and statistics on blended families, stepfather- stepchild relationship, and positive stepfather-stepchild relationships.

African American Males Roles within Families

Fathers play a major role in families and have through both direct and indirect efforts. Fathers engage in multiple roles within the family such as childcare providers, parental figures providing guidance, and financial providers (Doyle, Nebbit, Estroff, Clark, Goldston, & Magan, 2015). The importance of these roles in families varies over time and evolves across racial and cultural groups (Doyle et al., 2015).

The research about African American stepfathers is limited (Bryant et al., 2016). Researchers noted that many studies have either not addressed African American stepfather's families in their study samples or decided to use all races for convenience of sampling (Bryant et al., 2016). African American men are more likely to be stepfathers than African American women are likely to be stepmothers (Bryant et al., 2016). Programs to assist African American stepfathers and African American blended families are extremely limited (Bryant et al., 2016). The results of African American adolescents

and the relationship with their stepfathers have shown a not so positive relationships and this requires future research (King et al., 2015).

The relationships of African American stepfather-stepchild relationships have been positively correlated to marital quality (Bryant et al., 2015) and this is true amongst all cultures (Jensen & Shafer, 2013; King et al., 2015) However, there is limited research that only focuses on how important marital quality of the African American stepfather is related to the African stepfather stepchild relationship (Bryant et al., 2016; King et al., 2015). Research has shown that there is a need to understand the importance of having a strong African American stepfather-stepchild relationship and regardless of the circumstances African American stepfathers were able to do their best in the blended family and not allow it to affect their mental health (Bryant et al., 2016).

Blended Families Cycle & Beginning of Stepfather Stepchild Relationship

A *blended family* is defined as a marriage between two people which includes one or more children from previous relationships who reside in the blended family home (Kumar, 2017). Previous researchers have revealed that the formation of the relationships within the blended family depends on the relationships between the husband and wife within the blended family home (Jensen & Shafer, 2013; Jensen & Pace, 2016; Kumar, 2017). The number of blended families in the United States is on the rise. Kumar (2017) reported that in the U.S., 40% of adults have a family member who is not biologically related to them.

Blended families have become one of the most common family units over the past 10 years in the United States (King et al., 2015; Kumar, 2017). Researchers have noted

that blended family units face difficulties that are different from the nuclear family because they are attempting to create a household with unrelated members (Bryant et al., 2016; Kumar, 2017). Many individuals in blended families struggle to create a relationship with a new spouse while handling child-related issues (Kumar, 2017). This struggle spills over into creating a strained stepfather stepchild relationship (King et al., 2015; Kumar, 2017).

The blended family structure is complex and is most challenging during formation of the initial stages of living in the family (Favez, 2015; King et. al, 2015). The emotional process within blended families is important as not lead to emotional distance or the impairment of children. The stability of the stepfather stepchild relationship hinges on the functioning of the spouses (Favez, 2015; King & Lindstrom, 2016). The emotional stability of spouses during the initial stages of blending the family can positively reinforce the relationship between the stepfather and stepchildren (Jensen & Shafer, 2013; Jensen & Pace, 2016; King et al. 2015). This material informs my research because it shows that in the formation of the blended family, the stepfather stepchild relationship is correlated to the early stages of marital quality presented in the blended family.

Jensen and Pace (2016) conducted a quantitative study to explore the association between stepfather involvement and stepfather-child relationship quality among a racially diverse and predominately low-income sample of stepfamilies with preadolescent children. The study consisted of a subset of 467 mother-stepfather families from year 9 from the Families and Child Wellbeing Study. The results revealed that stepfather involvement with their stepchildren was positively associated with stepfather child

relationship quality in the family. Jensen and Pace (2016) noted that stepfathers may benefit from their partner's support as they begin to involve themselves in the lives of their stepchildren.

The stepfather relationships with stepchildren in a blended family can be daunting and can cause positive or negative emotions for the child (Jensen & Pace, 2016). Because the formation of the stepfather and stepchild relationship happens during the blended family formation period, this can be overwhelming for children (Jensen & Pace, 2016). Jensen and Pace (2016) further suggested that the overwhelming feeling for children can cause isolation or emotional distance for the stepfather to relate to the stepchildren. It is important for the stepfather to make an attempt to handle the stepchild's feelings and be understanding and nurturing to promote a positive relationship and to prevent isolation (Jensen & Pace, 2016).

Jensen and Pace (2016) suggested further research be completed to assess specific diverse cultures as their research was limited in terms of all diverse cultures. The research specifically noted that most research highlights White blended families and there should be more research on other populations. Jensen and Pace (2016) further discussed how their research was set across multiple ages of the stepchildren and that further research would benefit from specifying specific ages groups. This would be applicable to my research in identifying the importance of researching African American stepfathers and school aged children.

Ethnicity and Statistics on Blended Families

The statistics regarding blended families is slightly outdated as the US Census recently discontinued providing blended family statistics such as the statistics for marriage, divorce, and remarriage (National Stepfamily Resource Center, 2019). Kumar (2017) stated that in the United States, four out of 10 families are blended families. African Americans have a higher chance of belonging to a blended family more than any other race (Kumar, 2017). Sixty percent of African Americans have a step relative compared to 46% of Hispanics and 39% Whites (Kumar, 2017). In addition, 21% of African Americans indicated they have a stepparent compared to 10% of Whites and Hispanics. Moreover, 19% of African Americans revealed they have stepchildren compared to Whites at 14% and Hispanics at 8% (Kumar, 2017).

In many areas of the United States, stepfamilies have become a common family for many households (King & Lindstrom, 2016; Metts, Schrodt & Braithwaite, 2017). According to American Community Survey presented by the US Census (2017), some 4.2 million children in the United States live in blended families with 2.4 million of them being under the age of 18. Parker (2017) further noted that 15% of all children are living in stepfamilies at some point in their lives. This trend is expected to double by the year 2013. Also, the Pew Research Center by Parker (2017) noted that at least 31% of all children living in the United States under the age of 18 years will spend part of their teen years in stepfamilies (Jensen, 2017; King & Lindstrom, 2016). The most recent statistics revealed that a majority of stepfamilies, about 85% consist of a biological mother with

her children and the stepfather because majority of children live with their mothers after relationships dissolved (King & Lindstrom, 2016; Parker, 2017).

Stepfathers Roles in Blended Families

Jensen and Weller (2019) noted that there is a lot of research that reflects the negative relationships between stepfathers and their stepchildren. However, stepfathers may have uncertainty as they take on a father figure role which can be complex if the biological father is active in the stepchildren's lives (Gold, 2019). Gold's article synthesized studies that discuss interventions to assist the stepfather with role is within the blended family home with his stepchildren. Gold (2019) highlighted that stepfathers' relationships and roles with their stepchildren are different that the relationship dynamics of fathers and their children.

Counselors should seek to counsel the stepfather and stepchild relationship different based on the level of closeness of the stepfather and his stepchild. The closeness of the stepfather stepchild relationship can be marked by different concepts one of which is highlighted as the stepfather being addressed as "dad" (Blyaert et al., 2016; King et al., 2016). The concept of the stepfather being addressed as dad shows a strong role of acceptance and strong level of relationship between the stepfather and stepchild (Lucier-Greer, Adler-Baeder, Harcourt & Gregson, 2014). Future research suggests counselors of stepfamilies should address many important factors that are unique in the stepfamily relational dynamic. Further research is also needed to address how these dynamics are represented through different culture factors such as African American blended families (Blyaert et al., 2016; Lucier-Greer et al., 2014).

Stepfathers may experience a level of uncertainty concerning their roles in a blended family (Blyaert et al., 2016; Kumar, 2017). The stepfathers may feel uncertain about boundaries regarding the levels of discipline as well as the physical and financial care of the stepchildren (Blyaert et al., 2016). This uncertainty regarding boundaries can cause a stressful relationship between the spouse, the stepfather, and stepchild within the blended family home (Blyaert et al., 2016; Bryant et al., 2016; King et al., 2014). Some researchers have explored the relationship between stepchildren and their extended family members (Blyaert et al., 2016).

Blyaert et al. (2016) conducted a qualitative study to explore stepfathers' views of their relationships with their stepchildren and family members. The researchers also examined how the stepfathers described their position within the stepfamily (Blyaert et al., 2016). The results of the study indicated that a stepfather did not feel the need to legally be represented as the stepfather through adoption. However, their relationship with their stepchild is based on the consistent relationship the stepfather has with his stepchildren. The data from the researchers revealed that stepfathers felt they were viewed more as a friend by stepchildren, yet they still engaged with their stepchildren in the parental role. This parental role would be based on the stepfather's views of the stepchild and the boundary of parenting created by the stepfather (Blyaert et al., 2016).

Researchers have shown that stepfathers at times find parenting to be stressful and at times can become depressed if they do not have a positive relationship with their stepchildren (Bryant et al., 2016; Gold, 2019). Learning to adapt to a new family, especially when they have never parented or been in a parental role prior to their new

blended family can be a daunting task on stepfathers (Bryant et al., 2016; King and Lindstrom, 2016). Jensen (2017) reported that a stepfather needs to establish authority, and discipline for the children in the family when needed. Also, stepfathers should share the decision making of the children with the mother and sometimes the extended family members in order to maintain order in the family.

Some researchers have focused on the positive views, such as children's views of their blended family formation. The children's views are also correlated with the feeling of the stepfather accepting the parental role and treating the child as if they are their own without completely taking the role of the child's father (Blyaert et al., 2016; Ganong, Jensen, Sanner, Russell, & Coleman, 2019). Children view their relationship with their stepfather as being positive when their stepfather treats them as their own child and can also be a "*friend*" (Blyaert et al., 2016). Such view from the children may encourage stepfathers to seek a relationship with children (Ganong et al., 2019).

Forehand, Parent, Golub, Reid, and Lafko (2015) conducted a study to examine whether stepfathers were involved in child-rearing and parenting of non-biological children. The researchers found that child-rearing practices are consistent to the boundaries and systems created by the parents in the home and is done by the stepfather within the home. The authors showed that stepfather is involved with childrearing of stepchildren. However, the boundaries of the stepfather's childrearing practices were based on the mother's views. Stepfathers were able to discipline and be positive role models for their stepchildren. This research showed the importance of the stepfather accepting his boundaries with his stepchildren, and understanding the boundaries involved in child-

rearing of their stepchildren. This research also highlighted the important role the stepfather plays in the home with their stepchildren (Forehand et al., 2015). This research is important to this current study because the research shows the important roles that stepfathers play within the home with the stepchildren. Childrearing can be seen as an important step in building a stepfather stepdaughter relationship.

Researchers noted that biological mother-child relationship can impact the stepfather-stepchild relationship (Kumar, 2017). The stepfather-stepchild relationship has to be established in a positive manner and can be done prior to the stepfamily formation through conversation with the spouses and possible counseling (King et al., 2016; King et al., 2015; Lucier-Greer et al., 2014). The strength of the biological mother-child relationship provides a background to establishing the stepfather-stepchild relationship as well as the stepfather and biological father relationship (Kumar, 2017).

Positive Relationships Between Stepfather and Stepchildren as Adolescents

Previous researchers have highlighted the positive relationships that are formed between the stepfather and their stepchildren, during the stepchildren's adolescent years. Jensen and Harris (2017) conducted a longitudinal analysis of the quality of the stepfather stepchild relationship and the effects on the stepchild's physical health. In this research the stepchildren were adolescents. The study consisted of a sample of 1233 adolescents living in a blended family home consisting of their mother and stepfather. The results of the researchers found that positive stepfather and stepchild relationships were associated with fewer negative health symptoms in adolescents (Jensen & Harris, 2017).

Jensen and Harris (2017) suggested that a high quality of stepfather stepchild relationship could promote the health of adolescent stepchildren. Future researchers should seek how the stepfather stepchild relationship promotes a positive adolescent stepchild. Future research should seek to assess whether the promotion of the adolescent's health is directly involved with life choices that the stepfather assists with, such as youth career choices or sexual behavior (Jensen & Harris, 2017). Jensen and Harris research is applicable to this current research as it provides research to show how stepchildren's health positively benefits from a positive relationship with their stepfather. The guidance that stepfather's use to build a relationship with their stepchildren assists the stepchildren in making healthy choices.

King, Amato, and Lindstrom (2015) examined the quality of the blended family formation and the stepfather-adolescent relationship during the first year of blended family development. The researchers sought out influential variables that existed prior to the formation of the blended family marriage, between the parents (King et al. 2015). The study extended prior research by using a nationally representative sample of data. The sample was restricted to 179 adolescents who went from a single mother household to a married mother and stepfather household. King et al. (2015) studied how factors existing prior to stepfamily formation were associated with the quality of stepfather-adolescent ties within the first year after married stepfathers joining the household. The results of the study indicated that both the quality of the mother and adolescent relationship and the adolescent's adjustment prior to the stepfamily were significantly associated with the quality of adolescents' relationships with their stepfathers. The results

of the study also suggest that a relationship between stepfather and stepchild becomes better after the first year and continues over the course of time. The transition to a stepfamily is a critical course event for adolescents and other family members, and only a few studies have captured stepfamilies during the beginning of their juncture (King et al., 2015).

Ganong, Jensen, Sanner, Russell, and Coleman (2019) completed research quantitative to reflect the views of stepfathers' affinity seeking with their stepchildren. The research was completed by an online survey of 234 blended family couples. The questions of the survey provided views of the stepfather's perception of the affinity seeking relationship with his stepchildren, perceptions of stepfather stepchild conflicts, and closer blended family ties. The results indicated that as stepfathers are more involved in affinity seeking, then stepfather stepchild conflicts were lower (Ganong et al., 2019).

This research applies to the basis of this current study because it provides results to show that stepfather stepchild relationship can be more positive if the stepfather is affinity seeking of the stepchild (Ganong et al., 2019). The limitations of this research was that it addressed the affinity seeking of stepfather and did not look at affinity maintaining which would identify the long term effects (Ganong et al., 2019). Ganong et al., (2019) suggests further research to look at socioeconomic factors that may influence affinity seeking of stepfathers. Further research should also look at multiple races and ethnicities and how those factors affect affinity seeking of stepfathers.

King and Lindstrom (2016) used a quantitative study to examine the closeness between stepfathers and adolescents following the blended family formation period. The

researchers used data from The National Study of Adolescent to Adult Health to examine continuity and change in the closeness of stepfather- stepchild relationships. Findings showed that stepfather and adolescent relationships were stronger based on the positivity of the marriage in the home and the quality of the mother and adolescent relationship (King & Lindstrom, 2016). The results showed the strength of the stepfather-stepchild relationship was consistent between the adolescent and their non-resident biological father. King and Lindstrom (2016) further found that for young children, acceptance of the stepfather was mediated by a feeling of belonging to a family or their blended family. Researchers also noted that for young children, a positive stepfather-stepchild relationship was based on the rapport they had with their stepfathers (King & Lindstrom, 2015). This rapport can be built through regular communication with each other and within the blended family dynamic (King & Lindstrom, 2015).

King and Boyd (2016) conducted a study to examine factors associated with the perceptions of family belonging among adolescents in stepfamilies. The purpose of the study was to explore the feeling of adolescents' family belonging in their married mother stepfather families. The authors used data from the National Longitudinal study of adolescent to adult health Add Health data. The population for the study consisted of 20,745 adolescents in Grades 7-12 in a nationally representative with the use of appropriate sample of the population. Parent data consisted of 17,670 participants were collected from one parent of each respondent usually with the mother. The findings from the study indicated both similarities and differences across family structure in the factors associated with family belonging in adolescents. Adolescents correlated their feeling of

family belonging by way of their relationship with their stepfather. The study also indicated feelings of belonging were higher among girls, younger adolescents, immigrants, and religious adolescents, and lower among Asian youth as compared to Whites and African Americans. There was a modest effect also found for gender, age, race, religiosity and number of siblings

Positive Stepfather- Stepchild Relationships

Stepfather stepchild relations are important for a blended family to work. Jensen and Shafer (2013) conducted a longitudinal quantitative approach to examine children's views of their closeness to their stepfathers. Findings from the study revealed that the perception by the child of the quality of the marital relationship had bearings on the relationship between the stepfather and stepchild (Jensen & Shafer, 2013). When children see a strong and loving mother and stepfather relationship they will easily adapt to their stepfather. Findings from the research highlighted that stepsons were more likely to be close to their stepfathers (Jensen & Shafer, 2013). Jensen and Shafer (2013) suggested that more research was needed to analyze the stepfather stepdaughter relationship from the stepdaughters' views. Future research should pay attention to how female children desire to form relationships with their stepfather.

This research informs my research because the researchers were able to highlight that stepfathers should seek to build a strong and loving relationship with their spouse. As a result, building a relationship with the stepchild will not be daunting.

Researchers suggested that, although a variety of factors contribute to children's adjustment in stepfamilies, many researchers agree that a supportive relationship with

parents is key for a healthy family life (Amato & King, 2016). Close and supportive relationships with parents can foster children's healthy development in all types of families, including stepfamilies, yet establishing and maintaining strong parent-child relationships in stepfamilies is challenging especially for adolescents due to the lack of communication in the family (Amato & King, 2016). Amato and King (2016) conducted a study to determine whether relationships with parents during adolescence continued beyond the teen years. Results from the research showed that the stepfather stepchild relationship continued beyond the adolescent years into adulthood (Amato & King, 2016; King, Thorsen, & Amato, 2014). Findings from this study could be taken to suggest that if a positive and close relationship is established between a stepfather and his stepdaughter during the youth's adolescent years, the relationship could matriculate into a positive relationship when the stepdaughter reaches adulthood.

Campbell and Winn (2018) investigated whether the interpersonal dynamics of closeness were different in stepfather-stepdaughter versus father daughter relationships during the daughters' adolescent years. The population of this quantitative study consisted of 1,888 females living with their biological fathers. Also, the study consisted of 273 stepdaughters who reported on the availability and involvement of their stepfather, as well as the communication and closeness in their relationship with him. The data were taken from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent and Adult Health. The results revealed that young girls living with stepfathers, strong involvement with their stepfather was associated with greater closeness to their nonresident biological fathers. These findings suggested that stepfather stepdaughter relationships reflected similar

interpersonal dynamics as father daughter relationships. However, there is a need to establish and maintain these relationships through meaningful communication with the stepfather and the stepdaughter. This study informs this current research because it shows that one of the ways for stepfathers to build strong relationships with their stepdaughter is by watching and understanding the dynamics of the relationship with the father daughter relationship.

King et al. (2014) completed a quantitative study that examined the factors associated with a positive relationship between stepfathers and adolescent stepchildren. This research looked at the gender of the stepchildren in terms of their relationship to the stepfather. The research identified how stepsons would build a positive relationship with their stepfathers and how stepdaughters could build a relationship with their stepfathers. However, King et al. (2014) stated, that there was no association between the quality of the spousal relationship within the home and ties between stepfather stepchild relationships.

Researchers noted that African American males are twice as likely to become stepparents as African American females (Bryant, Futris, Hicks, Lee, & Oshri, 2016). Bryant et al. (2016) further conducted a study on African American stepfather-stepchild relationships in relationship to marital quality and mental health of the African American stepfather. The researchers examined the relationship between stepfather-stepchild relationships, stepfather reports of depressive symptoms, and marital quality. The population for the study consisted of 149 stepfathers. The results of the study indicated that stepfathers reported more positive relationships with their stepchildren. The results

also reported more positive marital quality and a higher frequency of positive marital interactions and in turn, were associated with stepfather experiencing fewer depressive symptoms. These findings suggested that it might be useful for professionals and counselors to address depressive symptoms when working with stepfathers before they start a new family. Addressing these possible depressive symptoms could assist the stepfather in building new relationships within his new blended family. This could also include the building of the relationship with stepdaughter.

Jensen and Lippold (2018) conducted quantitative research to observe the patterns and how adolescents adjust in the stepfamilies. The research further sought out the short term and long-term relationship quality between stepfather and stepchildren. The research used a sample of 20,745 youth to answer questions regarding their family dynamics and wellbeing. The results yielded that youth have a high quality of relationships with their stepfathers and the quality of relationship can be short and long term. The level of adjustment to the relationships with parental figures is different between male and female's youth. Some of the youth's adjustment is influenced by the marital conflict within the blended family home. The research suggests further research to identify the important factors from stepfathers that assist in youth's adjustment in their home. Further research should also seek to see the differences among the short term and long-term effects based on male and females.

Jensen (2017) completed a quantitative study to examine the complex networks of dyadic relationships within a blended family. The different networks included the stepparent child connection and the step-couple connection. The research suggested that

if there are step-couple conflicts the youth within the stepfamily are unhappy. This unhappiness in the stepchild would be displayed externally in delinquent behaviors. This research was limited in that it used data that was collected at the beginning of the twenty-first century. There is a difference in present day as to how families communicate, and communication assists in building strong relationships between blended family members. Future research should look at appropriate interventions to assist blended families based on cultural differences.

This research was beneficial to this current study as it showed the importance of how the marital quality can affect the behaviors of stepchildren. Stepfathers may seek ways to keep marital conflicts outside of the blended family home as to not negatively affect behavior of stepchildren.

Summary

The literature reviewed in this chapter focused on the many different aspects of stepfather's roles within their blended family home, the stepfather adolescent relationship, the positive factors between stepfather and stepchildren, and the lack of research for African American stepfathers.

The research on blended families noted the difficulties with forming a household with unrelated members. Stepfathers struggle in identifying their roles within the formation period of their blended family. There are many factors that can influence the relationship in a negative manner some of which include the marital conflict and the lack of preparation in adjusting with the new stepchild. Statistics showed that the blended

family dynamic is one of the fastest families throughout the United States (Kumar, 2017). Future research should look at all relationship components of the blended family.

Researchers noted several factors associated with having a positive stepfather-stepchild relationship. There were researchers that have studied some of the beneficial positive factors for children whom have a positive relationship with their stepfathers. The children whom are now young adults were able to reflect on the positive feelings of engaging with their stepfathers in the home. The research also highlighted the feeling of stepfathers and the views of the positive relationships they have with their stepchildren. This research showed that stepfathers have their own views of their stepfather-stepchild relationship. The stepfathers have a view of their relationship with their stepchildren. The stepchildren also have a view of their relationship with their stepfathers. The positive views of the relationship can be short term and long term in blended families.

The stepfather stepchild relationship is important to adolescent functioning. The factors of the relationship can cause positive health in adolescents. The factors of the stepfather stepchild relationship can come from the way the adolescent views the marital conflicts within the blended family home. Understanding how to keep a positive relationship between stepfathers and their stepchildren is important to the strength of the step couple and the blended family home.

Although the presence of the African American father is important to the stability within the child's life, there is limited research that has been completed to capture the feelings and thoughts of the African American stepfathers' roles within the home. Although the research was limited on African American male being married, is beneficial

to understand the thoughts of how these men feel towards their stepchildren. There should be a call for professionals who work with African American stepfathers to start the dialog with including them in more research samples. African American men are more likely to be stepfathers than African American women. However African American stepfathers are the population least studied.

The methodology for this study will be presented in Chapter 3. In Chapter 3, I will present the rationale for choosing a generic qualitative design, the data collection instrument, and the data collection strategy. In Chapter 3, I will also provide details about the study sample, the sample selection process, and the study data analysis process. The research study ethical standards and practices applied to maintaining the study's participants' protection will be discussed in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this generic, qualitative study is to determine what strategies African American stepfathers use to develop positive, supporting relationships with their school age stepdaughters. Due to the increasing prevalence of African American stepfathers and the challenges they endure in developing and maintaining strong relationships in the blended family unit, there is a need for research that takes a strengths-based approach to determine how stepfathers develop strong blended family relationships. According to Bryant et al. (2016), African American fathers are an understudied population. As such, results from this study could potentially provide information that could be used to inform the development of interventions that promote positive interactions among members of blended family units. The following research question guided this research: What strategies do African American stepfathers in blended families use to develop positive, supporting relationships with their school age stepdaughters?

In this chapter, I provide information regarding the research design and rationale, the role of the researcher, the research methodology, justification for participant selection, and details of the instrumentation. I also discussed the techniques that were used for data analysis. Then I addressed the details of how trustworthiness of the data collection and data analysis will be enhanced. I also addressed ethical considerations related to the study.

Research Design and Rationale

The research design for this qualitative study is a generic qualitative design. In using the qualitative design, researchers can investigate how people thrive in their daily life settings by examining their views and perspectives of various phenomena (Kennedy, 2016; Yin, 2016). Also, the qualitative approach to research tends to be more personal and provides latitude for rich responses from various participants (Percy et al., 2015; Yin, 2016). A qualitative approach to this research provided an opportunity for African American stepfathers to express their thoughts and feelings surrounding their interactions with their stepdaughters.

Generic qualitative research is used to examine participants reports of phenomenon based on their attitudes and beliefs on their own experiences of that phenomenon (Khalke, 2014; Percy et al., 2015) Percy et al. (2015) further stated that the generic qualitative approach gives participants the opportunity to focus on their actual experiences and not their internal emotions. Khalke (2014) also suggested that the generic qualitative approach provides researchers the opportunities to observe how participants make meaning of their world. A generic qualitative approach was the most adequate approach for this research because my research was about determining the strategies that African American stepfathers use to develop positive, supporting relationships with their stepdaughters.

Using a generic qualitative approach also allows researchers to obtain variation in the responses of a sample of participants. This variation may provide information on a broad range of strategies that African American stepfathers use to build positive

relationships with their stepdaughters (Khalke, 2014; Percy et al., 2015). The generic qualitative approach allows for various types of data collection, such as semi structured interviews and focus groups (Khalke, 2014; Percy et al., 2015). The generic approach also allowed me the opportunity to construct semi- or fully-structured interviews with participants to gain in-depth responses regarding their experiences with their stepdaughters.

Although limited, there have been other qualitative and quantitative designs that have been used in previous research for African American stepfathers in their blended families. For example, Blyaert et al. (2016) completed a qualitative study that examined the feelings of stepfathers about the roles they play within their blended families. Using a quantitative approach, Bryant et al. (2016) examined associations between African American stepfather-stepchild relationship quality, depression, and quality of interactions in marriage. However, taking a quantitative approach was not appropriate for this study for a few reasons. First, the quantitative approach would need a larger sample of participants. African American men are one of the least understudied populations (Bryant et al., 2016) and getting a large sample of them to reply to the surveys could possibly take a long time. In addition, the purpose of this study is to determine directly from the stepfathers, what strategies they used to form positive relationships with their stepdaughters. Therefore, a quantitative approach would have not been suitable for collecting direct information using the participants' voices (Percy et al., 2015; Yin, 2016). A qualitative approach was most appropriate for conducting this study because it provided me the opportunity to obtain information rich, open-ended responses, from the

stepfathers regarding the strategies they used to establish positive relationships with their stepdaughters.

Role of the Researcher

I was the sole researcher throughout the research process. I collected, coded, and analyzed the data to determine relevant themes among the participants' responses. It is common in qualitative research for the researcher to complete the entire process of data collection, data analysis, and interpreting for reporting (Percy et al., 2015; Yin, 2016). In generic qualitative research, the researcher may have some previous knowledge regarding the research topic (Khalke, 2014; Percy et al., 2015). Researchers can use this prior knowledge to assist them in creating interview questions to assist in identifying the experience (Kennedy, 2016; Percy et al., 2015).

Researcher Bias

I currently have a blended family and my husband is African American. My husband has built a positive relationship with my daughter, his stepdaughter. I also have African American male friends, who are considered family friends, and I have observed them creating positive relationships with their stepdaughters. From knowing my husband and these male friends, and seeing them all in action with their stepdaughters, I have basic knowledge of this topic. I have observed them creating relationships with their stepchildren, each at different times and at different levels. I know the dynamics of their blended families and have seen some of the interaction between the men and their stepdaughters. Having this knowledge, as the current researcher, may have caused for me to assume that all African American stepfathers have the same type of relationship with

their stepdaughters. People may find it hard to resist preconceived beliefs that they may have developed as a result of their personal experiences with a topic or phenomenon (Xu & Storr, 2012).

During research, it is important for researchers to uphold ethical standards and acknowledge any preconceived beliefs and personal biases they may have regarding the topic being studied (Xu & Storr, 2012). It was important that I acknowledge my biased views upfront so that I may be aware of my thoughts and feelings during research (Chenail, 2011). These biases have to be acknowledged in an attempt to identify any preconceived feelings regarding the study. Yin (2016) suggested the importance of looking at the research plainly without distorting information to avoid unexplained bias. Chenail (2011) suggested that it is important to acknowledge biases so the researcher will not think they know everything regarding their research. As a researcher I had a biased view on the topic of this research because I personally believe that all stepfathers can use positive strategies to build relationships with their stepchildren and with their stepdaughters in particular. In order to manage my researcher bias on this topic I used bracketing and reflexivity.

Bracketing is defined as the way a researcher identifies personal experiences or assumptions that could influence the outcomes of their research (Fischer, 2009). Bracketing during research provides the researcher the chance to acknowledge their personal experiences and beliefs regarding the research topic (Fischer, 2009). I completed bracketing in my research by journaling my thoughts and feelings that may arise regarding interview questions. Since bracketing is a continuous process, (Fischer, 2009).

I bracketed my thoughts and feelings during the data collection and data analysis processes.

Reflexivity is another way to acknowledge researcher bias. The best way for me to process my personal biases during data collection, specifically during the interviewing stage, was to journal. This journal during data collection is also a form of reflexivity (Amankwaa, 2016). Fischer (2009) described reflexivity as the way for the researcher to be aware of how they have developed an understanding of their research. During this reflexivity I continuously recorded my personal feelings and assumptions I have regarding the stepfather-stepdaughter relationship. I did this by reflective journaling. Journaling assists the researcher in documenting and acknowledging thoughts, feelings and emotions regarding the research topic and process so thoughts, feelings and emotions are bracketed out during collecting data, data analysis, data interpretation and writing results (Berger, 2015).

Another strategy I used to maintain bracketing and reflexivity was through debriefing. Peer debriefing involves a peer, who is not involved in the research project, to assist in seeing the research from a different perspective. The peer will also assist by providing feedback that is to be used by the researcher (Berger, 2015; Fischer, 2009). I had my dissertation committee members who agreed to assist me in peer debriefing.

Methodology

Participant Selection

The targeted population for this research was married African American men who are over the age of 18 years. Purposeful sampling was used to recruit participants for this

research. *Purposeful sampling* is defined as a sample of participants that are recruited based on specific criteria and participant characteristics (Suri, 2011). It is important for a researcher to use purposeful sampling to enhance the likelihood of obtaining information rich data that may lead to achieving data saturation (Palinkas et al., 2015). Purposeful sampling can increase the likelihood of achieving data saturation. I intended to achieve data saturation based on the responses of the participants because the research participants would possibly have similar responses to the interview questions. After several similar responses, this was be an indication that there is no new data to be obtained (Palinkas et al., 2015; Suri, 2011). Furthermore, Mason (2010) proposed that the more similar the experiences shared by the participants regarding the phenomenon of interest in a study, the quicker data saturation may be achieved. My plan was to continue sampling participants until saturation is achieved.

Snowball sampling is another sampling strategy that was used to recruit participants for this research. *Snowball sampling* happens when participants who know about the study refer other potential participants that fit the inclusion criteria to the researcher as potential participants (Heckathorn, 2011). Snowball sampling took place during participant recruitment. After a participant was recruited via Facebook or Instagram, they would contact me to participate in the study (this process is discussed in detail later in the chapter). I then asked respondents if they knew anyone else who possibly fits the inclusion criteria and who would be interested in participating in the study. If they said yes, I requested that respondents forward the recruitment flyer to other potential participants via Facebook or Instagram.

The inclusion criteria for participation in this study were restricted to African American males who are married and living in a home with a school age stepdaughter. The school age stepdaughter must have been between the ages of 6-12 years (David, 2014). These African American stepfathers must have lived with their stepdaughters for a minimum of 1 year. The exclusion criteria for this research were unmarried or cohabitating African American stepfathers, married African American stepfathers married without a preadolescent stepdaughter. Single stepfathers were also excluded from participating. A final exclusion criterion was non-African American stepfathers as they were a different ethnicity.

I recruited participants from social media specifically Facebook and Instagram. I personally posted an electronic flyer using my personal Facebook and Instagram name (See Appendix E for a copy of the recruitment flyer). The flyer contained information regarding the study, and it instructed individuals who are interested in participating in the study to private message me. After individuals contacted me about the study, I used Facebook or Instagram messenger to call them. I determined their eligibility to participate in the study by asking them the questions pertaining to the inclusion criteria (See Appendix D for copy of the screening questions). If a caller matched the inclusion criteria, I scheduled the caller for an interview.

Sample Size

There was no specific number of participants required for a study in qualitative research. The sample size is dependent on the type of qualitative methodology chosen by the researcher. After the research was approved by the Walden University IRB, I targeted

recruiting 6-15 participants for the study. Previous researchers have stated that generic qualitative data collection does not have an ideal sample size (Mason, 2010; Percy et al., 2015). An ideal number for phenomenology sample size could be as little as six participants, and the ideal sample for all qualitative research is 15 (Mason, 2010). So, the rationale for 6-15 participants was to encompass such sample size of qualitative research for the purpose of data saturation. Generic qualitative may include a slightly larger sample size because the sample of participants tends to be more widely representative and this can assist in producing information rich responses (Mason, 2010; Percy et al., 2015) which can increase the likelihood of data saturation (Mason, 2010). Data saturation is important in qualitative research because it lets researchers know when they have reached a point in their data collection and analysis where they can stop collecting new data (Mason, 2010). When there are no new responses or themes from the data collected, that means saturation has been achieved (Mason, 2010). Once the data was collected from each participant, I reviewed the responses. If the collected data had no new themes I planned to stop recruiting for more participants, as this indicated data saturation.

Instrumentation

I was the sole researcher for this study and all data was collected by me. In qualitative research, researchers often complete their own data collection and data analysis (Yuri, 2016). The data collection for generic qualitative research is a process with multiple steps and must be completed step by step (Kennedy, 2016; Percy et al., 2015). Data for this study was collected from semi-structured interviews.

In this study, I developed the interview protocol guide, wrote interview notes, and maintained a reflective journal. The purpose of an interview guide was to guide the interview process and to assist me in remaining on task while conducting the interviews (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). The interview guide includes details such as the purpose of the consent form, the purpose of the study, the reason the participant was recruited, a scripted introduction for the interview, the interview questions, and prompts for the follow up questions. A copy of the interview guide is included in Appendix A.

The research questions provided the stepfathers the chance to examine their relationships between their stepdaughters and themselves. To verify whether the interview questions are adequate and appropriate, I addressed face validity and content validity. Face validity refers to subjective judgement of whether an instrument appears to measure what it was designed to measure (Oluwatayo, 2012). Evidence of content validity is determined by whether the instrument has been constructed fairly and highlights all the important meanings within the concepts of the phenomenon (Oluwatayo, 2012). Both face validity and content validity was important in this research to ensure that the instrument that was created for this research would measure what it is designed to measure. Both face validity and content validity was judged by my dissertation committee members.

Recruitment Procedures

I created a recruitment flyer to assist in recruiting participants. I posted a copy of the recruitment flyer on social media, specifically Facebook and Instagram. I posted on my personal pages and ask participants if they are interested in participating in this

research. If they were interested in participating, they were instructed to send a private message to me with their names, phone numbers, and best times to call to my inbox. After I received their names and numbers from the inquiries, I then contacted respondents. I asked them screening questions to determine whether the potential participants meet the inclusion criteria. If they met the inclusion criteria and were interested in being interviewed, I proceeded to schedule a formal time for the interview.

Participation

After the participants were scheduled for interviews, I arranged to meet them at a specified agreed location or telephonically to complete the interviews. I provided participants the option for a face to face interview or a telephone interview. I was willing to meet participants within 15 miles of where I am located. The locations were to include local university libraries. However, the respondents who lived out of state or respondents who live over 15 miles away, I completed a telephone interview with those participants. Telephone interviews have become more accepted within qualitative research. Some advantages of telephone interviews are they are less intrusive and more flexible for accommodating a participants' schedule, as the participants do not have to physically meet for an interview (Drabble, Trocki, Salcedo, Walker & Korcha, 2016). Some of the disadvantages for using telephone interviews are that they present a lack of connection between the researcher and participant (Drabble et al., 2016). This lack of connection can result in loss of context of observation, loss of rapport, and the inability to respond to visual body language presented by the participant (Drabble et al., 2016).

I went over the consent form with participants and provide them the chance to ask as many questions they need prior to the interview to assist in building some type of rapport with them. Jacob and Furgerson (2012) suggested that research participants must always complete a consent form. The consent form should include information such as the topic of the study and reminder about confidentiality. The consent form was retrieved from the Walden University IRB website. The consent form included information about the study, details regarding confidentiality, and IRB contact information. The consent form also included a reminder to the participants that participating in the study is voluntary and they could withdraw at any time during the interview. Finally, I also provided them the opportunity to tell me more in their responses to the interview questions to make them more comfortable.

Data Collection

Data collection is a key component in research. For my research, data collection was completed using several methods. The data collection methods included interviews, audio recordings, field notes, and a reflexive journal.

Interviews

In generic qualitative research, semi- or fully pre structured interviews are one of the methods for data collection (Percy et al., 2015). The interviews should focus on the participants' external and real-world feelings and not the psychological feelings of their experiences. (Khalke, 2014; Percy et al., 2015). Khalke (2014) further stated that interview questions should be based on the researcher's previous knowledge of the existing body of literature about the topic. In generic qualitative research, the interview

questions should also provide a chance for the “tell me more” types of questions to find out the participants views regarding the phenomenon (Khalke, 2014).

Before the interview, I went over the consent form and asked the participant questions from the demographic form (See Appendix B for a copy of demographic questions). At the beginning of each interview I reminded the participants that I will be recording the interview and requested for them to let me know when they are ready to begin. During the interview, I asked questions listed in the interview guide. (See Appendix A for the questions that were asked and the guide used for the interviews.) The interviews were expected to last for approximately 1 hour. The participants did not need to be interviewed more than once. None of the interviews were interrupted or had to stop to be postponed.

At the close of the interviews, I asked all participants if they had any questions for me. Then I gave them a debriefing form. The debriefing form included information regarding the study; reminded them about confidentiality, and my contact information. Upon completion of us going over the debriefing form I thanked them for their time for completing the interview. I then let them know about member checking. The *member checks* are a means of follow-up for a researcher to ensure credibility, validity, and accuracy of the interview data (Cope, 2014). A member check is completed when participants are contacted and provided the research data to ensure accuracy of reporting (Amankwaa, 2016). I emailed the participants copies of their interview data and results. The email address was provided from the demographic form, which was given to the participant at the beginning of the interview. I called them to let them know that the

transcript had been emailed and then I gave them one week to review the transcript and provide feedback within the document and then email it back to me. If there was no response from the participants after that one week, I considered the information to be verified.

Recording Device

I planned to record the participants' interviews by way of recording device. The recording device was used to verify the accuracy of data collection for transcription (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). I used an audio recording application that is located on my android phone. I did not use a standard audio recording device that I will purchase from a local store. I ensured the audio recording application on my phone was working adequately by testing it out prior to my first interview. The purpose of having two recording devices is to use one as a backup just in case one fails (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). Jacob and Furgerson (2012) further indicated that it is important to also have back-up batteries. In this case, I had my phone charger on hand. Prior to the interview beginning, each participant was required to give consent to being recorded and assured their recording would be kept confidential.

Field Notes

The field notes will be notes that provide insight to information that could not be recorded by way of an interview recording (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). The field notes are where I captured basic information about the data collection such as date, time, and the location of interviews. For in person interviews, I would have also written field notes to highlight noteworthy body language pertaining to participants' responses. I did not

complete any in person interviews however wrote notes that I deemed as important to interview.

Reflexive Journal

Lastly, I used the reflexive journal to capture my personal feelings, opinions, and biases about the interviews, data analysis and interpretation. A reflexive journal is important in qualitative studies because it allows researchers to organize their preconceived feelings and thoughts and identify biases before research (Yin, 2016). Journaling assists the researcher in collecting thoughts, feelings and emotions so they will not be included while collecting data (Berger, 2015).

Data Analysis Plan

After the interviews were completed, I transcribed the responses from each participant for subsequent data analysis. I then analyzed the data using the inductive data analysis plan discussed by Percy et al. (2015). Percy et al. indicated that, for generic qualitative research, inductive analysis is used to identify repeating patterns and themes from participants' responses. The inductive approach is used in data analysis by studying the transcribed documents to identify themes among a group of responses (Percy et al., 2015). Following transcription, I systematically went about coding and analyzing the data for themes using an Excel spreadsheet.

In qualitative data analysis there must a strategy used for analyzing the data. The strategy I chose to use was Colaizzi process (Thomas, 2006). The Colaizzi method uses 7 steps to assist in analyzing the data during the inductive analysis process (Shosha, 2012; Thomas, 2006).

1. Familiarizing. To begin the first step of completing the data analysis, I reviewed all data from each participant individually. I read the interview transcripts on my computer screen over and over several times to familiarize myself with the content of the participants' responses. I also printed them and have a paper copy to read and then I extracted similar comments or ideas expressed by the participants
2. Identifying significant statements. During the second step of the data analysis, the researcher is supposed to take each line, that is directly related to the phenomenon, and direct to another paper and use the page number and line number. For every line of data that I read that is pertaining to my research topic, I recorded separately on another journal and include the page number and line number. This will be journaled in an Excel spreadsheet.
3. Formulate meanings. The third step by Colaizzi (Thomas, 2006) involves developing meanings formulated by significant statements. I grouped statements, key words, or phrases that have similar content. I had to look at each statement to find a meaning that is related to my research topic (Shosha, 2012). This is known as open coding.
4. Categorize meanings into themes. The fourth step is to take the meanings from the previous step and formulate meanings based on similarities of words or phrases (Shosha, 2012). I formulated meanings of these similar words or phrases. These similar words or phrases then became themes.

The categories or themes could have been represented in the form of numbers or letters. This is also known as axial coding.

5. Exhaustive description. The fifth step is to integrate the themes and write them into an exhaustive description (Shosha, 2012). I took all categories and clusters of themes and wrote a thorough description of the theme.
6. Fundamental structure. The sixth step is to describe the structure of the phenomenon in relation to the findings (Shosha, 2012). I used this step to ensure that all other information that had no bearings on the cluster of themes were discarded to ensure the actual structures of the strategies of the stepfathers are revealed.
7. Validation of findings. The final step of the Colaizzi method is to share all findings with the research participants to ensure the information and themes are accurate (Shosha, 2012). I contacted all the participants and emailed them a copy of the interview themes and requested that they look it over to ensure that what I have interpreted as themes are accurate. This is also similar to member checking.

During this data analysis stage there was data that is considered a discrepant case. Discrepant cases consist of information from an interview that differs from the other interviews. Discrepant cases information was included in the data analysis as to increase dependability.

Issues of Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, the best way to ensure the quality of the research is by assessing the trustworthiness of the results (Cope, 2014). There are various protocols that researchers can cross check to ensure that the research is trustworthy (Amankwaa, 2016). These protocols will enhance the overall trustworthiness of findings of the research. Amankwaa (2016) further stated that credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability are the key requirements for enhancing trustworthiness in qualitative research.

Credibility

Credibility is viewed as the confidence in the truth of the findings in research (Amankwaa, 2016). The credibility of the research is the most important factor is establishing trustworthiness (Cope, 2014). To establish credibility in this research I completed an audit trail and transcript review. An audit trail is completed when all information from the research is documented for accuracy (Cope, 2014). The audit trail was used to document the logical steps and paths that I take in my data analysis. To ensure an audit trail was completed for my research, I kept a step by step record of how my study was collected and analyzed. This means that I will provide written documentation of everything involved in my research. The audit trail was verified by my dissertation committee. I ensured to keep an accurate account of all data by keeping them in one electronic file and one file for any hardcopy information. This included recordings of interviews, journals, all coding information, and transcripts for all data.

I also used transcript review to enhance the credibility of this study (Hagens, Dobrow & Chafe, 2009). Transcript review allows participants to read the transcripts of their individual interviews. The purpose of transcript review was to confirm that I accurately captured what was stated by the participants in the transcribed interviews. I emailed participants copies of their individual transcripts. I also requested their feedback regarding the accuracy of the transcripts. Each participant had one week to review and provide feedback, within the document line by line. Once they completed their reviews, participants were instructed to email the documents back to me.

Transferability

Cope (2014) defined *transferability* as the ability for the research study's findings can be transferred to other situations or populations. Amankwaa (2016) stated that transferability is the method of trustworthiness to ensure the findings can be relevant in other contexts. I used thick description to increase transferability of my research. Thick description was used to present support for the themes. Thick description is a detailed description or verbatim quotes used during data collection and analysis (Amankwaa, 2016). These detailed descriptions during the data analysis can increase transferability by providing context to the reader. I also used an audit trail to increase transferability of my research. The audit trail is used to document every step of my research. An audit trail is completed when all written documentation of the research is taken into account (Cope, 2014). I kept a step by step record of how my data is collected and analyzed.

Dependability

Amankwaa (2016) described *dependability* as consistency in the findings from a study and whether the findings could be repeated. The two methods I used to enhance dependability will be triangulation and member checking. The method of data triangulation occurs when information from multiple sources are compared for the results (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe & Neville, 2014). This method of triangulation occurred by collecting information from multiple sources, such as the literature review and data analysis, and the results are compared in Chapter 5. To further enhance dependability of this study I also used member checking. Member checks are completed to ensure accuracy and to give the participants the chance to read the themes established, once data analysis is completed (Amankwaa, 2016). To complete member checks I requested that participants played an active role in reviewing data that was analyzed. This included the themes as related to the strategies they used to develop positive relationships with their stepdaughters. Participants were sent their analyzed data including themes, via email and had an opportunity to review and provide feedback to me.

Confirmability

Confirmability is the process to ensure that the results from the research, is only shaped by the data from the participants (Amankwaa, 2016). The best way for confirmability to be accomplished is by way of triangulation and reflexivity (Cope, 2014). Triangulation is a method that establishes validity in research by collecting data from multiple sources and comparing the results (Carter et al., 2014). I also used a

reflexive journal. Reflexivity is the continuous process of reflecting during the research process (Berger, 2015). Reflexive journaling is like keeping a diary of all thoughts, feelings and observations during the interviews which can help to minimize bias (Berger, 2015). During the data collection process, I kept a journal with me during the interviews. I wrote down what I observed and my thoughts regarding the participants and how they responded to each question. I also reflected on what is happening in terms of my own values.

Ethical Procedures

All ethical procedures for Walden University students are on the IRB website. The website presents the key components for researchers to complete their research ethically. I followed the Walden University IRB guidelines to complete my study within ethical guidelines. After I received approval, I added the IRB approval number to each consent form, which was given to participants prior to conducting the interviews. No recruitment or interviews were completed prior to receiving approval. I ensured that all recruitment materials were in compliance with Walden's IRB guidelines.

All participants were treated in accordance to IRB guidelines. Each participant completed the interview voluntarily. Participants were reminded, that at any time they could refuse to continue the process. Upon completion of the interview, I went over the debriefing form with each participant. Each person whether they were eligible for the interview or not, was thanked for their time.

All data collected and archived was treated by the standards of Walden's IRB board. All data was kept confidential and the privacy of all participants' information was

protected by the researcher. This was completed by ensuring that no identifying information of the participant was utilized in transcripts, instead, I used study codes to represent each participant. In addition, all participants were told their names will not be revealed. During the period of collecting data, I ensured to keep the recording device and the transcripts of the interviews locked away in a file cabinet. The file cabinet is located in my office at my home, and the office door is locked. Only I have a key to the lock.

All research data collected is locked and stored at my residence and will be for 5 years. Once the time expires, the data will be destroyed by being thrown into the shredder within my office located at my home. While the research data is stored at my home, I am the only one that will have access to where the data is kept as it is in a locked container and this is my personal space. If there are any ethical issues, I will contact my dissertation committee and Walden's IRB.

Summary

In this chapter I discussed my research design and rationale, my role as the researcher and the methodology for my research. In the methodology I was able to describe my data collection process and analysis for my study of the strategies that African American stepfathers use to build positive relationships with their stepdaughters. In this chapter I also addressed issues with trustworthiness, and I addressed ethical concerns. In chapter 4, I will discuss data collection and analysis, trustworthiness, and the results of the study.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

In this generic, qualitative study, I explored the strategies African American stepfathers use to develop positive, supporting relationships with their school-age stepdaughters. In this study I addressed the following research question: What strategies do African American stepfathers in blended families use to develop positive, supporting relationships with their school-age stepdaughters? In this chapter, I present the findings of the data analysis of seven individuals who participated in this study. I begin this chapter with the setting of the interviews for the data collections. The next section highlights the demographics of the participants. In the following sections, the data collection and data analysis processes are discussed. The next section follows with the evidence of trustworthiness, the interview results, and presentation of the emergent themes.

Setting

I collected data for this study using semi structured interviews as described Chapter 3. I established privacy for the interviews by completing the phone calls in my home office. My home office was free from distractions because I was able to close the door. Participation in the study was voluntary, and I did not have knowledge of any of the participants having any mental or emotional disabilities. Each participant received the phone calls at the location of their choice. Participants maintained privacy and quietness during the calls, as there were no interruptions during the interviews. There were no personal conditions known to me that may have influenced participants or their thoughts

at the time of study. I began each interview with an introduction and thanking participants for their time. I emailed a copy of the consent form to each participant prior to the phone call for the interview. I also read the consent form over the phone with the participant to ensure they understood the consent form. Each participant gave their consent to participate in the study verbally. Once I received the consent, I used the interview guide presented in Appendix A to guide each interview.

Demographics

A total of seven participants took part in the study. The demographics of each participant were collected at the beginning of each interview, after going over the consent form. The demographics were recorded on the demographic questionnaire presented in Appendix D. Table 1 shows the demographics of the participants. The participants ranged in age from 31-41 years of age at the time of the interviews. Data in Table 1 reveals that the stepdaughters of the participants' ranged from 8-12 years of age. The participants revealed they had been married for 3-9 years. Participants revealed that the time they had been living with their stepdaughters ranged from 2-9 years. The last category of the demographics table highlights whether the participants had any other children in the home besides their stepdaughters. Most of the participants' revealed that there were 1-2 other children living in the home besides their stepdaughters. Only 1 participant had no other children in the home. All the participants identified that they had at least 1 biological child with their current spouses. These spouses were also the mother of the participants' stepdaughters. Six of the participants identified that there was at least one other child living in the home.

Table 1

Demographics of the Stepfathers

Participants	Participants Age in Years	Stepdaughter Age	The # of Years Married	The # of Years Stepdaughter in Home	Number of Biological Children	Number of Other Children in the Home
P 1	31	8	6	6	1	1
P 2	46	11	9	9	2	2
P 3	41	8	5	5	1	0
P 4	38	11	3	2	1	1
P 5	32	12,9	5	5	1	1
P 6	44	12	7	7	1	1
P 7	37	12	8	8	1	2

Data Collection

After receiving approval from the Walden University IRB, (IRB Approval # 01-31-20-0605385), I followed the data collection process outlined in Chapter 3. Data were collected from seven participants. The number of participants interviewed fell within the range of the intended sample size outlined in Chapter 3, which was between 6-15 participants. The seven participants were within the range of acceptable sample size for generic qualitative.

The timeframe for the recruitment process was 2 weeks. The participants were recruited based on the recruitment process presented in Chapter 3. The participants were recruited from Facebook and Instagram, which is where I posted the recruitment flyer. The potential participants then private messaged me to inquire about the study. I, in turn, replied by requesting to call them via private messenger. During this initial conversation, I provided them more information about the study and asked the screening questions.

After the initial conversation with the participants via private messenger, participants provided me their contact information once they agreed to participate in the study. I then called the participants and scheduled a day and time for the interview. On the scheduled date and time for each interview, I contacted the participants from my home office via telephone and conducted the interviews. Data for this study was collected through semi structured interviews. The interviews continued until data saturation was achieved. I determined that data saturation had been achieved when there was no new information related to my research topic to emerge from the participants' responses to the data I collected. Data saturation had been achieved by the fifth interview. However, I interviewed the two additional participants to achieve the targeted sample size of 6 – 15 participants as indicated in Chapter 3. Also, previous research indicated the acceptable sample size for generic qualitative research ranges from 6-15 participants (Mason, 2010). The interviews were recorded with a call recording application that I downloaded to my phone.

Before beginning the initial interview, I downloaded a call recording application to my phone to record all the interviews. I downloaded the recording application named Cube ACR (Cube Automatic Call Recorder) to record the interviews. Cube ACR is a free call recording application that is accessible to my phone via the Google Play Store. After the interviews were recorded, I sent them to be transcribed. Each interview was sent separately right after being recorded.

In Chapter 3, I indicated that I originally intended to use Trint, which is an automated transcription service, to transcribe the interviews. However, I had technical

issues with downloading the Trint application to my cellphone. I noticed the technical issues with Trint after the recording of my first interview. The Trint application would not download completely. I then alerted my chair of my technical issues with Trint. I also discussed with my chair that going forward I would use Temi for transcription of the interviews. Temi is a transcription website that transcribes audio recordings for \$.25 per minute. I went to the Temi website on my phone and uploaded each interview from the Cube ACR file. I paid for each transcription using my credit card. Temi then transcribed the recorded interviews automatically and sent the transcription to my email address. After the data was transcribed, I then needed to clean the data.

I began to clean the data by taking the transcriptions provided in my email from Temi and to remove the personal information of the participants from the transcripts. The participants' names were removed from the transcriptions and were replaced with the letter "P" and a number. The numbers were assigned based on the sequence by which participants were interviewed, for example, P1, P2, P3, and so forth. I removed the names of the participants from the transcriptions to ensure the participants' confidentiality.

Data Analysis

I conducted the data analysis using Colaizzi's 7 step method. For the first step of the data analysis, I read the transcripts of the interviews several times. I read the transcripts repeatedly to achieve adequate knowledge of the participants' reports of the strategies they use to build positive relationships with their stepdaughters. In the second step of analyzing the data, I extracted recurring themes related to each interview question from the responses given by participants. I extracted the comments related to each

interview question by copying and pasting them into an Excel spreadsheet. Once the comments were posted in Excel, each set of similar comments was arranged according to the interview question. Then the grouped comments were highlighted with different colors. The color-coded highlighting allowed for me to highlight keywords and phrases that were later grouped to create emergent themes. The third step was to create emergent themes using open coding. I looked at each group of comments from the responses and found a meaning that was related to my research topic. I used the keywords and phrases and placed them into common units of meanings which were labeled as themes.

For the fourth step of the data analysis, I used axial coding to tag related items for grouping into categories to develop themes. For step 5 of the data analysis, I synthesized the themes created from the axial coding by combining the common themes. Then, I wrote a thorough description of each theme. The sixth step is known as fundamental structure where all of the other information that has no bearings on the interview question was discarded. The process of fundamental structuring was done by discarding information that was unrelated to each interview question. The fundamental structuring was done to reveal the themes that were related to each interview question.

The final step to Colaizzi 7 step method was to validate the findings (Shosha, 2010). I validated my findings by member checking. I sent a summary of the data analysis to the participants via email. Transcript review was accomplished to provide the participants with an opportunity to confirm that their responses and the themes had been captured and interpreted accurately. To complete step 7 the participants were to validate the findings by agreeing or disagreeing with the summary of the data analysis that was

emailed to them, which is identified as member checking. None of the participants gave any comments regarding the summary of the data analysis. Therefore, I assumed that they accepted the themes that were created from their interviews.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in research is important because it addresses the researcher's accuracy in reporting the experiences of participants (Cope, 2014). The components of trustworthiness are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These four protocols are the key requirements for enhancing the trustworthiness of findings in qualitative research.

Credibility

To establish *credibility* in this research I used an audit trail and completed a transcript review. To ensure an audit trail was completed for my research, I kept a step by step record of how my data was collected and analyzed in a separate notebook. Chapter 3 outlined the methodology for my research and in Chapter 4 I discussed the actual steps that were taken during the data collection process. The data analysis section in Chapter 4 also provides a step by step record of how the data analysis was completed.

I also used transcript review to enhance credibility. After the data collection was completed, I emailed participants copies of their individual transcripts and requested their feedback regarding the accuracy of their transcripts. Each participant had one week to review and provide feedback on their transcripts. Participants were instructed to email the documents back to me after they completed their reviews. None of the participants

replied with any corrections, and I, therefore, assumed that they accepted the transcripts of their interviews.

Transferability

Amankwaa (2016) defined transferability as the degree to which findings from a study may be transferred to other situations or populations. I used thick description as a method to enhance the transferability of findings from my study. I used thick descriptions by providing detailed descriptions or verbatim quotes of the participants' responses from the interviews, in the results section. To further enhance transferability, I also developed an audit trail which I described in detail in the previous section of this chapter on credibility.

Dependability

Amankwaa (2016) described *dependability* as consistency in the findings from a study and whether the findings could be repeated. For dependability, I used triangulation and member checking. I will complete triangulation in Chapter 5 in the Interpretation of Findings section where I compare the findings from my research to findings in the literature review presented in Chapter 2. In Chapter 5 I will also present my findings in the context of my theoretical orientation presented in Chapter 2. I also used member checking for dependability. Member checks are completed to enhance accuracy of the analyzed data. Member checks also give the participants the chance to read the themes established, once data analysis is completed. Participants were contacted and sent their individual analyzed data including themes, via email. The participants were given an opportunity to review and provide feedback to me within one week. None of the

participants replied with any feedback and I therefore assumed they accepted the analyzed data.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the degree to which the results from the research are shaped by the data collected from the participants (Amankwaa, 2016). After the data was collected from the participants, I used triangulation and reflexivity to achieve confirmability. I will use triangulation in Chapter 5 for confirmability which was described in detail in the section on Dependability. I also used reflexivity for confirmability. Reflexivity refers to the continuous process of the researcher reflecting during the research process, which can be done by keeping a diary of thoughts or feelings (Berger, 2015). The reflexive journaling is done to minimize biases during the research process. I completed the reflexive journaling during the data collection process. Upon the completion of each interview, I wrote down my thoughts and feelings based on the participants' responses to the questions in a journal. I was also able to use the reflexive journal to record my values and thoughts while rereading transcripts of the interviews. I referred to my reflexive journaled thoughts and values to minimize biases while creating the themes during data analysis.

Results

Data were collected and analyzed in this study to answer the research question. The research question was, What are the strategies African American stepfathers use to develop positive, supporting relationships with their school-aged stepdaughter? The interview questions were broken into two categories. The two categories were

Background Information and Strategies Used for Building Positive Relationships with Stepdaughters.

Background Information:

The first sets of questions were used to gather background information on the participants' general perspectives of their relationships with their stepdaughters. Knowing their perspectives enabled to better understand the context of how they went using strategies for developing positive relationships with their stepdaughters. There were three interview questions that gathered that background information. Several themes emerged from the responses to the three questions: The three interview questions that incorporated background information addressed the following topics:

1. Perspectives on being a stepfather
2. Sources of conflict with stepdaughter
3. Nature of relationship with stepdaughter

Perspectives on being a stepfather. Participants were asked what they think and feel about being a stepfather. As a follow-up question, the participants were further asked how those thoughts and feelings influenced the strategies they use to build a positive relationship with their stepdaughters. The keywords and phrases that were coded to the themes are listed below in Table 2. The themes that emerged from the participants responses for this question were positive emotional experience and the desire to be an ideal stepfather.

Table 2

Perspectives on Being a Stepfather

Theme	Key words and phrases
Desire to be an ideal stepfather	Learning to be the father Strong Role Model Being someone their daughter relates to Open door policy
Positive Emotional Experience	Love it It's a natural feeling I embrace it

The first theme that emerged from participants regarding their perspectives on being a stepfather specified the participants' desire to be an ideal stepfather. The comments P3 presented below are a good example of the desire to an ideal stepfather. The comments directly reflects wanting to be a role model and ideal stepfather for his stepdaughter. P3 stated:

What I hold dear is that I try to be the most positive and wholesome role model I can be. Everybody has their faults and their vices but I try to be the best version of myself displayed to her so she pick up some traits here and there of traits she can look for when the time comes. And I am just interested in being positive in front of her...like I want her in general, like all young females to have that positive male to look for.

P1 expressed how important it was to let his stepdaughter know there was an open door policy and she could tell him everything. The following is a direct quote from the interview where he stated, "She can come to me for anything I tell her it's the open door policy. So it just, it's just a natural fit."

The second theme that emerged from the follow-up question was that being a stepfather was a positive emotional experience. All participants gave positive responses regarding their perspectives on being a stepfather. P2 made a simple statement about his perspectives. He stated, "I love it, straight up... it's great!" P1 provided his perspective of being a stepfather and he stated, "It just feels normal, feels natural, so it just, it's just a natural fit a flow thing. It's just, I can't explain it".

Sources of tension/conflict with stepdaughter. Participants were asked to describe the sources of conflict/tension that they have with their stepdaughters. Table 3 presents the major theme that emerged from the participants' responses. The sources of conflict tended to reflect typical school aged girl behavior. Table 3 also presents the supporting key words and phrases that were coded to the theme.

Table 3

Sources of Tension with Stepdaughter

Theme	Key words and phrases
School-aged girl behavior	Stepdaughters distracted from tasks Lack of attention Attitude for backing up spouse Seeking attention from stepfather Mood swings due to hormones

P2 indicated that most of his conflicts with his stepdaughter occur when his stepdaughter gets sidetracked from a task that he has asked her to complete. He acknowledged that at the beginning of living with his stepdaughter, her becoming sidetracked "freaked" him out. P2 had the following comment to describe the source of conflict with his stepdaughter:

The only, the only issue we may have is I have to repeat things to her. Um, if I tell her to do something, she kind of does her own thing and, or gets sidetracked. She gets sidetracked very easily. So that's the tension that you have that's what freaked me a lot.

P5 mentioned that the source of conflict with his stepdaughter occurs when he backs up his spouse while she provides instructions to his stepdaughter. P5's perception was that his stepdaughters' attitudes toward him changes when he supports his spouse. He further mentioned that during those times his stepdaughters remind him that he is not their biological father. P5's perception of how the stepdaughters' change of attitude causes conflict is in the following comments:

You can feel the sense that there's somewhat, you know because they know the outcome that I'm actually not their father. So I can sense the same feeling. Like, oh, I'm not the father and you can't say that to me.

P3 described the school-aged girl behavior as "something that took adjustment". P3 indicated that his initial lack of attention toward his stepdaughter was a source of conflict. P3 was not used to a child needing so much attention because he indicated that he had a son prior to meeting his stepdaughter. P3 further pointed out that his son did not require as much attention as his stepdaughter. P3 described his time of adjusting to his stepdaughter's attention-seeking as follows:

I think it has more to do with probably attention. Yea if there was anything it would probably have to do with attention. Because I think I think girls require a lot more, they require more time for contact time, quiet time, conversational time,

personal bonding time, yes they [girls] require a lot, which took time for me to adjust because I only had a son before [his stepdaughter].

All participants acknowledged that they experienced some sources of conflict with their stepdaughters. The comments revealed that the conflict centered around behaviors that were typical of school aged girls. However, participants later revealed some of the things they did to manage conflict or tension when it occurred. Comments presented in the next section reveals that even though there was conflict at times, the participants still perceived that they had strong, positive relationships with their stepdaughters.

Nature of relationship with stepdaughter. One interview question asked participants to describe their relationships with their stepdaughters. Table 4 presents the major theme of strong relationship that emerged from the participants' responses. Some of the supporting keywords and phrases that were coded to the theme are also presented in Table 4. The majority of the participants highlighted that they had a strong positive relationship with their stepdaughters. Participant 1 revealed the following about his relationship with his stepdaughter, "The relationship I have with my daughter is very strong and I believe that is strong because it's communication. Me and her full time, we have an open line of communication between each other." Participant 2 indicated the following about the relationship with his stepdaughter, "We have a strong relationship. We get together. She likes movies so we go to see it sometimes. We do a lot of activities together." Participant 7 describe the nature of his relationship with his stepdaughter in the following comments where he stated "I believe our relationship is strong because I parent

her in a way, or at least I try to parent her in a way I believe I would want to be parented.”

Table 4

Nature of Relationship with Stepdaughter

Theme	Key words and phrases
Strong relationship	Good relationship Healthy relationship Awesome relationship We get along We communicate

Participant 6 provided a different view, from the other participants, of his relationship with his stepdaughter. The view from P6 differed because his stepdaughter has yet to make him feel more important than her biological father. P6 indicated, “Well, we have a love-hate relationship. Um, it's never any malice, nothing negative, but the side on her stepfather; it feels like she does want to make me more important than her biological father.” P6 identified that the biological father of his stepdaughter was actively involved in her life and he felt confused about his position in her life at times. The general comments of the participants revealed that the relationship with their stepdaughters was strong and they tended to see them as someone with an open line of communication.

Strategies Used to Build Positive Relationships with Stepdaughter

After gathering the background information from participants, it was important to gather information regarding the strategies they used to build positive relationships with their stepdaughters. Responses from the remaining interview questions were used to determine the strategies that participants used to build positive relationships with their

stepdaughters. The four primary strategies that emerged from the interview questions were:

1. Began relationship with stepdaughter before marriage
2. Accepts input from spouse
3. Effectively managing conflict and tension
4. Taking actions to build trust and communication

Began relationship with stepdaughter before marriage. The first strategy to emerge from participants' responses was that they began to establish relationships with their stepdaughters soon after the relationships with their mothers were established. Several participants indicated that establishing a relationship with the daughter of their girlfriend/fiancé/wife was an essential part of the relationship. Participant 4 stated, "I was going to be around (in a relationship with her mother). After all, I was dating her mother it would be more beneficial for her, for us, to build a relationship because I was going to be with her mom." Participant 6 gave a similar response regarding when he established the relationship with his stepdaughter by stating, "Well, I started a relationship with her because I was dating her mom. I met my stepdaughter in an eighth of grade while yea she was in the eighth grade going to the ninth." Participant 5 mentioned that he was from another country and developed his relationship with his stepdaughters telephonically. He stated, "The reason [he developed a relationship with his stepdaughters] is their mom, uh, we met back in my country. Let's say I had a ripple effect, if you'll be with their Mother you have to be with the children."

Accepts input from spouse. Participants indicated they accepted input from their spouses as another strategy for helping them develop positive relationships with their stepdaughters. Table 4 presents the two major themes, relationship guidance and confidence in the stepfather, which emerged from the participants responses. The supporting keywords and phrases that were coded to each theme are also presented in Table 5.

Table 5

Accepts Inputs from Spouse

Theme	Key words and phrases
Spouse provides relationship guidance to stepfather	Mediator to help stepfather understand stepdaughter Corrects miscommunication Spouse establishes Childrearing/discipline boundaries for stepfather Provide advice to stepfather about their daughter's behaviors Structures Family Time
Having Confidence in Stepfather's Judgement	Deflecting parenting decisions to stepfather Trust parenting skills Spouse provides no advice to stepfather

The majority of the stepfathers reported that their spouses provided them with some guidance that helped them develop positive relationships between them and their stepdaughters. P7 stated that his spouse provides advice to him about handling his stepdaughter's behavior. However, he also indicated that makes the decision on whether to use the advice from his wife. P7 indicated, "I wouldn't say she manages it. I believe she gives advice at times and I just take it and I reenact it in my own kind of way and that seems to work." Participants further indicated that their spouses provided assistance in

developing positive relationship with their stepdaughters by structuring family time. In reference to the key phrase “structures family time” P2 stated, “Uh, she makes sure we have time family time together every day. Like family events and dinners and stuff like that.” Participants also indicated that their spouses facilitates their efforts to build positive relationships with their stepdaughters by correcting miscommunication between stepfather and stepdaughter. P3 acknowledged that his wife helps with correcting miscommunication and he stated, “umm with my wife. Making sure that, um, there is no form of miscommunication. Yea that basically you know sometimes people can be misinterpreted or sometimes it doesn't have to verbal, but could be nonverbal.”

The theme of having confidence in stepfather’s judgment also emerged as a subtheme to the strategy of accepting input from spouses to guide the stepfathers as they worked to guild positive relationships with their stepdaughters. One participant indicated that his spouse helps to build confidence in his judgement of parenting by deflecting parenting decisions to him and this keeps him actively parenting. P5 indicated his spouse uses deflection and stated:

Yeah, well being that she was the only parent for both of them, she thinks like directly to me. In other words, if somebody [one of his stepdaughters] asks a question and like mommy said she couldn't have, they still have me [to ask the question], I need to see mommy’s pointing them to me and they'll come to see me and ask me the same questions they asked her. So that's how she [spouse] directs the question to me to let me get my input in.

P1 had a different perspective on how his spouse guides his actions to build the relationship between him and his stepdaughter. He indicated his spouse did not have a strategy for providing relationship guidance with his stepdaughter at all. He stated, “She let us do our own thing because she had confidence between what I do. So honestly, she really doesn't have a strategy on how me and my stepdaughter interact, to be honest.”

Managing conflict and tension. The next strategy that emerged from the participants’ responses to the interview questions related to how the participants managed conflict between themselves and their stepdaughters. The responses from Table 6 below present the major themes that emerged from the participants’ responses regarding the strategies they use for managing conflict/tension with their stepdaughters. Table 6 also shows the supporting keywords and phrases that were coded to develop each theme. The main themes which emerged from the keywords of the participants’ responses were that stepfathers created teachable moments in times of conflict, avoiding the conflict, and communicated with biological fathers.

Table 6

Managing Conflict and Tension

Theme	Key words and phrases
Creating a teachable moment for stepdaughter	Have calm open discussions Give gentle correction Hold stepdaughter accountable for her actions
Avoiding Conflict	Seeks advice from spouse Ignoring conflict with stepdaughter Give her time Contacts the biological father
Communicating with biological father	Accepting advice from stepdaughter’s biological father

Several participants indicated that they handle conflict with their stepdaughters by creating a teachable moment. P1 describe how he created teachable moments by having calm discussions with his stepdaughter. P1 indicated that he created a teachable moment in the following statement:

I just get on her level meaning eye level and just try to relate to her and let her know. When I was a child I used to do certain things and I wasn't perfect. So she feels more comfortable talking to me about it [her conflict].

Through the calm open discussions P1 indicated that he could show his stepdaughter that as a child, he was not perfect. P1 discussed his imperfections with his stepdaughter in hopes that she would be comfortable in opening up to him. P4 also described the ways he created a teachable moment with his stepdaughter was by teaching his stepdaughter about accountability or having her take responsibility for her actions. He wanted his stepdaughter to acknowledge when she might be wrong for doing something. Participant 4 stated:

Oh yeah. So I am kind of an accountability person. Not that I would say I'm a disciplined person, but I do not let you get away with murder. If she knows better, I'm going to let her know she knows better.

Other participants indicated that they used avoidance to manage conflict with their stepdaughters' altogether. P6 avoided conflict when he knew his stepdaughter was dealing with tension. He stated:

You just know not to really bother her in terms of tension when she's like that, you know, cause she is a young girl, a young lady and she has a lot of hormones

that she is dealing with now those are little feelings, that are new little, uh, emotions for her. You just, you just definitely gotta know how to deal with her.

P7 indicated how he avoided conflicts with his stepdaughter in the following statement:

How do I manage? Usually, I ignore it depending on the severity of the problem, but for the most part, I let her make her own mistakes. If she needs help, she comes to me. Other than that, her mom normally takes care of it.

The participants were asked if the biological fathers of their stepdaughters were actively involved in their stepdaughters' lives. Six of the seven participants stated that the biological fathers of their stepdaughters were actively involved in their stepdaughters' lives. To avoid conflict with their stepdaughters, some of the participants indicated they included the biological fathers to seek guidance on how to defuse conflicts with their stepdaughters. P3 indicated that he has her father on a chat with his stepdaughter. P3 stated, "I can text him the issue and he can be included in the conversation and help if needed."

P2 was the only participant who stated that he did not have a strategy for managing or alleviating conflict with his stepdaughter. P2 did not have a strategy because he could not recall ever having a conflict between his stepdaughter and himself.

Taking actions to build trust and communication. Participants described taking actions to build trust and communication as another strategy they used to build positive relationships with their stepdaughters. Table 7 presents the major themes that emerged along with the supporting keywords and phrases that were coded to each theme. The

themes that emerged were the desire to be a committed father and having quality connecting with their stepdaughters.

Table 7

Taking Actions to Build Trust and Communication

Theme	Key words and phrases
Stepfather showing commitment as a father	Being a confidant Remembering birthdays Being transparent at times about own experiences Being at school activities Listening to her problems/communication Allowing her freedom of speech/expression Providing affirmation/compliments to stepdaughter
Spending quality time	Bonding through sports Doing activities together Daily family time Religious family time together

One theme that emerged from the interviews regarding the strategy of building trust and communication was the participants' desire to be a committed father. The theme of being a committed father was reflected in comments related to attending school activities and remembering birthdays. P2 stated:

Oh, umm I just try to live up to what I say. Yea try to live up to what I say. And try to remember dates. I try to remember birthdates. I try to find out what is going on at school.

P6 mentioned that he demonstrated commitment to being a father by providing compliments and positive affirmation. P6 stated, "So you definitely have to give them

positive influence, encouragement, uh, compliments, you know, even showing them how a young man is supposed to, to treat them.” Participants wanted show commitment as a stepfather by being a confidant. Participants wanted their stepdaughters to know that they could confide in them about anything and that they will not tell their spouses. P1 stated:

We communicate with each other and just be an open book and just, you know, let her know you can come talk to me. That's my strategy. Talk to her and let her know when I was young I made mistakes and you.

Participants further revealed that they showed their commitment as a stepfather by listening to their stepdaughters’ problems and having open communication. P3 added that his stepdaughter’s biological father also plays a role in his strategy of building communication with his stepdaughter. This active communication with his stepdaughter and her biological father helps to make him a committed father. P3 stated:

And we [stepfather with his stepdaughter] have a direct line and she has a messaging app. And we communicate all the time on it. Her dad plays a good role in this to. He always communicates with me and her.

The next themes that emerged from the responses related to strategy of taking action to build trust and communication was quality connecting time. The participants discussed that engaging in various activities with their stepdaughters enabled them to build strong relationships, communication, and trust between them. The time spent together was quality because it was things that were equally liked by stepfather and stepdaughter. P2 stated:

Well, she's kind of a tom boy. She likes to do the things that I like to do. Her Mom stays at home, but she was just like to follow me to do whatever I wanted to do. We do things like we watch the news and we will talk about it even when she was younger and I would give her the dos and the don'ts. I try to explain the good and bad things to her.

P5 found that his quality connecting time with his stepdaughters was religiously based. In addition to “prayer” P5 stated:

ummm yes so at the beginning of the year. I told the girls to kind of like read at least three chapters in the Bible each day from Monday to Thursday. And occasionally we have general chit chat about it [the Bible].

Composite Summary of Themes

The goal of this research was to determine what strategies African American stepfathers used to build positive relationships with their stepdaughters. Several interview questions gathered background information that provided context regarding the nature of the relationships between participants and stepdaughters. These questions highlighted the participants' perspective of being a stepfather, the nature of the relationship with their stepdaughter, and the sources of conflict with their stepdaughter. Regarding their perspectives of being stepfathers, most participants describe relationships with their stepdaughters as being strong, and participants generally indicated they desired to be ideal stepfathers to their stepdaughters. The strong relationships that the participants developed with their stepdaughters resulted in the participants' experiencing a positive emotional response to “step fatherhood”. The positive emotional experiences further

indicated that the stepfathers embraced being a stepfather and that they loved being a stepfather. The participants identified that the sources of conflict between them and their stepdaughters stemmed from typical school-aged girl behaviors, which included the stepdaughters getting distracted from completing tasks or the stepdaughters wanting the stepfather's attention. Participant responses The background information revealed that the participants perceived the overall relationship with their stepdaughters and the overall experiences of being a stepfather were positive. While there were some sources of conflict, participants indicated the conflict was related to typical school age girl behavior. Participants appeared to not allow the conflict to overshadow their overall positive perceptions of their relationships with their stepdaughters.

Responses to the remaining interview questions revealed strategies that the stepfathers used in building positive relationships with their stepdaughters. The four major strategies that emerged were: a) began relationship with stepdaughter before marriage, b) accepts input from spouse, c) managing conflict and tension, and d) taking actions to build trust and communication. Within the four strategies, participants revealed specific actions they took to build positive relationship with their stepdaughters.

All the participants indicated that the first strategy they used to build positive relationships with their stepdaughters was to build the relationship before marriage. Participants indicated they understood the importance of building relationships with their stepdaughters while dating their spouses. Building the relationships early established a positive foundation for the relationships after the marriage. The participants realized that accepting their spouses' input could help them build positive relationships with their

stepdaughters. The participants' spouses provided relationship guidance and demonstrated confidence in the stepfather's judgment in managing the relationships between them and their stepdaughters.

Effectively managing conflict and tension was another strategy the participants used to build positive relationships with their stepdaughters. Participants indicated they managed conflict with their stepdaughters by creating teachable moments, avoiding conflict, and communicating with the biological. . Some of the teachable moments included having calm discussions and holding the stepdaughters accountable for their actions. Participants avoided conflict by seeking input from their spouses, giving the stepdaughters space, or by involving the stepdaughter's biological father.

The participants further indicated they adopted the strategy of building trust and communication, which assisted them in building positive relationships with their stepdaughters. The participants built trust with their stepdaughters through demonstrating their commitment as a stepfather by attending school activities, remembering birthdays, being a confidant, and by listening to their stepdaughters' problems. Spending quality time was another meaningful technique the participants used to build trust and communication. This quality time was spent by engaging in activities together such as sports and engaging in family activities.

Summary

In Chapter 4, I discussed the purpose of my research and restated the research question. The recruitment process, the data collection process, and the data analysis were discussed. A comprehensive data analysis was completed utilizing the responses from the

participants of the research. In this research, I interviewed seven African American married stepfathers with stepdaughters. The participants were asked their perspective on the strategies they have used to build positive relationships with their stepdaughters. The data I gathered from the participants was then analyzed. I reported the data analysis in the Results section of this chapter.

In this chapter, I answered the research question by highlighting the strategies stepfathers use to build positive relationships with their stepdaughters. I identified the emergent themes for each question. The themes were strong relationships, spending quality time together, relationship guidance, confidence in stepfather's judgment, creating a teachable moment, conflict avoidance, school-aged girl behavior, being an ideal stepfather, positive emotional response, and being a committed father. The findings, limitations, and recommendations are discussed in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to determine what strategies African American stepfathers use to develop positive, supporting relationships with their school-age stepdaughters. Due to the increasing prevalence of African American stepfathers and the challenges they endure in developing and maintaining strong relationships in the blended family unit, there was a need for research that takes a strength-based approach to determine how stepfathers develop strong blended family relationships. This study was conducted to gather information on developing strategies for developing positive stepfather-step daughter relationships.

The key findings of this study were that African American stepfathers use various strategies to build and maintain positive relationships with their stepdaughters. The responses from the interview questions were grouped into two categories, background information and the strategies used to build positive relationships. The themes that emerged from the background information were that participants desired to be ideal stepfathers, participants perceived being a stepfather as a positive emotional experience, typical school-aged behavior was the main source of conflict, and participants described having strong relationships with their stepdaughters.

Results from the remaining interview questions revealed that participants used the following four strategies to build positive relationships with their stepdaughters: (a) began relationship with stepdaughters before marriage, (b) accepts input from spouse, (c) effectively managing conflict and tension, and (d) taking actions to build trust and

communication. In this chapter, I will present a discussion of the research findings, interpretations, and the conclusion of findings.

Interpretation of Findings Relevant to the Literature

The responses from the interview questions were split into background information and strategies for building positive relationships. The questions grouped in the “Background Information” provided a context for helping me to understand and interpret the strategies the participants used to build positive relationships with their stepdaughters. The questions grouped under “Strategies for Building Positive Relationships” were used to specifically determine the strategies the stepfathers used to build positive relationships with their stepdaughters. There were various findings within the current research that were relevant to the previous literature. The interpretation of findings from this study as it relates to findings from previous literature are discussed in two sections: Background Information and Strategies for Building Positive Relationships.

Background Information

The Background Information responses were grouped in an attempt to show the core of how the participant’s strategies for their positive relationships were developed. The thought behind the background information questions was an attempt to identify the participants’ perspective of their relationships with their stepdaughters. The participants’ perspectives, of their relationships with their stepdaughters, would help me to better understand the strategies they used to develop positive relationships with their stepdaughters.

Perspectives on being a stepfather. There were two themes that emerged from the participants' responses regarding their perspectives about being stepfathers. Those themes were participants wanted to be an ideal stepfather and that being a stepfather was a positive emotional experience. Findings for the theme related to desiring to be an ideal stepfather was consistent with the previous findings regarding stepparents' successful relationships with their stepchildren. (Jensen & Pace, 2016). Participants indicated they showed their desires to be ideal stepfathers by having an open-door policy with their stepdaughters. This open-door policy indicated that the stepfathers were available to talk their stepdaughters at any time to talk with them about anything. The strategy of building positive relationships by being available to their stepdaughters through having an open-door policy is consistent with findings from previous literature. For instance, Jensen and Pace (2016) found that the practice of availability was associated with stepfather involvement and higher quality stepfather/stepchild relationships.

Additionally, the participants further addressed the theme of how they desired to be an ideal stepfather to their stepdaughters by learning to be a father or being a role model. This was also consistent with research findings from Blyaert et al. (2016) which discussed that most stepfathers in their relationships with their stepdaughters wished to be a father figure as much as possible. The stepfathers from the previous research went further by highlighting that they wanted to ensure they embraced their father figure role without actually taking on "the" father title.

The theme of positive emotional experience is consistent with previous findings of Blyaert et al. (2016) who studied stepfathers' experiences of family life and their

relationships with their stepchildren. Blyaert et al. reported that stepfathers in their study reported being happy and having positive feelings about their relationships with their stepchildren. Findings from my study supported the findings from Blyaert et al. in that the participants reported positive emotions of loving their stepdaughters and embracing their stepfather roles.

Results from this study also contradict findings from previous literature which suggested that stepfathers may experience a level of negative feelings in their blended family (Kumar, 2017). Kumar suggested that the stepfathers may experience negative feelings if they are relying heavily on being accepted by their stepchild. The participants of this research described positive emotions for being stepfathers and did not express any negative feelings regarding their perspectives on their relationships with their stepdaughters.

Sources of conflict/tension with stepdaughter. The participants were asked to discuss the sources of tension or conflict that arise between them and their stepdaughters. The theme which emerged from the keywords and phrases of the responses was typical school-aged girl behavior caused the most conflict. The participants identified typical school aged behavior such as seeking attention from the stepfather or having an attitude with the stepfather when they supported their spouses in any discipline or instruction give to the stepdaughters. The participants discussed that a source of conflict with their stepdaughters was the stepdaughters seeking the stepfathers' attention. The seeking of attention for the participants from their stepdaughters was consistent with the previous literature regarding how spending time together could improve stepparent-stepchild

relationships. Braithewaite et al. (2018) highlighted the importance of the stepparent spending quality time with their stepchildren as the quality time indicated a positive relationship.

The participants indicated their stepdaughters' attitude changed towards them when the participants supported their spouses in disciplining the stepchildren. The stepdaughter's attitude changing towards the participants was in alignment with the previous findings. Findings from this study are consistent with results from Braithewaite et al. (2018) which identified that conflict with their stepchildren arose when stepparents supported the spouses' decision in discipline. Participants further indicated there would be a conflict with their stepdaughters if their stepdaughters felt they were engaging in any form of child rearing, which included supporting their spouses in disciplining. The findings from this study further confirm the previous research from Ganong et al. (2019) regarding discipline. Ganong et al. (2019) indicated more conflicts arise between stepparents and stepchildren when the stepparent attempts to discipline the stepchild before building a relationship with them. The findings further suggest that stepparents should engage with their stepchildren over time in behaviors to ensure they bond with them before any discipline.

Nature of relationship with stepdaughter. Several themes emerged from participants regarding their descriptions of the nature of their relationships with their stepdaughters. Overall the participants characterized their relationships with their stepdaughters as being strong relationships. The participants having a strong relationship with their stepdaughters is consistent with the previous research that suggested

relationships between stepfathers and stepchildren becomes better after the first year of the stepfamily formation and continues getting better over the course of time (King et al., 2014). The findings further suggest that the stepfather-stepchild relationship ties can continue to get strong based on communication (King et al., 2014). The participants' descriptions of their relationships with their stepdaughters being strong were characterized with key phrases that specified communication. The communication between the participants and their stepdaughters provided a background for creating a strong and positive relationship between the participants and their stepdaughters. The previous findings from Campbell and Winn (2018) suggested communication between the stepparent and stepchild is important in building a positive stepparent-stepchild relationship.

Strategies Used to Build Positive Relationships with Stepdaughter

After discussing the background information with the participants, it was important to determine the actual strategies the stepfathers used to build positive relationships with their stepdaughters. There were four primary strategies identified based on the interview responses. The four primary strategies were began relationship with stepdaughter before marriage, accepts input from spouse, managing conflict and tension, and taking actions to build trust and communication.

Began relationship with stepdaughter before marriage. All participants indicated that they began relationships with their stepdaughters while they were dating the stepdaughters' mothers, their spouses. The participants realized it was important to establish the bond with the stepdaughters prior to marriage because they would

eventually form a lifelong commitment with their mothers. The strategy of creating a relationship prior to the blended family formation supported findings from previous literature which addressed the closeness of stepparent/stepchild relationships.

Stepparent-stepchild relationships are closer based on when the stepparent began nurturing an emotional connection with the stepchild (Gangong et al., 2019). Gangong et al. (2019) further indicated that if stepparents nurtured an emotional connection prior to marriage and continued during the marriage the stepparent-stepchild relationship would be closer than those that discontinued the connection. The participants' stepfather-stepdaughter relationships may have also been easier to establish because the stepfather had the chance to focus on building the relationship with the stepdaughter independent of the marital relationship. The previous literature indicated that an ideal time for stepparents to bond with their stepchildren may be before the stepfamily formation. Bonding before the stepfamily formation gave the stepparents time to create a relationship with the stepchild. Building a marriage with a new spouse while handling stepchild-related issues can stress the stepparent-stepchild relationship (King et al., 2015; Kumar, 2017). Blyaert et al. (2016) findings highlighted that stepfather-stepchild relationships can be started sequentially to the relationship with the spouse. Regardless of when the relationship with the stepchild began stepfathers felt a positive evolution in their closeness with their stepchildren. The strategy of forming relationships with stepdaughters before marrying their spouse shows the importance for stepparents to establish relationships with their stepchildren early to ensure the stepparent and stepchild closeness and a positive evolution in the relationship.

Accepts input from spouse. Results from the data analysis showed that participants accepted input from their spouses as a strategy for building positive relationships with their stepdaughters. The two major themes that emerged from participants' responses were that their spouses provided relationship guidance and the spouses showed confidence in the participants' judgement in their interactions with their stepdaughters. Some of the relationship guidance from the spouse included structures family time. The participants' spouses provided structured family time for the participants, which in turn provided a foundation for the participants to build positive relationships with their stepdaughters. The use of family time as a strategy for building positive stepparent-stepchild relationships supports findings from previous research. For instance, Braithewaite et al. (2018) conducted a study of young adults to determine how stepchild-stepparent relations turned into positive relationships as the stepchildren reached adulthood. One of them that emerged from the Braithewaite et al. was the practice of spending quality time as family and developing family rituals contributed to the development of positive child/adult relationships in families. In this current study, participants embraced the notion that spending quality family time would positively influence the stepparent-stepchild relationship.

Another way that the spouses provided relationship guidance to the participants was through establishing childrearing boundaries for stepfather. The participants indicated the spouses established parenting boundaries by ensuring the participants made decisions regarding certain discipline of their stepdaughters such as curfews and household chores. The participants spouses providing guidance for the participants to be

involved in child-rearing is consistent with the previous literature by Forehand et al. (2015), who conducted a study to examine whether stepfathers were involved in child-rearing and parenting of non-biological children. Results revealed that the stepfather's childrearing practices were based on the mother's views of childrearing and discipline. The participants used the guidelines established by their spouses for disciplining their stepdaughters as a strategy to create a positive relationship with their stepdaughter.

Findings related to the theme spouses having confidence in the participants' judgment regarding interactions with their stepdaughters are also consistent with findings from previous research. Participants indicated that this confidence was demonstrated when spouses having deflected parenting decisions to the stepfather. As an example, the participants' indicated their spouses would redirect questions regarding curfews or choices of clothing pertaining to the stepdaughters to the participants. These deflections signaled to participants that their spouses trusted the participant's parenting judgement. Confidence in the stepfather's judgment was consistent with the previous literature. For instance, Jensen and Shafer (2013) suggested that an agreement on parenting and the quality of the marital relationship was a predictor of a positive stepfather-stepchild relationship. Ganong et al. (2019) also reported mothers' confidence in stepfathers parenting was related to positive family relationships. The participants' spouses had confidence in the participants' judgment and the participant used those times of redirection to build a positive relationship with his stepdaughters.

Managing conflict and tension. Participants described how their conflict management strategies helped them to build positive relationships with their

stepdaughters. The themes that emerged regarding conflict management were creating a teachable moment in times of conflict, avoiding the conflict, and communicating with the biological father. The participants further discussed they used the teachable moments by having open calm discussions or communicating at eye level to talk to their stepdaughters. The participants would also have open calm discussions with their stepdaughters by going to their bedrooms to talk to them in hopes that the stepdaughters would feel more comfortable talking to them. Through these discussions participants revealed how they made mistakes growing up. Participants indicated that the self-revelations allowed the stepdaughters to communicate openly with the stepfathers about personal things the stepdaughters were going through. Participants indicated the meaningful conversations promoted positive relationships with their stepdaughters. Findings from this study regarding how meaningful communication between stepfathers and stepdaughters contributed to positive relationships in the dyad are consistent with findings from previous research. For instance, Campbell and Winn (2018) conducted a quantitative study to determine communication affected relationships between stepfathers and their adolescent stepdaughters. Findings from the study showed stepfathers had an important role in promoting closeness between stepfathers and stepdaughters. Campbell and Winn further proposed that their finding may have been related to the notion that stepfathers put the time and effort into establishing and maintain communication with their stepdaughters. The participants use of the teachable moments through using open discussions were a successful strategy that they used to manage conflict and build positive relationships with their stepdaughters.

Avoiding conflict was also a theme which emerged from participants responses used to manage tensions between them and their stepdaughters. The participants avoided conflict with their stepdaughters during times of conflict. The participants indicated how they would decide to deflect and seek advice from their spouse. Braithewaite et al. (2018) indicated that having positive stepparent-stepchild relationships includes navigating conflict through conversation and one-on-one time. The navigating of the conflict could also include the going outside the dyad and incorporating the social network (Braithewaite et al., 2018). The social network for the participants included incorporating their spouses or the biological fathers of the stepdaughters. Avoiding conflict does not mean the participants avoided the issue. However, the issue can be addressed when the moment of conflict has settled and through triangulation.

Communicating with the biological father of their stepdaughters was also a theme that emerged concerning strategies used to manage conflict. To have the biological fathers involved during times of conflict was consistent with the previous literature. Several researchers discussed how involvement of biological fathers could promote strong, positive relationships in stepfamilies. Gold's (2019) research stated that the stepfather will have less concerns if he engages the biological father to better understand the best way to parent the child. This is also correlated with the feeling of the stepfather accepting the parental role and treating the child as if they are their own without completely taking the role of the child's father (Blyaert et al., 2016; Gangong et al. 2019). The participants communicated with the biological fathers for guidance on how to lessen conflicts between them and their stepdaughters. The participants engaging the

biological father during conflicts with their stepdaughter was a strategy to build positive relationships with their stepdaughters.

Building trust and communication. Participants described building trust and communication as a strategy for building positive relationships with their stepdaughters. The themes that emerged from the participants' responses were stepfather showing commitment as a father and spending quality time with their stepdaughters. The theme of the stepfather showing commitment as a father was described by the participants as them being a confidant to their stepdaughters, participating in school activities, and having times of communication. The participants discussed that participating in school activities as one way of showing their commitment as father figures. The school activities consisted of things like assisting with tasks such as homework and/or attending extracurricular events. The participants identified that assisting their stepdaughters with homework was a way to show commitment as a father and a technique to build trust and communication. Blyaert et al. (2016) highlighted how stepfathers felt most secure in the position as a stepfather when they were able to assist their stepchildren on their educational decision. The participants further identified another way they build trust and communicate with their stepdaughters was by being confidants to their stepdaughters. The participants described times when their stepdaughters openly discussed with them things they would not share with their biological mothers such as admiring boys. The participants' stepdaughters would feel comfortable discussing interests of the opposite sex was aligned with previous findings from Jensen and Harris (2017). The researchers noted that a high quality stepfather-stepchild relationship was marked by the stepfather

maintaining a calm demeanor while discussing issues such as sexual behavior or choices (Jensen & Harris, 2017). The participants noted that it was important to be a confidant to their stepdaughters to show their commitment as a father figure.

Additionally, the participants used listening to their stepdaughter's problems and communication as another way to show their commitment as a father. The participants highlighted how they would constantly "check in" with their stepdaughters to see how they were doing or to get an update to previous conversations. The participants engaging with their stepdaughters through communication by listening to their stepdaughter's problems was consistent with previous research related to communication and stepfathers. Previous research from Campbell and Winn (2018) identified the most important bonds between the stepfathers and stepdaughters were achieved during times of open communication between the two. Additional research from Braithewaite et al. (2018) identified that the stepparent-stepchild relationships benefit from strong communication that builds resilience in overcoming conflicts and a positive relationship. The participants' listening and communicating with their stepdaughters were key techniques they used to build trust and communication with their stepdaughters. In turn, this trust and communication contributed to positive stepfather and stepdaughter relationships.

The participants spending quality time with their stepdaughters was a technique used to build trust and communication. The participants denoted quality time consisted of doing activities together and spending religious time together. The participants spending religious time together was aligned with previous findings. The previous

findings from King et al. (2014) indicated a high indicator of a positive stepfather stepchild relationship included religion. The participants from this current research identified that prayer and Bible reading time with their stepdaughters were important. The participants further indicated they would have religious family time through attending church and having family prayer. The participants identified that having religious family time together was spending quality time with their stepdaughters and a method for building trust and communication.

The participants also identified doing activities with their stepdaughters was a way to have quality time. Participants doing activities together to spend quality time confirmed previous literature. The previous literature from Braithewaite et al. (2018) indicated that doing activities and spending quality time was an important factor in building a positive stepparent-stepchild relationship. Braithewaite et al. (2018) further indicated the quality time spent between stepparents and stepchildren would assist in developing a style of parenting that works well for the stepparent and stepchild relationship. The participants from this study identified that they would spend quality time by doing activities such as going to the park or playing basketball together. It was important to the participants to spend quality time with their stepdaughters as a technique for building trust and communication.

Overall the participants used trust and communication techniques as a strategy to build positive relationships with their stepdaughters. The participants were able to build trust with their stepdaughters by being involved with them by spending quality time and by showing the stepdaughters commitment as a father. The participants being involved

confirmed previous literature. Previous literature from Jensen and Pace (2016) completed a quantitative study to explore the association between stepfather involvement and stepfather-child relationship quality. The results revealed that stepfather involvement with their stepchildren was positively associated with stepfather-stepchild relationship quality in the family. The participants were involved with their stepdaughters by listening to their problem/ communication, spending religious time, and doing activities together. The participants used the techniques of quality time and showing their stepdaughters commitment as a father as a strategy to build positive relationships with their stepdaughters.

Interpretation of Findings and Family Systems Theory

According to Bowen (1966), premises of the family systems theory (FST) highlights how the emotions of each family member govern the relationships with the family. A family is an emotional unit so that each member reacts to each other's needs and expectations to build interdependent relationships within the family (Bowen, 1966). There are eight concepts that describe the emotional system within the family structure. For this research, five of the FST concepts were related to the strategies that stepfathers use in building positive relationships with their stepdaughters. The five concepts from the FST that can be related to the findings from this study are triangles, differentiation of self, nuclear family emotional process, multigenerational process, and emotional cutoff. There were no themes that emerged from the data that were connected to other three concepts family projection process, sibling position, and societal emotional concept.

Triangle. According to Bowen (1966), the triangle concept describes the three person emotional systems within the family structure. Bowen (1966) further identifies the triangle as the smallest most stable family relationship unit. The participants used the triangle concept to build positive relationships with their stepdaughters. The participants of this study identified two family triangles. The first triangle was indicated based on the participants accepting input from their spouses in the relationship in their stepfather-stepdaughter relationships. The second triangle identified by the participants indicated the participants involving the biological fathers to manage alleviate conflict in the stepfather-stepdaughter relationship. In the current research the participants accepted input from their spouses to in help manage relationships with their stepdaughters.

The participant communicating with the stepdaughter's biological father to assist in managing conflict was an example of a triangle. In this situation the triangle is formulated by the participant, his stepdaughter, and the biological father. The participant involved the biological father as a third person to support the emotional system between him and his stepdaughter. The triangle concept is being used because the stepfathers involved the biological fathers to help them manage conflict with the stepdaughters. Involving the biological father as a strategy during times of conflict had a positive impact on the stepfather-stepdaughter relationship. The positive impact on the stepfather-stepdaughter relationship was indicated by the conflict or tension being alleviated which shows resilience.

Differentiation of self. The second concept of the FST that was indicated in this current study was differentiation of self. Differentiation of self describes the emotional

forces which drive how a person becomes an individual within the family system which helps them navigate conflicts (Bowen, 1966). The themes from this research which emerged from data analysis reflects the concept of differentiation of self were the desire to be an ideal stepfather and positive emotional experience. The positive emotional experience was the emotion expressed by the participants based on their feelings about being a stepfather. Differentiation of self was shown by the participants as the participants wanted identify their position and role with their stepdaughters. The participants identifying their role with their stepdaughters were revealed by as they did not want to try to be “the father” for their stepdaughters; however, they wanted to learn how to be an ideal stepfather. The participants identifying themselves in a fatherly role but not being “the father” is an example of the differentiation of self. The participants ideally adjusted to the fatherly role by doing fatherly duties but creating a boundary to not try to become “the father” of their stepdaughters. Additionally, the participants described their perspective about being a stepfather to their stepdaughters which were themed as a positive emotional experience. The participants having a positive emotional experience are reflective of the concept of differentiation of self as the participants were embracing and loving their stepfather roles. The differentiation of self was presented by the participants as they accepted the parental role as learning to be a stepfather and being a role model for the stepdaughters without trying to be their fathers.

Nuclear family emotional process. The nuclear family emotional from FST process governs the relationships between family members (Bowen, 1966). The concept suggests that during the stages of the nuclear family emotional process tensions begin to

arise from familial stress as the family navigates adjusting to new members (Bowen, 1966). During the current study, the participants were asked to discuss how and why they began the relationship with their stepdaughters. The participants did not identify any tensions that arose as the family adjusted to new members. . The participants however, indicated they began their relationships with their stepdaughters because they were establishing relationships with their spouses. The participants indicated they began building a relationship with their stepdaughters prior to being in the blended family, which may have caused less stress. The adjustment for the participants may have been lessened as they were not getting adjusted to all their family members at one time. The participants were getting adjusted to their stepdaughters independent of other family members. The strategy of building the relationships early contribute to positive stepfather-stepdaughters relationship as the stepfather was able to focus on just the stepdaughter while bonding.

Multigenerational transmission process. Bowen (1966) used this concept to describe how family patterns and dynamics can repeat through multiple family generations. Triangles and differentiated roles can reappear generationally. A parent may use their level of differentiated role they have learned in life and pass it on to their children. The multigenerational transmission then continues when the children passes it to their children and so forth. The theme which emerged from this research that was aligned with this concept came from participants' descriptions of how they showed commitment to being an ideal stepfather. A few participants identified how they modeled the values and morals they learned from their fathers or father figures. The participants

indicated they used the morals and values they learned from their father or father figures to create the strategies they used to build positive relationships with their stepdaughters.

Emotional cutoff. The concept of emotional cutoff describes people cutting off emotions from siblings, parents, or other family members due to unresolved emotional issues (Bowen, 1966). The theme of avoiding conflict emerged from the participants' responses regarding managing conflict with their stepdaughters. The participants avoided conflict, which could be considered a form of emotional cutoff because the participants emotionally disconnected from their stepdaughters. The participants deflected the emotions from their stepdaughter to the biological fathers or spouses to assist in them cutting off emotionally from their conflict with the stepdaughters. Emotional cutoff contributes to the building of a positive stepfather-stepdaughter relationship because the participants involved the biological parents to manage the conflict, which is a strategy used to build a positive stepfather-stepdaughter relationship.

Limitations of the Study

In addition to the limitations mentioned in Chapter 1, this research is limited by a few factors. One of the main limitations of this research was the small sample size of seven participants. The small sample size limits the transferability of the findings to a broader population of stepfathers. A larger sample of African American stepfathers could make the results applicable to more African American stepfathers.

Another limit was that the research was restricted to only African American stepfathers. Including multiple ethnicities of stepfathers could provide a greater insight

of the strategies used of stepfathers use with their stepdaughters. Having stepfathers from different racial backgrounds could make the results more transferable to other races.

A final limitation within this research pertains to the ages of the stepdaughters of the African American stepfathers. This research was limited to only African American stepfathers of school-aged stepdaughters. The stepfathers could only identify strategies that they used to build relationship based on their school aged stepdaughters. The responses of the stepfathers with school aged stepdaughters could differ to the responses of the stepfathers with adolescent stepdaughters. Including stepfathers of adolescent stepdaughters could potential result in a broader variation of strategies the stepfathers use in building positive relationships with their stepdaughters. The broader variation of strategies could make the results of the research more transferable to more stepfathers. Ganong et al. (2019) indicated stepparents affinity seeking time with stepchildren were easier during the preadolescent years of the stepchild. During the adolescent years of stepchildren lives they are less attached to parents. King et al. (2014) findings further indicated the older adolescents exhibited a less positive stepfather-stepchild relationship.

Recommendations

Based on the limitations of the study, I recommend additional research using a larger sample of African American stepfathers. The purpose of a larger sample of African American stepfathers could improve transferability to more African American stepfather. The larger sample of African American stepfathers could use a qualitative study to replicate this current study. The qualitative study replicating my study could use the same

strategies and background information to indicate whether these findings are consistent in a larger sample of African American stepfathers.

I would additionally recommend a qualitative study to include a more diverse ethnic group of stepfathers. This research would be beneficial in gathering more information strategies from various ethnic stepfathers. A qualitative method would allow men from various ethnic groups to describe the strategies they use to build positive, supporting relationships with their stepdaughters. This could bring out information-rich data from other ethnic groups of stepfathers.

Furthermore, a recommendation to include stepfathers with adolescent stepdaughters would extend the body of literature on the stepfather –stepdaughter relationship. This study only included stepfathers with school-aged children. The stepfather of adolescent stepdaughters could shed light on a wide range of stepfathers' perceptions of the strategies they use with their adolescent stepdaughters. This wide range of perception could be used to identify variations to this research of stepfathers with school-aged stepdaughters. The need for identifying the variations is important to understand how the strategies the stepfather creates during school age years may have to be the same or changed for the adolescent years of the stepdaughter. A qualitative study would provide stepfathers of adolescent stepdaughters to highlight the strategies they use to build positive, supporting relationships with their stepdaughters. A qualitative research using the stepfathers of adolescent stepfathers would be important to ensure the strategies used to build a stepfather-stepdaughter relationship could last or evolve over time. The

qualitative method will also assist in bringing out information-rich data from the stepfathers of the adolescent stepdaughters to see the wide range of perceptions.

Implications for Positive Social Change

This research makes an original contribution to the literature on African American blended families. This current research took a strengths-based approach to determine the strategies African American stepfathers use in building positive, supporting relationships with their stepdaughters. Previous research highlighted some of the negative factors which influenced a negative stepfather-stepchildren relationship. Some of the negative views included include a high divorce rate; undefined roles and boundaries experienced by the stepfather within the blended family, and stereotyped family roles (Lucier-Greer et al. 2014; Kumar, 2017). There was also previous research which highlighted the dysfunctional dynamics of the stepfather-stepchild relationship (Jensen & Shafer, 2013; Jensen & Pace, 2016). Additionally, prior research discussed negative views of African American stepfathers with their stepchildren (Bryant et al., 2016). Findings from this current research are significant because it has provided a positive view of African American stepfamily relationships.

This current study makes a contribution to the existing body of literature. This research differs from the previous studies which highlight the stepfather-stepdaughter relationship. The previous research discussed the experiences of stepfather-stepdaughter relationship. However, this current research highlights the strategies the stepfathers use in building positive relationships with their stepdaughters. Furthermore, this current research also highlights the strategies used of African American stepfathers with their

stepdaughters. The previous research discussed the experiences of multiple ethnicities of stepfather-stepdaughters relationships.

Findings from this study highlighted the strategies the African American stepfathers use to build positive relationships with their stepdaughter. Human service professionals, social workers, and family counselors can benefit from this research by potentially utilizing the information from this research to promote the strategies that can help build positive stepfather-stepdaughter relationship. Human services and other professionals can use the information to help families build positive, supportive relationships. The human service professionals could use the information from this research during blended family counseling sessions. The stepfathers in blended families could then use the strategies at home with their stepdaughters to build positive relationships with their stepdaughters. The human service professionals could also use the findings for therapy building of the stepfather-stepdaughter relationship. The strategies could be promoted in blended family marriage conferences or marriage and blended family therapy hosted by the human service professionals or family counselors.

Conclusion

This research identified the strategies that African American stepfathers use in building positive and supportive relationships with their stepdaughters. This research was important as the blended family is becoming more prevalent than the nuclear family structure in the United States. Blended families must work harder at maintaining the blended family structure than families with the nuclear family structure (Kumar, 2017). One of the subsystems of the blended family is the stepfather-stepdaughter relationship.

Previous researchers have shown that relationships between stepfathers and stepdaughters can be particularly daunting because the stepfather and stepdaughter closeness is less likely to develop than the closeness between stepfathers and stepsons (Jensen & Shafer, 2013).

There was a gap in the previous literature that focused on the development of positive relationships between stepparents and their stepchildren. Furthermore there was not any literature to focus on the strategies of building a positive African American stepfather stepdaughter relationship. This research used a generic qualitative approach to determine the strategies African American stepfathers use to build positive, supporting relationships with their stepdaughters. The participants of this research identified the strategies used for building positive relationships with their stepdaughters as began relationship with stepdaughter before marriage, accepts input from spouse, managing conflict and tension, and taking actions to build trust and communication. Several themes emerged from the participants responses regarding the strategies the participants used to build positive relationships with their stepdaughters. The themes which emerged from the perspectives from the stepfathers helped to shape the strategies they have used in building a relationship with their stepdaughter. African American stepfathers building positive and supportive relationships with their stepdaughters are a step in building a foundation to support the blended family structure.

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Appendix A: Interview Guide and Questions

Before the Interview:

Thank you again for agreeing to participate in this study. Your time and willingness to share your experiences and thoughts on such a sensitive topic is appreciated. The purpose of the study is to understand the strategies that African American stepfathers use to build positive relationships with their stepdaughters. You were recruited because you fit the criteria for the research and you have signed the consent to move forward with this interview. Please remember that any information you share with me today will remain completely confidential. None of your identifying information will be shared. This interview should last approximately 60 minutes and will be recorded for transcription. A transcript of the recorded interview will be sent to you for verification upon completion. Please do not hesitate to stop the interview at any time if you no longer wish to continue. Do you have any questions? Let us begin.

The interview questions are as follows:

- 1) Tell me about the relationship you have with your stepdaughter and how strong you consider your relationship to be with her.
- 2) Tell me about how and why you began the relationship with your stepdaughter and if her biological father involved.
- 3) What strategies does your spouse use to manage your interactions between you and your stepdaughter? Do those strategies include childrearing?
- 4) How do you manage conflict/ tension experiences with your stepdaughter?
- 5) What seems to be the general source of conflict/tension?
- 6) Please describe how you alleviate conflict between you and your stepdaughter.

- 7) What do you think and feel about the role of being a stepfather to your stepdaughter? a.How do those thoughts and feelings influence the strategies you use in being a stepfather?
- 8) Please describe strategies you use to build trust with your stepdaughter.
 - a.Why do you think those strategies helped to build the trust?
- 9) Describe the strategies you use to build positive relationships with your stepdaughter.
- 10) Please describe the strategies you use to communicate effectively with your stepdaughter.
- 11) Is there anything you would like to add?

After the interview questions:

This concludes our interview. Again, I appreciate you taking this time to share your experiences with me. As a reminder, this interview will be transcribed into text and both the recorded interview and transcription will be provided to you for your review. Please let me know if there is anything that was not captured correctly at that time. Your gift card will be emailed to you to the email address you provided on the consent form. If you have any questions or concerns following this interview please email me at shauntele.rogers@waldenu.edu.

Appendix B: Demographic Questions

Demographic Questions

1. What is your age?
2. What is your stepdaughter's age?
3. How long have you been married?
4. How long have you and your stepdaughter been living in the same home?
5. Do you have biological children?
 6. How many other children in are the home?

