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Through Their Eyes: Young African American Men's Perceptions of Fatherhood

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Abstract

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MA, Wayne State University, 2000

BS, University of Detroit Mercy, 1998

Dissertation Submitted in Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore current African American fathers' experiences with being fathered, and to understand how those definitions, perceptions, and experiences of fatherhood impacted their involvement in the lives of their own children. In-depth individual interviews were conducted in Detroit, Michigan with 10 African American fathers ranging in age from 22 to 25. Ecological systems theory and identity theory served as the theoretical framework for the study. Member checking, detailed descriptions, and audit trails were used to establish trustworthiness of the data. The findings of the study showed that father involvement was directly related to or affected by being fathered. The participants' desires or abilities to be active and involved fathers with their own children were not contingent on whether their own fathers were active in their lives. The participants expressed specific ideas about what being a father means to them, the importance of the role, how they enact the role, and the impact of their role on their children. Drawing on their own experiences, both positive and negative, participants expressed an unwavering level of commitment to their role and children. The themes that emerged from the interviews included: presence, responsibility, fatherhood as a priority, acceptance, and reciprocal relationships. The participants did not equate being a father with providing financial support, but placed significant emphasis on meeting the emotional and psychological needs of their children. The need for continued exploration of father involvement among young African American fathers is necessary in order for the development of comprehensive, research-based programs to provide support for and benefit to both fathers and their children.

Through their Eyes: Understanding Fatherhood as a Young African American Man

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to my father, George D. Glover. Navigating this world without your love, your wisdom, and your laughter has been unbearable at times. However, it is because of your love, your wisdom, and the support you gave me, that I am the person I am today. I am thankful for the years we had together and the incredible father that you were to me. You were a shining example of patience, strength, and generosity. I think of you every day and I miss you so much. Thank you for being a great man and a great father. I love you always.

First and foremost, I want to give thanks and praise to God for His continued grace and mercy that has gotten me to this point. I may not always understand the path that He is leading me, but as my pastor, the esteemed Rev. Dr. Tellis J. Chapman says, "if it is right with God, it is right with me." Jeremiah 29:11 says, "for I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not harm you, plan to give you hope and a future." Thank you God for your word. I am standing on your promise.

I would like to thank my mother, Jessie, who has always been one of my biggest supporters. No matter what, you have loved and supported me unconditionally. I love you more than you know and appreciate the sacrifices you have made to get me where I am today. You are the best!

Thank you to my son, Jackson. You are the absolute joy of my life, my reason for being. Thank you buddy for bearing with me and understanding my late nights, missed movies, and always having my face in my laptop. I will never forget the night I came in your room to watch a movie with you after a few hours of writing. You were about six

years old and you asked me if I had homework, to which I responded yes. You said,

"don't you want to be a doctor, go do your homework, I'm fine." That still brings a smile

to my face. You are my amazing little man and I love you more than everything!

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Scholarship on fathers and fatherhood has evolved over the past two decades to include consideration of the significance of fatherhood for both the child and the father. Fatherhood has been explained from a variety of contexts including developmental issues, men's identity, the meanings associated with fatherhood, and the challenges and opportunities of assuming the role of father (Choi & Jackson, 2011; Lemay et al., 2010). Involvement, in particular, has received a great deal of attention as it relates to African American fathers. Many African American fathers are not actively involved in the lives of their children, as evidenced by statistical data showing that 80% of African American children will live a significant portion of their childhood years away from their fathers (Caldwell et al., 2014; Julion et al., 2012; Perry, 2009). In addition, two out of three African American infants are born to single female-headed households (Fleck et al., 2013). Twenty-nine percent of all female-headed African American households have children ages 18 or below in the United States, as compared to the 18.7% of married African American couples with children ages 18 or below (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). These statistics illustrate the changing structure of African American families and the phenomenon of father involvement.

Cultural issues, societal factors, generational fathering, and the nature of the relationship with their child's mother have been cited as contributing factors in the degree of father involvement (Guzzo, 2011; Roy & Dyson, 2010; Sipsma, Beille, Cole-Lewis, & Kershaw, 2010). Researchers have also focused on paternal involvement in relation to the father's resident or nonresident status and the effects of resident status on the child

and the father (Hammond, Caldwell, Brooks, & Bell, 2011; Castillo, Welch, Sarver, 2010; Olmstead, Futris, & Pasley, 2009; Coley & Hernandez, 2006). Viewing fatherhood role and involvement through these various perspectives and contexts sheds light on the topic, but minimally adds to the scholarly understanding of involvement for African American fathers. While this population may experience similar issues related to father involvement, further exploration is needed to yield data germane to understanding their specific needs and issues. In Chapter 2, I discuss the theoretical foundations I used to understand the involvement of this age group. In this chapter, I introduce the topic under investigation, the primary research question, and social significance of this study.

Background of Problem

Fatherhood is a dynamic concept that researchers have explored from a variety of perspectives and contexts. In particular, researchers have given attention to how the significance and focus of the role has changed. Morman and Floyd (2006) discussed the "historical flexibility of fatherhood" (p. 114) and the various approaches researchers have used to explain the phenomenon of paternal involvement. In their examination of fathers and their roles over time, Morman and Floyd noted that in the colonial period, the father was considered the moral leader of the family, whereas during the 20th century, the role shifted to that of breadwinner. Exploring the "shifting demography of fatherhood" (p. 114) involved examining the different styles of fathers. Researchers have thus focused on single fathers, custodial fathers, residential versus nonresidential fathers, divorced and stepfathers, father figures, teenage fathers, low income fathers, and fathers from various cultural backgrounds.

Previous researchers have also examined fathers and their roles as they relate to women, mothers, and extended family members (Choi & Jackson, 2011; Ngu & Florsheim, 2011; Perry, 2009; Fagan, Bernd, & Whiteman, 2007). In some contexts, the father's role is dismissed as altogether insignificant (Lemay et al., 2010; Lu et al., 2010; Dubowitz, Lane, Greif, Jensen, & Lamb, 2006). Within African American families, mothers are more likely to rely on their extended family, rather than fathers of their children, for help and support with caring for children (Lu et al., 2010). These relationships, as well as the mother's relationship with the father, can have a direct impact on his level of involvement. An adversarial relationship with the mother is often a barrier to the father's involvement with his children (Perry & Langley, 2013; Choi & Jackson, 2011).

From a cultural perspective, researchers have noted that as cultural changes occur, the role of the father changes (Morman & Floyd, 2006). Fathers' parenting stress and its effects on the social development of their child has also been a topic for exploration (Paschal, Lewis-Moss, & Hsaio, 2010; Mitchell & Cabrera, 2009). Included in these studies have been separated and divorced resident and nonresident fathers' relationships with their children (Leite & McKenry, 2006). The effects of paternal involvement, or lack thereof, on child development have been a particular research focus (Mitchell & Cabrera, 2009). Researchers have also given attention to various factors that affect paternal involvement.

While the literature on paternal involvement is expanding, a specific scholarly understanding of the meaning of fatherhood for African American fathers is lacking.

Julion, Gross, Barclay-McLaughlin, and Fogg (2007) have identified problems with existing research, including large amounts of data from Caucasian mothers and fathers. However, the research instruments used for Caucasian populations were irrelevant for African American fathers. Jordan-Zachary (2009) asserted that, in projects designed to support fragile families, a significant missing link is a robust understanding of men's views on fatherhood in their own voices, specifically those of young African American fathers.

As I demonstrate in Chapter 2, young African American fathers have often been included in research studies with older fathers. However, research dedicated solely to young African American fathers may have far reaching implications for these fathers and their children by gathering information that can facilitate working with fathers to become involved and/or maintain their involvement. Exploring and understanding the way this population conceptualizes fatherhood offers opportunities to effect positive social change by providing data that can be used to develop effective programs geared towards increasing involvement among young African American fathers. Young fathers who are not involved in their young children's lives have only been so for a relatively short time period, in comparison to older fathers. Examining the mindset of young African American fathers regarding their paternal role is thus vital to the development and implementation of services and programs that engage them in taking an early, active role in the lives of their children.

Statement of the Problem

The phenomenon of paternal involvement appears to be most problematic among young African American fathers. Although exhaustive research has been conducted on fathers and fatherhood, a gap exists in the literature on the experiences, insights, and thoughts of young African American men regarding their role as fathers (Smith, Krohn, Chu, & Best, 2005). A gap also lies in the scholarly understanding of how these men's relationships with their own fathers manifest in how they parent and the relationships they have with their children (Guzzo, 2011). As a result of this lack of knowledge, limited services and social supports are available for this population. Many of the past policies and programs developed in an effort to support African American fathers had an emphasis on these fathers making financial contributions (Lawrence, Watson, & Stepteau-Watson, 2013; Jordan-Zachary, 2009). Although the aforementioned research regarding young African American fathers and their experiences of fatherhood includes important findings, I found no research on the experiences of fatherhood among 18-25 year old African American fathers. Given such, further research was warranted in an effort to address the documented problem.

Research Question

The main research question I designed to ground this study was: How do African American men between the ages of 22 ad 25 experience and perceive fatherhood?

Purpose of the Study

In this study, I sought to extend scholarship on the issue of father involvement by young African American fathers aged 22-25. The purpose of this study was to

understand the lived experiences of these fathers and how those experiences shaped their involvement with their own children. The scholarly literature provided me an overview of fatherhood and the factors associated with father involvement. I used a phenomenological methodology to investigate fatherhood and father involvement among these young African American fathers. This method of investigation and specific interview questions are further described in Chapter 3.

Theoretical Framework

Ecological systems theory provides a well-defined illustration of human development with all aspects of life deemed interrelated, and knowledge of development linked by context, culture, and history (Darling, 2007). Bronfenbrenner has been a pioneer in developmental psychology and ecological systems theory. In his comprehensive work on ecological systems theory, he has offered detailed information on individuals and their connections with their relative systems: microsystems (an individual's immediate environment), mesosystems (relationships among microsystems), exosystems (social structures that impact an individual's development), and macrosystems. Macrosystems represent the economic, social, educational, legal, and political expressions of local micro, meso, and exosystems (Salkind, 2005). Ecological systems theory provided the theoretical framework for this study that I used to understand African American fathers with regard to how their family, peers, schools, and communities shaped their views of fatherhood and how those views impacted their level of participation in the life and care of their child(ren).

Identity theory, based on the principle of identity guiding behavior (Adamsons, 2013), was helpful in exploring parental involvement. Relationships and interactions within their environments affect individuals, as do the messages, meanings, and teachings they receive regarding the various roles they play (Adamsons, 2013; DeGarmo, 2010). I used this framework to gain an in-depth understanding of how the father's interactions and the messages he received about his role as father influenced his behaviors as father. Identity theory complemented the ecological perspective in exploring this topic.

Nature of the Study

Researchers use qualitative inquiry to develop an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of fatherhood among African American men, aged 22-25. I used a collective case study as the methodology for this study because it allowed me to focus on studying multiple cases to generate an in-depth, multi-faceted understanding of paternal involvement (Crowe, Cresswell, Robertson, Huby, Avery, & Sheikh, 2011). Using in-depth, semi-structured, face-to-face interviews, I sought to provide young African American fathers with an opportunity to convey their experiences of fatherhood.

In qualitative research, the role of the researcher is as important to the study as the information gathered from the participants. Understanding the effect of the researcher on the study involves adopting a reflexive role which is a continuous, introspective process regarding the researcher's beliefs, behaviors, and values and how they can affect the interpretation of the data (Parahoo, 2006). In concert with the reflexive role, I used an

interpretive role, which is a dynamic process of analyzing the data and themes expressed by the participants (Manley-Johnson, 2012). These roles served to aid me in providing a balanced, accurate account of participants' lived experiences.

Operational Definitions

African American: An individual born in the United States with origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa (Humes, Jones, & Ramirez, 2011).

Fatherhood: Behavior and identity portrayed by a man who has children; the experience of the role of father (Pleck, 2007).

Fathering: For the purposes of this study, fathering is the action of being a father.

Paternal involvement: "A fathers' interaction with, availability to, and responsibility for his child" (Lawrence, Watson, Stepteau-Watson, 2013, p. 102).

Assumptions

In this study, I assumed that the participants provided candid responses reflecting their perspectives and worldviews during their interviews. Furthermore, I assumed that the participants would participate in the study of their own volition, and that the data obtained from the interviews would answer the research question.

Limitations

Given the purpose of this study and their desire to be viewed in a positive light, fathers may have exaggerated their responses to questions about their participation and interactions with their children. Given the collective case study design, I relied solely on participants' self-reports of their involvement. I established safeguards against this

limitation by offering participants a detailed explanation of the study, reviewing with them the consent form and the types of questions included in the interview, and providing them information on how the study outcomes would be used. In addition, I informed participants of the measures taken to ensure their privacy and confidentiality. As additional protections against this limitation, I used member checking and participant review of the transcripts to amend their responses, if needed.

My role as the researcher and data collection instrument presented an additional limitation for this study. Given that I am an African American woman, inquiring about personal and sensitive information, the participants' responses to the interview questions may have caused them to feel ashamed, vulnerable, or uneasy. In order to decrease or eliminate these feelings as a potential barrier, I conducted the interviews at a familiar setting for the participants. Being in a familiar environment provided a sense of safety for participants, allowing them to feel at ease and comfortable so that they could focus and fully participate in the interview.

Scope and Delimitations

As I indicated in the introduction, further research is vital to address the needs of young African American fathers and their involvement with their children. As a result, I limited this study to young African American males, aged 22-25. Given the designated participants in the study, the results are not generalizable to all African American fathers, or to fathers outside of this demographic or geographic region. An added delimitation was that I drew the participants solely from barbershops in Detroit, Michigan.

Significance

The study has far reaching implications for future engagement and interventions with African American fathers and their children. Practitioners may use my findings regarding these fathers' perceptions and experiences with fatherhood to develop treatment plans with a goal of addressing feelings of uncertainty, fear, resentment, doubt, low self-esteem, and disappointment. My results indicate need for the development of programs and services geared towards addressing barriers fathers believe prevent them from engaging more fully with their children.

The findings of this study may lead to positive social change for African American children whose fathers are not actively involved in their lives. Researchers have demonstrated the detrimental effects for children of not having their fathers involved in their lives, including increased risk for involvement in the juvenile justice and foster care systems, high rates of school dropout, mental health issues, teenage pregnancy, and poverty (Zhang & Fuller, 2012; Perry, 2009; Hunter et al., 2006). The outcome of this study may aid human service providers in developing programs to engage fathers by, for instance, promoting early involvement during the pregnancy. Engaging fathers and providing them with the services, support, and education they need increases their level of involvement with their children and improves outcomes for their children.

Summary

The absence of African American fathers from the home and in the lives of their children is a phenomenon receiving a great deal of attention. Researchers have explored

myriad reasons this phenomenon continues to plague African American families. The decrease in the rate of marriage for African American couples, high unemployment, increased rates of incarceration, and multiple children with multiple partners are factors related to the lack of involvement of African American fathers (Zhang & Fuller, 2012). An abundance of research related to fathers, fatherhood, and father involvement exists. However, much of this research has included data from sources other than young African American fathers (Jordan-Zachary, 2009). In this study, I aimed to understand the views of young African American fathers, aged 22-25, as related to their definitions of what it means to be a father, their experiences of being fathered, and how those definitions and experiences influenced their involvement with their children. In Chapter 2 I offer a literature review. Chapter 3 follows with a description of the study design including descriptions of participants, procedures, the assessments I used and the information I gathered. In Chapter 4 I report the results, and in Chapter 5 I discuss implications and conclusion of the study, and offer recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

In this chapter 2, I offer a review of the literature related to African American fathers and involvement with their children. The purpose of this study was to gain an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of young African American fathers and how those experiences shaped their involvement with their own children. The data I collected included interview question responses regarding their lived experiences with being fathered and how those definitions, perceptions, and experiences of fatherhood impacted their involvement with their own children. My search for scholarly literature yielded limited results on fathers' views and experiences of involvement, specifically from African American fathers. Research on fathers and paternal involvement has been a focus from the vantage point of different populations (e.g., mothers and extended family) and from different contexts (e.g., race and age), but there have been relatively few studies from the vantage of fathers themselves.

Studies of paternal involvement from the viewpoint of mothers and extended family members generally provided a negative perspective of fathers. Mothers' views of fathers and their involvement with their children often depended on the mother's relationship with the father (Robbers, 2013; Julion et al., 2012). Her viewpoint was often also colored by the relationship she had with her father. Mothers also viewed fathers as insignificant when they had the support of their mothers and other extended family, which is often the case in African American families (Julion et al., 2012).

African American fathers have been a focus of research in the contexts of age and race, but much of the paternal involvement research related to race has focused primarily on Caucasian fathers. In studies where African American fathers have been part of the sample, their percentage is markedly lower that of Caucasian fathers. Some scholars have given attention to teenage fathers, exploring their developmental tasks in relation to assuming the role of fathers and their involvement. Research not focused on teenage fathers has grouped fathers into the vast age range of 18-65, leading to a generalized view. However, in-depth exploration is necessary to understand the experiences of young adult fathers and their issues related to their involvement.

After an exhaustive literature review, I determined that the perspective of African American fathers aged 22-25 was not readily available in scholarly research. My examination of paternal involvement from the perspective of the father gave a voice to how their experiences shaped their understanding and enactment of their role as father.

Literature Research Strategy

As fatherhood and paternal involvement has gained scholarly attention, a wealth of studies have been focused on this population and topic (Fleck et al., 2013; Castillo, Welch, & Sarver, 2013; Hammond et al., 2013). These studies have included an exploration of the social, environmental, and political impact on fathers and of what factors have promoted and/or hindered involvement. When conducting a comprehensive literature review for this study, I found several sources that were helpful for accessing peer reviewed journal articles, books related to the topic and theoretical framework, and statistical data from national databases. All literature I used for this study was published

within the past five years, with the exception of seminal and influential research, which informed and helped me focus this study of African American men and fatherhood.

Key terms that I used to search academic databases included *African American men, fathers, father involvement, fatherhood, African American families,* and *parenting.* Search terms related to the theoretical framework for the study included *ecological systems theory, Bronfenbrenner, person in environment,* and *social networks*. I searched the following databases: *PsycInfo, Academic Search Complete, PsycArticles, SocIndex, and ERIC*. *PsycInfo* yielded the most articles related to African American fathers and father involvement, and many of these articles called for further exploration of African American fathers' experiences. These articles were particularly fruitful, because they indicated the need for this study to explore and examine the perspectives of African American fathers.

In the remainder of this chapter, I present the theoretical frameworks, bioecological model and identity theory, that I used for the study. This section is followed by a discussion in which I explore the distinction between fathering, fatherhood, and paternal involvement. Next, I examine insights on paternal involvement from the viewpoints of mother and extended family, and the contexts of age and race. Finally I conclude the chapter by identifying the need for exploration of paternal involvement among African American fathers.

Theoretical Framework

Paternal involvement is a multi-faceted topic that researchers have explored from a variety of theoretical perspectives. Life course theory has provided an examination of

how a father's life affects and is affected by social structures (Roy, 2006). Identity theory has been useful in understanding how fathers navigate their role based on internal, as well as social and relational, expectations and how those expectations guide behavior (Hammond et. al., 2011, Palkovitz & Palm, 2009). Symbolic interactionism has been the means researchers have used to explore the meanings fathers assign to cultural symbols and their interactions with those symbols (Bryan, 2013). While these theories provide a glimpse into the lives and interactions of fathers and can be used to understand father involvement, they do not take into account the reciprocal relationship between the father and the various contexts of his environment.

Ecological systems theory served as the theoretical framework for this case study. It provided me the means for examining individual and environmental factors affecting paternal involvement. Bronfenbrenner (1979) first offered the ecological systems theory of human development in his work *The Ecology of Human Development*. This theory takes an approach to human development in which all aspects of life are interrelated and knowledge of development connects to context, culture, and history (Darling, 2007). Bronfenbrenner (1979) defined the ecology of human development as the systematic study of the continuous and reciprocal relationships between individuals and their immediate settings in which they live.

In ecological systems theory, levels or systems characterize an individual's environment. This theory has a set of concentric circles within which individuals are in the center surrounded by four environmental levels. Bronfenbrenner (1979) identified the first level, or system, as the microsystem, which he defined as a pattern of interpersonal

activities, interactions, and roles experienced by individuals in a particular setting. This level includes face-to-face interactions with parents, peers, neighbors, coworkers, and religious organizations. With regard to my study, the microsystem included the father and his interactions with his children, his parents, the mother of his children, and her parents.

The mesosystem is the second level, which Bronfenbrenner (2005) characterized as the interrelations between two or more settings in which individuals are active. The mesosystem is a system of microsystems such as relations between home and school, school and work, home and work, and neighborhood and church.

The third level, the exosystem, involves settings in which individuals are not active participants. However, individuals affect or become affected by events in the setting (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). For example, this process is evident when a father is actively involved at his child's school, but is not necessarily involved with the child's peer group. However, that peer group can directly affect the child's interactions and behavior at home and school, which affects the father.

The macrosystem is the last level, involving the organization of shared social institutions in a particular culture or subculture (Bronfenbenner, 2005). Ethnicity and socioeconomic status are representative of social institutions. Macrosystems evolve over time and include individual belief systems, cultural customs, values, guiding principles, or laws that indirectly impact the individual (Onwuegbuzie, Collins, & Frels, 2013).

Understanding the impact of the father's systems required that I understand his role and experiences as a father. It was integral that I examined the relationship he has

and/or had with his father and the mother of his children (microsystem), the interactions within his home life both as a child and as a father (mesosystem), the messages he received regarding the significance of his role as father (exosystem), and the effect social institutions, such as culture and race, had on his ability or desire to enact the role of father (macrosystem). Taking into account the father's interrelated environments aided me in painting a picture of his level of involvement with his children.

Ecological Models

When examining development related to person and environment, Bronfenbrenner created developmental models, which take into account the impact and influence of a person and environment. Rosa and Tudge (2013) asserted that when applying Bronfenbrenner's theory, it is important to specify the model. The social address model is the most simplistic and views development as the sole product of unspecified environmental factors (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Generally these factors include family size, social class, cultural differences, and residence. While the social address model focuses on environmental factors, the personal attributes model studies biological or physical features, such as age, sex, and physical body type.

The person-context model accounts for both personal and environmental factors. Bronfenbrenner (1992) identified ecological niches as favorable or unfavorable areas in the environment that influence the development of individuals with particular personal characteristics. This model allows for examination of various combinations of person and context characteristics in the individual's development. The person-context model involves an examination of the effects of an external setting on a specific developmental

feature. An example of this model is how parents' experiences at work affects the dynamics and functioning of the family unit. With regard to my study, this model may have proven useful for exploring how the father's experiences of being fathered influenced his behaviors and interactions as a father.

The process-person-context model combines the previous three models. Researchers using this model regard developmental outcomes as the result of interactions of both the person, the environment, and the processes that facilitated the developmental outcome. In explaining the process-person-context model, Bronfenbrenner used the term *synergism* to describe the combined action of two or more forces, which has a greater effect than the total of the individual effects (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). If I were to have used this model in relation to the topic under investigation, I would have focused on how the effects of the father's relationship with his children's mother, as well as his experiences with the family and court system, impacted his beliefs and perceptions of his role as father.

Ecological systems theory has been widely used to explain various phenomena including developmental studies, youth academic and psychological outcomes, the influence of family on gender development, and risk and potential factors for substance abuse (Neal & Neal, 2013). This theory includes understanding how environmental factors and settings affect an individual's behavior. Using an ecological perspective for this study assisted me in identifying individual and contextual factors that influence paternal involvement (Adamsons, O'Brien, & Pasley, 2007).

Bioecological Model

Through the ecological systems theory, Bronfenbrenner demonstrated the integrative link between individuals and their environment. Later he transitioned to the bioecological model in order to fuse biological, psychological, and behavioral levels into the ecological systems (Lerner, 2005). Bronfenbrenner viewed the bioecological model as an evolving theoretical framework for scientifically studying human development over time (Rose & Tudge, 2013). He based this model on the four elements of person, process, context, and time, which he contended simultaneously influence individual development outcomes. Understanding these elements as they relate to paternal involvement allowed me to understanding how they influenced participants' interactions with their children.
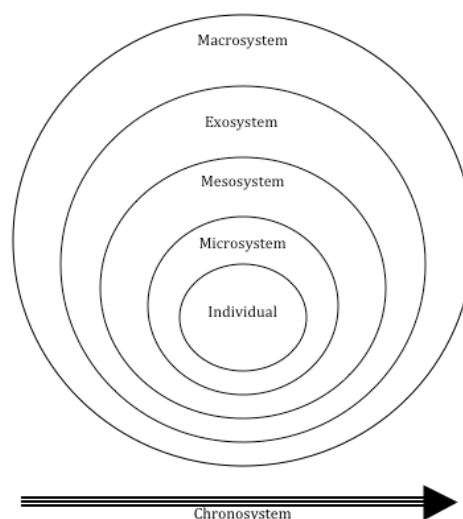
Figure 1. Bioecological model.

The first element of the bioecological model, person, denotes individuals and their characteristics such as gender, race, age, and previous experiences, as well as differences in cognitions including attitudes, beliefs, and expectations (Adamsons, O'Brien, &

Pasley, 2007).   In my study, "person" refers to the father, his race and age, and his

perceptions and experiences of fatherhood, which influences his level of involvement

with his children. I focused on African American fathers and explored their experiences

of being fathered, their perceptions of the role of father, and how those experiences and

perceptions influenced their level of involvement with their children.

The fused and dynamic relationship between the person and their environment in

which development takes place is the process (Adamsons et al., 2007, Lerner, 2005). The

interactions that occur over time between the person and their environment are proximal

processes (Bronfenbrenner, 2001). Process related to this study involved exploration of

the fathers' relationships with his children, his father, his children's mother, and other

extended family members. The interactions that occured as a result of these processes are

integral to understanding paternal involvement.

Context, conceptualized through the four nested systems: microsystem,

mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem includes each system with which the father is

involved directly, as well as indirectly influences his development, interactions, and

experiences. Within the realm of this study, a father's involvement and interactions

within his systems was the unit of analysis in an effort to understand how the systems

affected his involvement with his children. Context included messages received as a

result of being fathered and messages received from the child's mother and extended

family members.

The concept of time not only includes the passage of time, but also chronological

age, the historical time period, and the family's developmental stage (Adamsons et al.,

2007). Just as the processes and systems affect the individual, the various instances of time affect all three: the individuals, processes, and systems. While the chronological age was a criterion for this study, the historical period and family time of the father yielded important information on the significance of this concept of time on father involvement.

The defining properties of the bioecological model are human development occurring through progressive processes of multifaceted and continuous interactions between humans and their immediate environment, referred to as proximal processes (Lerner, 2005). These interactions include feeding an infant, reading to a young child, siblings at play, making plans, learning new skills, and problem solving. As it related to this study, the proximal processes of the participants encompassed interactions with his children and the nature of those interactions. For example, exchanges the father had with his children, decisions made about and/or in the interest of the children, and making provisions for the children.

The second defining property indicated that development is responsive to the form, power, content, and direction of the proximal processes (Lerner, 2005). Each serves as a function of the developing individual, the environment, the nature of the developmental outcomes, and the social changes that occur through the life course and historical period of which the individual lives. This property related to the interactions and the influences of those interactions on the father's involvement, such as his relationship with the child's mother and the nature and impact of his relationship with his father.

While this model has its beginnings in studying child development, Bronfenbrenner conducted extensive research and applied the ecological perspective to explore family relationships, parenting styles, genetics and intelligence, and societal threats to the parent-child system. Both the ecological systems theory and the bioecological model have been clearly ecological in nature with an emphasis on the importance of person-context interrelatedness (Tudge, Mokrova, Hatfield, & Karnik, 2009), which can be used to study different phenomena.

Kelly, Maynigo, Wesley, and Durham (2014) explored African American communities and family systems by using the bioecological model. The authors focused on using the model to explain the systematic factors that impact African American families. Structural racism at the macrosystem level was a focal point and its trickledown effect on the exosystem (socioeconomic disparities), mesosystem (racial discrimination), and microsystem (internalization of negative stereotypes). Following the discussion of how factors can affect the larger system through to the smaller system, the authors examined the strengths of African American families at the microsystem and mesosystem that provide a buffer against the systematic factors. These strengths included: strong family relationships with fictive kin/extended family, spirituality and religion, and positive racial and ethnic identity. The results revealed the effectiveness of the bioecological model in identifying the factors and the extent to which they affect an individual or group.

Consistent with the early explorations of father involvement, McWayne, Downer, Campos, and Harris (2013) utilized the bioecological model to examine the effect of

father involvement on early childhood learning. The authors identified the strength of the model in acknowledging that father behaviors and interactions influenced child outcomes across various contexts. However, it never diminished the importance of those behaviors and interactions. This study examined father involvement and acknowledged the influence of the fathers' perceptions and experiences on his level of involvement with his children.

Adamsons, O'Brien, and Pasley (2007) asserted that the ecological perspective is helpful in uncovering the various individual and contextual factors that impact fathers' involvement with their children. Using the bioecological model, their study was an exploration of paternal involvement among biological and stepfather families.

In examining an individual's environment, it is important to consider how individuals perceive and understand their environments and the elements within that environment (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). Adamsons, O'Brien, and Pasley (2007) posited that the ecological perspective served as a useful framework to examine the multiple and varied individual and contextual factors that influence paternal involvement. Bush and Bush (2013) found that Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory was appropriate for the study of African American men. It takes into account the impact of environment on human development by examining them within dynamic and multi-directional relationships influenced by different dimensions. Peart et al. (2006) asserted that the ecological perspective should be adopted in understanding how fathers navigate their roles in context their other roles. The purpose of this study was to understand the lived experiences of 22-25 year old African American fathers and how those experiences

impacted their involvement with their children. Their experiences varied in context, importance, time and complexity. Phenomenological in nature, the bioecological model was befitting as the theoretical framework for this study, given its design to examine the dynamic, multi-dimensional levels of development.

Identity Theory

In considering the various dimensions that influence relationships and interactions of African American men, it is appropriate to discuss identity theory.   Relationships and interactions within their environments shape individuals messages, meanings, and teachings also shape the various roles they play (Adamsons, 2013; DeGarmo, 2010). These messages influenced how they view themselves, which affects how they interacted with others.

The basis of identity theory is the fundamental principle that identity guides behavior (Adamsons, 2013). Individuals give meaning and significance to their different identities, which they demonstrate through specific behaviors (Adamsons & Fuller, 2013). As related to the study of father involvement, identity theory involved a father's perceptions of his role as father, originated from interactions within his social environment and those perceptions guided the extent of his involvement (Habib, 2012; Zhang & Fuller, 2012). A father's interpretation of the messages he received about his role as father from his family of origin, the mother of his children, and perhaps his children influenced the importance he places on his role and its enactment.

Salience, centrality, and commitment are three constructs that inform identity theory. Salience reflects the likelihood a specific identity will occur in a given situation

(Adamsons, 2013; DeGarmo, 2010). It indicates the probability a man will demonstrate fathering behaviors. Centrality denotes the level of importance an individual assigns to an identity (Adamsons, 2013). Centrality refers to the importance a man has placed on his role as father. Salience does not require conscious awareness whereas centrality has its basis in his awareness of the role (Adamsons & Pasley, 2013). The maintenance of a father's salience and centrality are across situations, interactions, and environments.

Commitment is a demonstration of the effect of relationships on identity enactment (Adamsons & Pasley, 2013). Specifically, commitment denotes the consequence of losing relationships associated with a particular identity, should that identity be vacated (Adamsons, 2013). This construct involves what relationships the father would lose if he chose to abandon his role as father. Commitment consists of two components: extensiveness [the relationships supporting an identity] and intensiveness [the importance of those relationships] (Adamsons & Pasley, 2013). If a father has several family members and friends who supported him in his role as father, he will demonstrate a higher level of commitment and be more likely to participate in fathering behaviors.

With regard to this study, the bioecological model was an exploration of the impact of external factors on father involvement, while identity theory was an exploration of the impact of internal factors. Interaction with others influenced identity. However, the internal processing of those interactions influenced how identity formed. It is important to understand how fathers perceived the messages they received and how those messages influenced their decisions and behaviors.

Defining Fathering, Fatherhood, and Paternal Involvement

Fathering, fatherhood, and paternal involvement have been utilized to capture men's relationships and interactions with their children (Zhang & Fuller, 2012; Coley & Hernandez, 2006). For the purposes of this study, fathering was the act of being a father, while fatherhood consisted of the experiences associated with being a father and/or being fathered (Pleck, 2012). The distinction between these two terms is that one depicted action and the other experiences. Paternal involvement culminated in fathering and fatherhood by specific activities and interactions between fathers and their children.

Various definitions have been in use to capture paternal involvement and all that it entails. The definitions and constructs have encompassed both tangible and intangible aspects of fatherhood. As paternal involvement studies evolved and involvement definitions more diverse and operationalized, the components became more specific and descriptive.

In their study exploring young African Americans view of the paternal role, Peart, Pungello, Campbell, and Richey (2006) defined their involvement as behavior that encourages interaction with a child and reflects a devotion to activities including face-to-face contact, phoning or writing, physical caretaking, and providing financial support. While this definition painted a picture of involvement, it failed to provide a comprehensive, multi-dimensional view, as it only encompassed physical, tangible aspects of father involvement.

Lamb, Pleck, Charnov, and Levine (1985) developed a construct of paternal involvement, which included engagement, accessibility, and responsibility. Engagement

is any direct interaction with the child, which can occur in the form of caregiving, play, or other activities. Accessibility entails the availability of a father to the child. Responsibility is arranging services and resources for the child to ensure needs being met. This construct of involvement served as the basis for numerous studies and has been significant in fatherhood research as it encompasses multiple dimensions of fathering behaviors (Goldberg, 2013; Brown, Mangelsdorf, & Neff, 2012; Castillo & Sarver, 2012; Perry, Harmon, & Leeper, 2012; Castillo, Welch, & Sarver, 2010; Pleck, 2007).

Pleck (2010) revised the current formulation to include three primary components: positive engagement activities, warmth and responsiveness, and control. Also identified were two auxiliary components: social and material indirect care and process responsibility. While positive engagement, warmth and responsiveness, and control mirror the engagement, accessibility, and responsibility constructs, the auxiliary components further expand the concept of fatherly involvement. Social and indirect care are activities a father does for his child, but not with his child. This care ensures that goods and services, such as daycare and after-school and sports activities, are in place and clothes, shoes, and uniforms are provided for the child.

Pleck (2010) referred to process responsibility as the father ensuring the needs of the children are met with regard to the four prior components and taking appropriate action when necessary. The act of process responsibility is the unification of all aspects of father involvement. The process encompasses the father taking an active role in interacting with his children, but also being proactive in ensuring the children's needs are met.

Insight on Paternal Involvement

Scholarship on fatherly involvement has evolved since its beginnings in the 1970s (Hammond et al., 2011; Marsiglio et al., 2000). This research has a primary focus on father-child interactions and the effect of fatherly involvement on child development (Castillo, Welch & Sarver, 2011). Fatherly involvement is directly related to positive health, behavioral, and educational outcomes for children (Choi & Jackson, 2011; Lu et al., 2010; Forste & Jarvis, 2007). When fathers are not involved in the lives of their children, the children experience higher rates of substance abuse, poverty, school dropout, and teenage pregnancy (Fleck et al., 2013; Goldberg, 2013).

With more attention given to fathers, their contributions, and their influences, came more expansion of research to include various conceptualizations and effects of fatherhood on the family unit (Caldwell et al., 2014; Hammond et al., 2011). Moving from a focus solely on the impact of children, involvement studies encompassed the effects of involvement and non-involvement on father's mental health, as well as barriers to involvement. Fathers who are engaged and involved with their children have overall increased life satisfaction, including self-confidence and decreased levels of psychological distress (Long et al., 2014). While the benefits of father involvement for both children and fathers was in the research literature, there continued to be low numbers of fathers actively involved in their children's lives.

In addressing the barriers to father involvement, there occurred a creation of programs, services, and initiatives dedicated to examine and explore the multitude of issues related to fatherhood and involvement (Perry, Harmon, & Leeper, 2012; Jordan-

Zachary, 2009). The Healthy Marriage Initiative and the Promoting Responsible Fatherhood Initiative are federally funded programs created to foster stable relationships between parents and build positive relationships between fathers and their children (Waller, 2012; Castillo, Welch, & Sarver, 2010; Roy & Dyson, 2010; Robbers, 2009). Exploration of issues transitioned from the deficit views of father absence, "deadbeat dads," to seeking an understanding of societal, psychological, and familial influences on fathers and father involvement.

Mothers and Paternal Involvement

Much of the research found on fathers and their involvement was from sources other than the fathers themselves, namely mothers (Julion, et al., 2007; Peart et al., 2006; Leite & McKenry, 2006). Mothers provided insight on the topic from their vantage point, often skewed by the current state of their relationship with the father or the relationship they had with their own father (Robbers, 2013; Julion et al., 2012; Zhang & Fuller, 2012; Hernandez & Cooley, 2007). Examining fatherly involvement from the perspective of the mother often contributed to the deficit perspective that highlighted inadequacies rather than identifying positive attributes (Goldberg, Tan, Davis, & Easterbrooks, 2013).

Cabrera, Ryan, Mitchell, Shannon, and Tamis-LeMonda (2008) investigated to what degree race and ethnicity, namely intracultural pressures and racism, affected nonresident paternal involvement, his resources, parental relationships, and relationships with others in the household. The sample for the study included mothers who reported mother-father relationship status; White, African American, and Latino fathers; and

mother-report data on father involvement. The findings of the study were important as it related to race indicating that Caucasian fathers had lower levels of father involvement than did African American and Latino fathers. However, the information from the study was from mothers and not fathers. This finding related to gathering data on father involvement from mothers with little to no input directly from fathers.

In contrast to Cabrera et al., (2008), Choi and Jackson (2011) conducted a study exploring paternal involvement and its effect on child behavior, as well as the mother's psychological wellbeing. The quality of the mother-father relationship had an effect on the mothers' economic hardship, depressive symptoms, and fathers' involvement. The father's involvement had an association with fewer child behavior problems occurring through the mother's adequate parenting. While the results of this study were noteworthy, the data was through the mothers' reports and associated with how fatherly involvement affected the mother.

Hernandez and Cooley (2007) highlighted many challenges related to capturing an accurate picture of father involvement, including the reliability and validity of mother reports; how fathers are recruited for research studies; and generalizations regarding fatherhood. In their study with interviews of mothers and fathers, fathers' involvement levels were higher according to paternal reports than mothers'. With regard to reliability of mother and father reporting, similarity across mother and father reports was present with limited information about the father's direct engagement. While maternal reports could be helpful in exploring a father's involvement, stronger validity occurred with fathers' reports or a combination of the two.

Race and Paternal Involvement

In addition to relying on maternal reports, a great deal of research on paternal involvement originated from exploring middle class, Caucasian fathers (Hernandez & Cooley, 2007; Julion et al., 2007). Other studies have included African American fathers within the participants. However, their percentage is lower compared to other races (Robbers, 2009; Morman & Floyd, 2006). Findings from these studies provided data regarding fathers' involvement in general, but did not provide insight into the experiences of African American fathers.

Morman and Floyd (2006) conducted two studies to understand men's perceptions of what fatherhood entails. The first study consisted of adult males ranging in age from 30-78 years of age with 78% of the fathers being Caucasian, 17% African American, 4% Hispanic, and 8% other ethnic origins. The fathers identified 20 categories regarding what it means to be a good father: role model, control, love, provider, sacrifice, availability, forgiveness, listener, teacher (general), teacher (specific), involvement, protector, discipline, support, affection, relationship with the mother, relinquishes control appropriately, friend, admits mistakes, and seeks child's approval. All the fathers in the study referenced their relationship with their sons, which prompted the second study to determine whether sons would agree with the reports of fathers about the important characteristics for raising sons. Similar to the first study, the fathers ranged in age from 30-87 and were 78% Caucasian and 15% were African American. Fathers and sons agreed on the top three characteristics of a good father: love, availability, and role model.

They also agreed on nine of the top ten items from the first study: love, availability, role model, involvement, provider, support, teacher (general), listener, and affection.

Robbers (2009) conducted a longitudinal evaluation of young minority fathers and their involvement with their children. Eighty percent of the 16-30 year old fathers were Hispanic, 12% were African American, 7% were Caucasian, and less than 1% were Asian or claimed a different racial group. The measure of a father's involvement was described by three subscales: (a) father/child interaction, (b) assistance, and (c) support, which mirrored the involvement scales established by Lamb, Pleck, Charnov, and Levine (1985). Robbers (2009) found that older fathers provided less assistance, which included activities such as changing and cleaning up after the child, speaking with doctors, or making appointments. This finding was attributable to the influence of extended family, namely grandparents, on younger fathers to become involved and take responsibility for their children, especially within the Hispanic culture. This study differs from the current study in its use of a population of 16-30 year old fathers, primarily Hispanic. While it sheds light on fatherhood from a Hispanic perspective, it does not reflect understanding African American fathers, 22-25 years of age.

Understanding how fathers interpreted and defined their expectations, obligations, and experiences as fathers was the goal of the study by Forste, Bartowski, and Jackson (2009). They also sought to identify the level of childcare and financial support fathers provided, as well as their relationship with their own fathers. The 36 participants ranged in age from 20-39 years with the majority being Caucasian (19%). Participants who were close to their fathers identified "being there" as their responsibility related to fatherhood.

Being there was demonstrating a commitment to family and providing financial and emotional support.

Four other themes emerged regarding commitment, employing the breadwinner role, as well as the role of moral teacher and disciplinarian, and the importance of providing emotional support (Forste et al., 2009). Fathers, who were not close to their fathers, saw their role as being dependent on the relationship with the child's mother and defined fatherhood primarily in terms of the breadwinner. While this study provided insight into fatherhood related to how men's relationships with their own father effected how they viewed fatherhood, it was primarily from the vantage point of Caucasian fathers and not African American fathers.

Age and Paternal Involvement

Paternal involvement studies used fathers of various ages to explore issues and dynamics of the phenomenon for that particular group. Frequently, this research had a focus on teenage fathers to older age fathers, each with their own unique characteristics and developmental levels. Teenage fathers not only deal with issues related to being a father, but also faced developmental challenges associated with their age (Fagan, Bernd, & Whiteman, 2007). Older fathers also faced their own challenges related to generativity and adjusting to middle age. These issues compounded for fathers when navigating their role as a father, in addition to developmental stages and milestones.

Julion, Gross, Barclay-McLaughlin, and Fogg (2007) sought to obtain African American non-resident fathers' perceptions on paternal involvement in general, as well as their involvement with their own children. In order to capture their views, perceptions,

and experiences, seven different focus groups had 69 fathers, ranging in age from 18 to 65. Paternal involvement among the participants ranged from minimally involved to highly involved. Fathers' descriptions of involvement included: factors influencing their involvement, dissatisfaction with their level of involvement, and their views on being heard.

The overarching premises of the father's descriptions were being consistently present to shape, guide, and most importantly, love their children regardless of their own circumstances (Julion et al., 2007). Fathers identified multiple forces within and outside their control that influenced their involvement including: the legal system, their child's mother, grandmother, the mother's new boyfriend, and father's new girlfriend; multigenerational issues, psychological stress, and the lack of support. While these findings provided information related to the perceptions of African American fathers on their role, participants ranged in age from 18 to 65.

Dubowitz, Lane, Greif, Jensen, and Lamb (2006) found similar results in exploring the views of low-income African American fathers regarding their involvement with their children. Also using focus groups with the participants, ranging in age from 20s to 60s, similar themes were related to providing guidance, love and support, protection and supervision, as well as material and spiritual needs. An added component of this study included participants giving advice to other fathers on the benefits of taking an active role in their children's lives. The participants admonished other fathers to take responsibility and look at the rewards of fatherhood or experience, as well as the regrets

of not being involved. The 20-60 year old fathers in this study experienced fatherhood differently than the young adult fathers who informed this study.

The studies related to older fathers yielded findings of higher levels of involvement in the lives of their children. Fathers' understanding and acknowledging the needs of their children connected with regard to how their involvement, or lack thereof, affected their child. Older fathers were more likely to be involved, as they tended to be emotionally mature and more committed to and engaged in fatherhood responsibilities (Fagan, Bernd, & Whiteman, 2007). Being more emotionally mature afforded them an opportunity to have different relationships with their children and other family members, such as the mother of their children.

In contrast to older fathers, teenage fathers experienced their role as father in a different manner. Fatherhood occurring during teenage years presented challenges as the teen father attempted to navigate his role as father, while simultaneously experiencing the challenges of being a teenager (Sipsma, Beille, Cole-Lewis, & Kershaw, 2010). With regard to becoming a father during the teen years, sons of adolescent fathers are three times more likely to have a child and sons of adolescent mothers are 2.7 times more likely to have a child (Sipsma et al., 2010). Numerous individual, family, peer, and environmental risk factors existed for teenage boys becoming fathers, including higher delinquency and substance abuse, numerous children in the home, not living with the biological father, early adolescent dating, and minimal parental education.

Extended Family and Paternal Involvement

Within the African American community, extended family plays a significant role in childcare, childrearing, and parental roles, which can adversely affect a father's involvement (Lu et al., 2010). Sometimes, African American fathers are viewed as unnecessary in light of African American women being self-reliant, benefitting from assistance from extended family, and having the option to reside with extended family (Julion et al., 2012; Lu et al., 2010; Leite & McKenry, 2006).

With regard to paternal involvement, maternal grandmothers were the "gatekeepers" to the extent of the role fathers' could play (Lu et al., 2010). Fatherly involvement was higher when his extended family was involved and lower with the mother's extended family involvement (Perry, 2009). Comparatively, Julion et al. (2007) asserted that barriers to father involvement included the mother, mother's family, mother's new boyfriend, and father's commitment to a new family.

Castillo and Sarver (2012) investigated the relationship between nonresident fathers' relationships with their child's mother, as well as perceived and received instrumental support and involvement with their young child. Using a sample of 895 fathers from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study, higher levels of father involvement occurred among fathers with higher levels of perceived social support. Even when the social support was not substantial, the fathers believing they had the support of friends and family resulted in a higher level of father involvement.

Voices of African American Men and Paternal Involvement

The experience of being fathered affects how and to what degree fathers engage with their children. Father's involvement or lack of involvement impacted the models adult children used in developing their own family relationships (Long, Fish, Scheffler & Hanert, 2014; Forste & Jarvis, 2007). Furthermore, lack of fatherly involvement served as a catalyst for men not take an active role in their own children's lives (Lu et al., 2010; Forste & Jarvis, 2007). With no example of what a father-son relationship entails, African American fathers often lacked an understanding of how to navigate and continue the role (Julion et al., 2012; Guzzo, 2011; Leite & McKenry, 2006). This knowledge deficit contributed to a lack of father involvement.

In contrast, not having an active and engaged father served as a catalyst for not following in their father's footsteps. Lemay, Cashman, Elfenbein, and Felice (2010) found that 77% of the 30 fathers they interviewed had no intention to raise their child as their father had raised them due to issues of abandonment, physical and/or emotional abuse. Despite feeling ill prepared, these fathers demonstrated a willingness and desire to connect with their children and engage in the role of father.

African American fathers are underrepresented in studies related to fatherhood and father involvement (Caldwell et al., 2014; Perry, Harmon, & Leeper, 2012). While they have been included in studies on the topic, limited research is available solely exploring their perspectives (Jordan-Zachary, 2009). Researchers called for incorporating narratives of African American fathers into empirical research (Hammond et al., 2011). Men's attitudes and beliefs about fatherhood, influenced by their father's

involvement, were determinants of their attitudes and beliefs and required further investigation. Specifically, how are men's behaviors influenced by their attitudes (Guzzo, 2011). Much of the research dedicated to fathers' involvement explored the emotional, psychological, and behavioral outcomes for children, but failed to focus on men's perceptions of their involvement and how those perceptions developed (Lawrence, Watson, & Stepeau-Watson, 2013). The purpose of this study is to address the gap in the research regarding African American fathers and how their perceptions and experiences of fatherhood influenced their involvement with their children.

Further explored were African American fathers, aged 22-25, and the lack of research related to this specific age group.. Studies, while exploring a wide range of ages, young adults to senior citizens, have failed to capture the perceptions and experiences of this pivotal age group. Young adults are in the precarious position of moving out of the teenage years and establishing themselves as adults, which involves establishing their identity (Marcia, 2014; Pittman, Keiley, Kerpelman, & Vaughn, 2011). While this age group experiences its own unique challenges and opportunities, adding the role of father is a new dimension to understand.

Summary

The research cited in this literature review provided a summary of paternal involvement related to this study's population: African American men. The research related to this population is lacking with regard to understanding their perceptions and experiences of fatherhood. Father involvement has been a focus in studies from the perspectives of mothers, extended family, culture, and age. While these perspectives

shed light on the topic, the perspectives of African American fathers ages 22-25 are needed to understand the effects of father involvement germane to this population. The next chapter details the research methodology, data collection, and data analysis plan used to conduct the study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

Investigating fatherhood from the perspective of African American fathers sheds light on how various factors influence their level of involvement with their children. These factors included how they were fathered, their relationship with their own fathers, and their understanding of their role as a father. The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the lived experiences of young African American fathers and of how those experiences shaped their involvement with their own children. Exploring this phenomenon through the lens of the ecological systems theory helped me understand the participants' experiences. Shedding light in this area allowed for the creation and development of research based services and programs for fathers.

In this chapter, I discuss the qualitative methods that I used to gather and analyze data. I begin with a discussion of the research design and rationale, followed by a discussion of my role as researcher. I also outline the research questions and data collection procedures that I used.

Research Design and Rationale

In this study I sought to understand the experiences and perceptions of fatherhood of 22-25 year old African American men. A qualitative method of inquiry befitted this study because it provided me an opportunity to interpret participants' social world by focusing on their histories, experiences, and perspectives (Wheeldon & Faubert, 2009). Unlike quantitative methods whose purpose is to examine the relationship among

variables, qualitative methods enable researchers to gain in depth knowledge of the content of experiences (Englander, 2012).

As I have demonstrated in the previous chapters, limited scholarly knowledge is available related to how young African American men between the ages of 22 and 25 define and experience fatherhood, and to how those experiences influence their interactions and involvement with their own children. The goal of qualitative methods is to achieve understanding (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). By using qualitative methods, I was able to generate a wealth of detailed, in-depth information regarding the insights and experiences of these fathers and the meanings they attach to their experiences.

Case study is the qualitative methodology I used to explore the perceptions and experiences of young African American fathers. Researchers use case study methodology to describe a phenomenon in its real life context (Anthony & Jack, 2009). This methodology provided me insight into the experiences of these men related to being a father. Starman (2013) described case study research as a qualitative method researchers use to "discover the unknown within well-known borders while continually monitoring our own performance; scalability; and our own, as well as general, existing knowledge" (p. 42). In my study, hearing and learning directly from the men about their experiences related to fatherhood was paramount to gaining this insight. With the goal of gaining understanding directly from the participants, case study yields the in-depth level of information this topic warrants.

For the purposes of this study, a case study methodology was useful in elucidating the perceptions and experiences of young African American fathers. This methodology

was appropriate for use with this study because it is a framework for exploring the nature

of the case, background, and contextual elements of an experience (Hyett, Kenny, &

Dickson-Swift, 2014). Rather than focus on one father in a single case study, I selected a

collective case study in order to understand paternal involvement across the participants'

experiences. Collective case studies call for exploring multiple cases in chorus with the

goal of understanding a phenomenon or a population (Crowe et al., 2011; Casey &

Houghton, 2010). As an aspect of collective case study, I used a cross-case comparative

analysis to identify similarities and differences in themes (Houghton, Murphy, Shaw, &

Casey, 2014). Examining paternal involvement through the perspectives and experiences

of multiple cases lends to the depth of understanding of the phenomenon.

Case study research is a flexible, iterative process that allows for development of

detailed descriptions (Cronin, 2014; Crowe et al., 2011). This study involved the

participants moving through this fluid process by reflecting on and sharing their

experiences and meanings as I interpreted those meanings. Because the population in this

study has been absent from research on fatherhood, it was important for me to learn from

them what meanings they ascribed to their experiences and how those meanings shaped

their behavior as fathers. Understanding their experiences will be beneficial in engaging

fathers in services geared towards increasing their involvement and supporting them in

their role. It was equally important to learn from the participants how their cultural,

social, and historical experiences shaped those meanings.

In summary, collective case study research allowed me to explore and understand

the real-life experiences of and meanings associated with fatherhood for 22-25 year old

African American men. Further it enabled me to understand how those experiences and meanings influenced their behavior as fathers. The reflective and interpretative process involved in case study research aided me in understanding their conscious descriptions of their experiences and the underlying dynamics that account for their experiences.

Before deciding to use a collective case study approach, I explored other qualitative methodologies including phenomenology, ethnography, narrative, and grounded theory. Each approach provides the researcher a way to examine individual or group experiences, life stories, and perspectives. However, I deemed these approaches less likely to provide an in depth understanding of young African American fathers' experiences of and meanings associated with fatherhood.

Phenomenological analysis provides an examination of how particular experiences of a phenomenon generally come to awareness in order for relationships between essential elements to be better understood (Beck, 2013). Phenomenology is the means to uncover the essential meaning of the phenomenon under study (Gee, Lowenthal, & Cayne, 2013). This design would have provided the in-depth exploration the topic warrants. However, in addition to obtaining information directly from participants, it would have required in depth understanding of their cultural, social, and historical experiences.

Researchers use ethnography to study behaviors, values, and language over time. However, this method involves focusing on a specific culture or group of people and becoming immersed in their daily activities. Ethnography is explorative, emphasizes the societal and cultural contexts of a given phenomenon, and is used to describe how that

phenomenon occurs within community or group of people (Fossey et al., 2002). While I sought to specifically understand the experiences and perceptions of African American men, my study did not occur over an extended period of time, which excluded ethnography as a suitable method.

Developed by Glaser and Strauss, grounded theory was designed to establish a new theory from the data of a study (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Grounded theory design involves collecting and analyzing a substantial amount of data to discover concepts and relationships between those concepts in order to generate a new theory to explain the phenomenon being investigated (Skeat & Perry, 2008). With a grounded theory study, a researcher seeks to produce a theory that emerges from the comparative analysis of the data, which was not the purpose for this study. In examining the phenomenon of fatherhood for the participants, my aim was not to generate new theories, but to understand their lived experiences and how those experiences influenced their involvement with their children.

While the basic premise of a narrative study might seem an appropriate choice for this study, it also failed to meet my needs. A narrative design involves "studying one or two individuals, gathering data through the collection of their stories, reporting individual differences, and chronologically ordering the meaning of those experiences" (Creswell, 2007, p. 54). A narrative approach would not effectively address the purpose of this study because examining only one or two fathers would not provide the level of depth this phenomenon warrants. Additionally, I was not focused on the chronological order of experiences, but on how the experiences affected their involvement with their children.

Role of the Researcher

In a case study, the researcher is a conduit for the participant and their real-life experiences. To accomplish the goal of gaining an understanding of the experience of fatherhood for African American men, I worked to absorb the meanings of their descriptions and make explicit the deeper, interior meanings within the descriptions (Louchakova, 2005). In order to accomplish this task relative to the experiences provided by the participants, I adopted two roles: reflexive and interpretive.

Reflexive Role

While the focus was on the participants and their experiences, it was critically important for me to reflect on, acknowledge, and understand how my beliefs and experiences may have influenced the study. Parahoo (2006) defined reflexivity as a continuous, reflective process by researchers regarding their behavior, preconceptions, presence, or values, which can affect the interpretation of responses. As an African American woman interviewing African American men about their experiences with fatherhood, it was important to the integrity of the study that I understand how my experiences of fatherhood could have potentially affected the outcome of the study. Adopting a reflexive role allowed me to avoid misinterpreting participant experiences of the phenomenon. Houghton et al., (2013) indicated that reflexivity is a critical aspect of qualitative research and relates to how the researcher's background and personal interests influences the research study.

Shaw (2010) asserted that reflexivity is proactive self-reflection, which facilitates the awareness of the "dynamic relationship between ourselves as researchers and our

participants' data and also of the way in which our research encounters change our fore-understandings to bring a fresh understanding of the phenomenon we are investigating" (p. 241). Reflexivity allows researchers to explore how their beliefs and perceptions will impact the study, rather than denying the influence exists. As Kumar (2012) indicated, through the process of interaction and interpretation, the researcher and participants co-create an understanding of the examined phenomenon.

Interpretive Role

Anthony and Jack (2009) indicated that case study methodology is an interpretive paradigm that guides an investigation of a phenomenon in its natural context. My interpretive role in this study allowed me time to thoroughly examine the participants' lived experiences of being an African American father. The interpretive role gave me a means of data analysis and occurred following an extensive review of the participants' descriptions of their experiences. Through this role, I engaged in the iterative process of data immersion and thematic analysis, which provided a clear picture of the participants' understandings of their life-worlds (Manley-Johnson, 2012).

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Research Questions

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I designed the main research question to address the overall research problem of the limited scholarly knowledge on 22-25 year old African American men's understanding of their role as father and how that understanding influences their involvement with their children. While the research questions provided direction to the course of the study, I used them as tools to facilitate the researcher-participant conversation. The interview questions for this study were semi-structured to generate an

in-depth level of discussion about participant descriptions and experiences of and with fatherhood. The main research question grounding this study was: How do African American men between the ages of 22 and 25 experience and perceive fatherhood?

Research Procedures

I began the study by sending out initial request letters with information about the study to two local recreation centers and two local barbershops in Detroit, Michigan. The letters contained information related to the purpose of the study, how the information would be used, and a request for support in the form of posting flyers in the respective locations. The flyers contained an explanation of the study, participant requirements, and the researcher's contact information. After two weeks with no response, I sent a follow-up letter with the same information and an attached flyer. In addition, I made telephone calls to the respective administrators of the recreation centers and owners of the barbershops. The barbershop owners were the only individuals to contact me to express interest and provide permission for flyers to be showcased in their shops.

Next, I scheduled appointments with the barbers to review the request letters and letter of cooperation. I reviewed the purpose of the study and their role in supporting the study. Once I obtained signatures on the letters of cooperation (Appendix E), additional flyers were provided to them for posting and distribution.

Following the distribution of flyers, interested participants contacted me and completed a screening interview to determine if they met the criteria for age, race, and parentage (Appendix F). Once deemed eligible, I scheduled an interview with each participant. Participants received the location of my private office, a distance from the

barbershop. None were willing to travel there and requested to participate in the interview at the barbershop before or after their scheduled appointment. In an effort to ensure the participant's comfort level and sense of safety and wellbeing, I sought permission from the barbershop owner to conduct the interviews on site. The barbershop owner granted permission to use an office adjacent to the barbershop for the interviews. The office was located in the rear of the building, separate from the barbershop, which ensured privacy and confidentiality.

Interviews began with my reviewing the consent form with the participant. The title of the study, purpose, and use of the information provided prospective participants with a clear understanding of their role in the study. I reviewed sample interview questions, as well as contact information for local counseling agencies should participants experience any psychological or emotional distress as a result of the interview questions. The consent form also contained the IRB approval number, expiration date, and writer's contact information. Following review of the consent form, I asked each participant whether they had any questions or desired additional information. If they did not, then they signed the consent form. Participants received a copy of the consent form, which is in Appendix B.

I informed participants during the consent form review that I would be recording the interviews and would take brief notes during the interview. None of the participants disagreed with the interview being recorded. I used my voice recorder and operated in the participant's presence. I used field notes to denote the participant's nonverbal expressions, highlighted particular responses that needed clarification, and captured

observations of the participant's overall engagement throughout the interview. I informed each participant that he had the right to cease participation at any time during the interview, as well as the right to pass on any particular question he did not want to answer.

After thorough review of the consent form, I conducted in-depth, semi-structured, face-to-face interviews to gather participant perceptions and experiences related to fatherhood. Each participant answered the same interview questions. I asked follow-up questions as needed for clarification. While the time allotted for each interview was 60-90 minutes, the interviews ranged from 5 to 14 minutes. The fathers appeared eager and willing to participate in the interviews, but the majority were direct in providing answers to the questions I asked with little elaboration, unless prompted by a follow up question.

Upon completion of the interview, each participant received a thank you gift of a $25 Visa Gift Card. All participants answered all the of the interview questions and completed the full interview. Many thanked me for discussing their fathering roles and experiences, since they had neither been asked about their experiences of being a father nor given much thought to verbalizing their experiences.

Next, following each interview I transcribed the interview recordings verbatim into a Microsoft Word document and pseudonyms replaced the actual names of the participants. After I transcribed each interview, I listened to the recording again while following along with the transcription to ensure accuracy. After completing 10 interviews, I determined that no new data emerged and therefore, I had reached saturation. The data collection procedures as outlined were followed without incident.

Methodology

As indicated in Chapter 1, researchers have demonstrated the absence of African American fathers in the lives of their children. Perry (2009) found that 80% of African American children will spend a significant portion of their childhood lives away from their fathers. Hunter et al. (2006) asserted that African American females head 30% of all African American households. Hammond, Caldwell, Brooks, and Bell (2011) posited that African American fathers bear the brunt of negative attention in relation to parenting and fatherhood, as they are more subject to public scrutiny. Given the statistics related to this population and the lack of understanding of how they view their role of fatherhood, it is their voices, which resonated from this study.

Participant Selection

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the experiences of fathers and how these experiences shaped their involvement with their own children. The individuals recruited to participate in the study were fathers who were involved with their children, as well as fathers who were not involved. Fathers who were not involved had minimal to no contact with their children, meaning the participants had not seen or interacted with their child in six months to one year or their contact had been sporadic and infrequent, totaling no more than 3-4 contacts in a year.

Involved fathers were those who had contact with their child(ren) at least three times per week. Much of the research on fatherly involvement had a focus on involved fathers' experiences of fatherhood as experienced and viewed by mothers. Selecting both fathers who had minimal and consistent contact with their children, offered the

opportunity to understand the factors influencing involvement. Although recruitment called for uninvolved, as well as involved fathers, only involved fathers answered the call to participate in the study.

Participants for this study included 10 African American men. Qualitative researchers use small sample sizes. This methodology, unlike quantitative research, places importance and value on the depth and information richness of the participant experiences and not the number of participants (Morrow, 2005). Using a small sample of 10 men provided the depth of information and understanding necessary to understand this phenomenon. The sample size was sufficient with saturation at 10 participants.

Selected from a purposeful sample, the men were between the ages of 22 and 25 years and had at least one child. Purposeful sampling involves selecting individuals who had knowledge of and experience with the phenomenon under investigation (Palinkas et al., 2013). Embedded within this sampling method is the capacity to compare and contrast, as well as identify similarities and differences among the participants with regard to paternal involvement. Gathering and analyzing the histories, perceptions, and experiences of the participants offered a wealth of information (Abrams, 2010; Fossey et al., 2002).

Gaining Access to Participants

Participants were requested from Adam Butzel Recreation Complex, Brightmoor Community Center, Classic Effects Barber Shop, and Image Xpressions Barber Shop, all located in Detroit, Michigan. The recreation centers offered various sports and activities for area residents. The purpose of the multi-purpose community centers was to bridge

the gap between citizens and community service providers (City of Detroit, 2014). The

barbershop owners were the only individuals to contact the researcher regarding the

request to recruit participants.

Meetings were with the barbershop owners for both sites providing information

about the study, use of the information gained from the study, and how advertising at the

shops would be beneficial. The owners provided a letter of support for the study and

permission to advertise at their places of business. Upon receiving permission, I included

flyers and informational letters included information pertaining to the study and its

requirements on announcement boards at the entrance of the facilities. A telephone

number indicating where potential participants could call was on the flyer in order to

schedule interviews.

Instrumentation

I collected data through an in-depth, semi-structured interview in order to gather

the participant's perceptions and experiences related fatherhood. Interviewing served the

purpose of allowing the researcher to enter into the participant's perspective and gather

their stories (Patton, 2002). The process of interviewing allowed the "interviewer and

participant to explore the participant's experience, place it in context, and reflect on its

meaning" (Seidman, 2013, p. 20). Each participant engaged in a discussion about his

experiences of fatherhood. Information gathered during this interview allowed for an in-

depth understanding of the participant's experiences with his own father, as well as how

he currently experienced fatherhood. This interview also allowed for rapport building

and establishing trust by explaining the role of the researcher, as well as the researcher's

experiences with fatherhood. It was incumbent on the researcher to create a comfortable

atmosphere, which encouraged the participant to respond openly and comprehensively

(Moustakas, 1994).

The goal of the interview was to reconstruct the concrete details of the

participant's experiences (Seidman, 2013). Interview questions had a focus on the

participant's descriptions of fatherhood and also explored the participant's relationship

with his father and being fathered. The interview questions are outlined in Appendix C.

Data Collection Procedures

In carrying out the procedures for this study of African American fathers and their

perceptions and experiences of fatherhood, a detailed plan included how participants

learned about the study and were recruited, data collection and analysis, and validation of

findings. A meeting with the barbershop owners took place for the purpose of explaining

the study and requesting permission to post information in their facility. Their agreement

allowed me to pose flyers and an informative letter in their places of business. The flyer

provided an explanation of the nature of the study and contact information for the

researcher.

Upon receiving a call from a potential participant, I scheduled an interview in my

office space, located in Downtown Detroit, to ensure confidentiality. Interview dates and

times were respectful of the participants' work and personal schedules. I addressed

issues related to transportation with the participants, so as not to cause burden or stress. I

presented a brief overview of the study prior to scheduling the interview. I informed the

participants about the consent form, interviews were to take 60-90 minutes. They had the

right to refuse to participate or terminate their involvement at any time without penalty.

The scheduled interview entailed review of informative letter and review and signing

of consent form. Participants learned again of their right to terminate their involvement

in the study at any time. They had an opportunity to ask questions. I explained the

measures taken to ensure confidentiality and privacy. An explanation of the interview

process occurred. I indicated that I would ask questions, take notes, and the interview

would be recorded. Permission was requested to contact participants by telephone or

email, if necessary, for follow up questions. I also explained the process of member

checking and requested opportunity to schedule time for that process.

After completing all interviews, I transcribed the audiotapes verbatim and analyzed

the data as outlined in the Data Analysis Section. A review of the transcripts occurred to

identify common themes. I scheduled a follow-up interview as a form of member

checking to review and validate themes. Upon completion of the initial and follow-up

interviews, participants received a $25 Visa Gift Card for their participation in the study.

Data Analysis Plan

After transcribing the interviews, I saved and organized into a file. Numbers

replaced participant's names in order to maintain confidentiality. I read each interview.

Once I reviewed all interviews carefully, the process of identifying commonalities in the

participants' descriptions and experiences began. Case study data analysis calls for an

initial examination of the individual cases prior to conducting a comparative analysis

across cases (Crowe et al., 2011). Reviewing the transcripts enabled me to find relevant

statements that spoke to the experiences of the participants, the coding process, which

involved identifying and noting concepts, examples, events, and themes in the text of the

transcript (Seidman, 2013).

After all interviews were transcribed, the coding process began. The codes served

as the core themes of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). Coding enabled me to examine

similarly labeled data and retrieve data related to multiple labels when considering

connections, distinctions, and patterns (Fossey et al., 2002). The process of coding was a

continual moving "from part to part and from part to whole in order to grasp the

structural organization and interdependence of parts that make up the lived experience"

(Wertz, 2005, p. 172). The process of moving from part to whole provided the means for

themes to emerge to whole, the phenomenon. This step was integral for understanding

and interpretation (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007).

The eight-step data analysis process by Manley-Johnson (2012) was used and the

process was informed by integrating the work of Ajjawi and Higgs (2007) and Colaizzi

(1978). This process, consistent with case study research design and analysis, was used

to thoroughly review the participant responses and further clarify themes. The eight steps

include immersion, understanding, abstraction, synthesis and theme development,

illumination and illustration of the phenomenon, integration and critique, identifying the

fundamental structure of the phenomenon, and returning to the participants for validation.

Step 1: Immersion

I reviewed the interview recordings and transcripts numerous times to gain a

preliminary understanding of the participants' experiences and perceptions of fatherhood.

Field notes were also reviewed. The first step of immersion allowed me to engage with the meaning of the data in order to get a "sense" of the participants' texts, which aids in coding the data (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007). Particular attention was given to the participants' descriptions and expressions related to their experiences of being fathered and those of being a father.

Step 2: Understanding

This second step provided the opportunity for me to gain a more in depth focus on the data. Understanding involved identifying first order constructs, which were the participants' specific words and phrases that presented a clear picture of what they were saying (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007). Each participant interview was reviewed a final time with significant words and phrases highlighted that detailed his perceptions and experiences.

Step 3: Abstraction

Abstraction involved the development of second order constructs based upon my theoretical knowledge and interpretation. Words and phrases that were significant and occurred across interviews were highlighted. Following the initial reading and identification of significant and resounding themes, the interviews were reviewed again and the words and phrases, which were highlighted in the initial reading, were written in the margins. Those words and phrases written in the margin were written in a separate document to identify the commonality among them.

Stage 4: Synthesis and Theme Development

This stage involved an iterative review of the literature, the participant data, and the previous analysis to develop themes. The hermeneutical circle created synthesis and theme development as "a metaphor for understanding and interpretation, which is viewed as a movement between parts (data) and whole (evolving understanding of the phenomenon), each giving meaning to the other such that understanding is circular and iterative" (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007, p. 622).

Stage 5: Illumination and Illustration of Phenomenon

After identifying the themes, I reconstructed the interpretations of the participant's first order constructs to illuminate the key findings. This stage also involved reviewing the construction to ensure they are true to the participant's experiences.

Stage 6: Integration

This stage of integration included testing and refining the themes. The integration stage ensured accuracy and ensured that I captured the essences of their experiences in the themes.

Stage 7: Identifying the Fundamental Structure of the Phenomenon

In this stage, I identified the essential structure of the participants' experiences in the final list of themes discovered for this study. The five themes exemplified the fundamental structure of the phenomenon, which spoke to the significance of their involvement and the importance of being present, both physically and emotionally in the lives of their children. Figure 2 is a demonstration of the process used to identify the themes.

Stage 8: Returning to the Participants for Validation

I scheduled follow-up interviews with all, but one of the participants, who died unexpectedly after completing the initial interview. The follow-up interview allowed the participants to check their responses and ensure that I captured their words and ideas correctly. Each of the participants expressed an accurate reflection of their experiences and the ideas they conveyed during the initial interviews.

<center>**Evidence of Trustworthiness**</center>

Establishing credibility occurred by adhering to detailed, thorough procedures for data collection and data analysis. Reviewing participant interviews and coding individually enabled me to gain an understanding of the participants' experiences. After careful review of the interviews individually and then collectively, I identified themes, which reflected the perceptions, definitions, and experiences of the participants regarding paternal involvement. In order to verify findings of a qualitative study, at least two of the following eight strategies should be employed: prolonged engagement and persistent observation in the field, triangulation, peer review or debriefing, negative case analysis, identifying researcher bias, member checking, thick, rich detailed descriptions, and external audits (Creswell, 2007). To verify the findings of this study and establish rigor and trustworthiness, I utilized detailed descriptions, member checking, and audit trails.

Detailed Descriptions

Thick, rich, detailed descriptions of the participant's experiences added insight into the phenomenon under study. Utilizing this strategy for the data gathered allowed for a close, intimate look at fatherhood through the eyes of the participants. What I

sought for analysis was "as complete a description as possible of the experience that a participant has lived through" (Englander, 2012, p. 27). This developing strategy was through use of excerpts from participant interviews in the study, where relevant and appropriate. Allowing the reader to see the participant's responses in their own words, language, and descriptions added weight to their experiences and the study.

Member Checking

Member checking was an effective strategy to ensure the experiences of the participants were captured accurately and definitively. This process allowed participants to judge the accuracy and credibility of the study by providing them with the data, analyses, interpretations, and conclusions (Creswell, 2007). The participant's input was sought on the clarity of the descriptions, themes, and experiences. Involving participants in the data analysis "allows for sharing and dialoging with participants about the study's findings, and providing opportunities for questions, critique, feedback, affirmation, and even collaboration" (Tracy, 2010, p. 844). Gaining their feedback benefitted the integrity of the study and the authenticity of the fatherhood experiences. All of the participants, with the exception of the one discrepant case, reported that the interview summary and identified themes provided an accurate interpretation of their interviews.

Audit Trails

To further establish trustworthiness and ensure transparency of the data, I used audit trails in this study. Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007) explained audit trails involved "the researcher maintaining extensive documentation of records and data stemming from the study" (p. 240). Documentation of interviews and participant responses, as well as

my notes, related to the interviews were part of the data base and maintained and reviewed in order to add clarity to the data analysis process. An audit trail allowed for the review of my analytical processes and methodological decisions related to the findings and conclusions of the data. By maintaining documentation, I provided a detailed explanation of how I moved from the raw data to final interpretation of the data.

Ethical Protection of Participants

In order to ensure this study adhered to ethical standards and practices, I obtained approval from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to conducting the study. The IRB application was approved on October 5, 2015. The approval number for this study is 10-05-15-026710.

Participants, who voluntarily chose to participate in the study, completed a consent form outlining study details, use of the information, and how I would protect their confidentiality. I ensured participants were aware of their right to refuse to participate in the study and the right to terminate their involvement at any time. I secured the audiotapes, files, and transcripts in a locked file cabinet in my home office. I was the only person with access to this data. I removed all identifying information from transcripts, further ensuring confidentiality. I assured participants that I would protect their identity/information to any legal/court officials (i.e., Friend of the Court, Child Protective Services, and the mothers of the child (ren)). I would not release any of this privileged information.

I clearly explained to the participants that their participation in the study had no affect, positively or negatively, on any legal issues they may be facing as a result of not

being involved in their child(ren)'s life (i.e., child support, parenting court orders, decisions made by Child Protective Services, etc.). Participating in this study was not likely to pose harm to the participants. However, in the event that a participant reported harm or difficulty as a result of participating in this study, appropriate referrals were made to local counseling agencies to provide support to the participants.

Summary

Through the lens of collective case study, I employed a reflexive and interpretive approach to understanding the lived experiences of African American fathers. A sample of 10 African American men, ages 22-25, were the source to obtain data related to their experiences of fatherhood and how those experiences influenced their involvement with their children. I explained the informed consent procedures in great detail to ensure the participants were aware of their rights, protected from harm. Confidentiality was to be maintained throughout the entirety of the study. Data collection occurred through in-depth, semi structured interviews.

The grand tour question directing this study was how do African American men between the ages of 22-25 experience and perceive fatherhood. In keeping with qualitative methods, I coded the data to identify themes. To ensure credibility and trustworthiness of the study, detailed descriptions, and member checking were part of the data analysis plan. This chapter explained the data collection and data analysis procedures used to conduct this study. Chapter 4 details the themes and findings from the participant interviews.

Chapter 4: Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the lived experiences of young African American fathers and of how those experiences shaped their involvement with their own children. I used a collective case study approach to explore those lived experiences and answer the following research question: How do African American men between the ages of 22 and 25 experience and perceive fatherhood?

In this chapter I present the findings of this collective case study for which I used identity theory and ecological systems theory as the guiding conceptual frameworks. I discuss the participant characteristics, offer detailed descriptions of the participants, and identify the themes I derived from their experiences. I also discuss the process of using member checking and audit trails during data analysis.

Pilot Study

Two fathers participated in a pilot study to determine the effectiveness of the interview questions and process. The pilot study participants followed the same protocol as the main study participants. They contacted me to inquire about participating and completed the screening to ensure eligibility. Once I deemed them eligible, I scheduled and conducted the interviews by asking the same questions I planned to use for the main study. The pilot study did not affect or change the process for the main study. It served as an appropriate test of the interview guide, with the participants demonstrating understanding of the purpose of the study and the ability to answer the questions without pause.

Setting

The setting for this study was a storefront barbershop located on the west side of

Detroit, Michigan. In the front of the barbershop are windows looking out onto the street.

Customers gain entry to the shop when the owner buzzes patrons into the door. Five

barber stations are located along the right wall of the shop, and chairs are lined along the

left side of the wall for waiting patrons. In the rear of the barbershop is the office where I

held interviews with the participants. The office included a table against the wall, and two

chairs under the table.

Participants Using Pseudonyms

Leo

Leo is a 25-year-old father with a 2-week-old daughter. He resides with his

daughter's mother and reported that they have a great relationship. Leo described his

father as his best friend. He indicated that while growing up, his father was present in his

life and described him as a strict disciplinarian, and a hard-working and loving man. His

father instilled in him the importance of family and of being responsible. He

acknowledged the role his grandfather and other male family members had on his life and

the man he is now.

Nate

Nate, age 23, reported that never knowing his father affected the role he played in

his 6-year-old daughter's life. His father was killed in a drive-by shooting at the age of

19, two weeks before his 20th birthday. Nate was 6 months old when his father died.

Although he and his daughter's mother were not together, Nate held her in high regard

stating, "How can I be mad at a woman, and she gave me the best thing that could possibly happen to me." He saw his daughter every weekend. While his father was not present, his grandfather and his mother's boyfriend, Mister, were positive male role models for him.

David

Twenty-five year old David lived with his girlfriend, who was pregnant, and her seven-year-old son, to whom David referred as his stepson. His father was not an active person in his life. His father moved out of the family home when he was four years old, and David reported that he had no memory of him prior to him moving out. While his father was not there for him as a child, David reported that he did not have a bad relationship with his father now, and that he could call him and talk to him. His father's current role in his life was that of a friend.

John

John described a rough childhood in which his mother abused him and his pleas to his father for help were ignored. At 24 years of age, John had a 3-month-old daughter and resided with her and her mother. John recently relocated to Michigan from North Carolina. His childhood experiences were motivating factors in him being an active and involved father. With regard to his daughter, John expressed that "I really love her, I genuinely care about her." He does not want his daughter to experience life without a father like he did. He had somewhat of a relationship with his father now and was trying to work towards forgiving him.

Henry

Henry was a 25-year-old with two daughters, aged 4 and 2. His father was an active and positive figure in his life. His father was "always there" and as a result, he wanted to make sure his daughters had the same positive childhood he did. He and his daughter's mother had a cordial, co-parenting relationship only. They kept their focus on the children and worked together for their sake. He saw his daughters often, regardless of the fact that they did not live together.

William

At 24 years of age, William lived with his three sons, aged 5, 2, and 10 months, and their mother. William grew up with both his parents and described his father as a very wise man. He attributed the example his father set and the lessons he taught him about "being a man, respecting women, taking care of himself, and being strong and independent," as his motivation to be a good father. He could not imagine not being there for his sons and helping to shape and mold them as his father did for him.

Paul

Having his father in his life to set an example was one reason Paul, age 25, credited to his drive to be involved with his 6-year-old daughter. Paul lived in Louisiana with his mother until he was 12 years old and then moved to Michigan with his father. He did not understand many of the things his father did when he was a child. However, now that he is a parent himself, he understood his father much more. His daughter resided in Louisiana with her mother, with whom Paul indicated he had a pretty good co-parenting relationship. Paul saw his daughter five to six times per year.

Tim

Tim, age 25, stated that both parents raised him. His father was a strict disciplinarian when he was a kid. However, his father was more lenient with his granddaughter. Tim had a 4 year old, who resided with her mother. He had a cordial relationship with his daughter's mother. Looking back at his childhood and his own role as a father, Tim sought to find a balance between the strict parent his father was and his efforts to maintain appropriate boundaries with his daughter.

Frank

Frank, age 25, had a 3-year-old daughter. He lived with her mother. Due to issues of substance abuse and domestic violence, Frank did not have his father consistently in his life while growing up. Being a teacher and not having a father in his life, Frank saw the importance of having a stable household for a child, and reported being motivated to make sure that his household was stable. He also reported that if it was not stable, then it was important to know how to make it stable, or how to take proper steps in having a split that is not devastating for the children. Frank noted that he saw his father making an effort to be better and be different with his grandchildren than he had been when his children were young. Frank appreciated the effort, but he did not easily depend on his father or seek him out when he needs help.

Carl

Carl, age 25, had 6-year-old twins, a boy and a girl. He desired to play an active role in his children's lives because, as he noted, "When I grew up, my father wasn't around, so I didn't want them growing up the same way I did." His father knew about

him; however, he just was not around. Carl did not have a relationship at all with his father growing up, but now they speak occasionally. For the past nine years, Carl's father has lived in Las Vegas, so their contact is limited to the telephone. His father did not have a relationship with his grandchildren.

<div align="center">**Demographics**</div>

My initial research plan for this study indicated that the age range for study participants would be 18-22 years old. Numerous potential participants, approximately 12, called to inquire about participating in the study; however, they were older than the required age. As a result, I made a request to the IRB to extend the age range to 22-25 with the expectation of increased potential participation. The request was approved by the IRB on December 28, 2015.

Ten men participated in in-depth interviews recounting their experiences of being fathered and how those experiences impacted their current role as a father. Tables 1 and 2 show the participants' demographic characteristics. All participants identified as African American and ranged in age from 22-25. The participants reported having between one and three children. Half of the men lived with their children and their childrens' mothers, and the other half were nonresident fathers, but reported seeing their children at least weekly. The exception was one father whose child resided out of state, and he reported seeing her at least six times per year.

The majority of the men reported having positive and fulfilling relationships with their fathers. One man, Nate, reported that his father was murdered when he was 6 months old. However, he had a positive relationship with his mother's significant other

during his formative years. His mother's boyfriend was a positive role model in his life

from elementary school until his freshman year in high school. "Mister," as he called

him, stressed the importance of Nate getting his education and staying focused in school.

Nate reported he was happy that Mister was around when he was young as those "years

that was that foundation, you know put some stability in me."

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Name	Age	No. of children	Living Arrangements with Child
Henry	25	2	Nonresident
Carl	25	2	Nonresident
David	25	1	Resident
Leo	25	1	Resident
Tim	25	1	Nonresident
Frank	25	1	Resident
Paul	25	1	Nonresident
John	24	1	Resident
William	24	3	Resident
Nate	23	1	Nonresident

Table 2

Paternal Involvement in the Life of the Participant

Name	Father Participating During Childhood	Father/Son Close Relationship During Childhood
Henry	Yes	Yes
Carl	No	No
David	No	No
Leo	Yes	Yes
Tim	Yes	Yes
Frank	No	No
Paul	Yes	Yes
John	No	No
William	Yes	Yes
Nate	No	No

| Protector
Influential
Teacher
Provider
Role Model
Foundation | → | Presence |

| Stability
Break the cycle
Provide guidance
Set good examples
Baby daddy v.
father | → | Responsibility |

| Be there 24/7, 365
I'm going to be
there.
My child is
important.
Whatever she needs | → | Priority |

| I'm going to be
different.
He's trying.
It's a better
relationship.
We talk more now. | → | Acceptance |

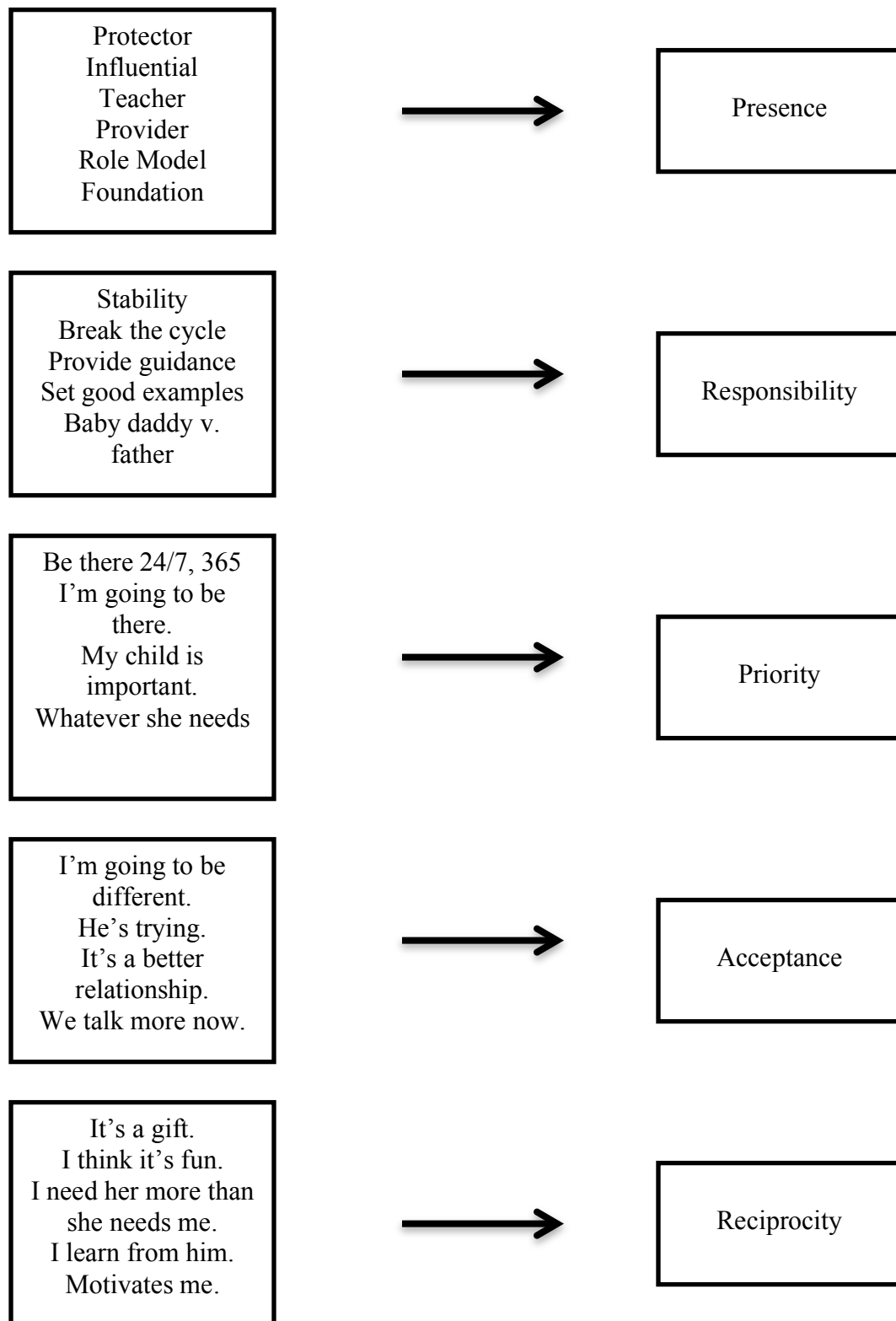| It's a gift.
I think it's fun.
I need her more than
she needs me.
I learn from him.
Motivates me. | → | Reciprocity |

Figure 2. **Theme identification.**

Thematic Outcomes

Presence

The first resounding theme from all of the participants was the expression of the importance of being present in their children's lives. When asked to define and describe a father's role, participants used terms such as "protector," "influential," "role model," "teacher," "present," and "active." In each of their responses, they identified their role as important and the importance of being present regardless of their circumstances, such as work obligations and the relationship with the mother. Tim and Paul expressed their role as providing guidance and being a role model to teach their children right from wrong. Nate indicated, "You really got to be like the foundation…I feel like I'm my daughter's backbone." Henry identified his role stating that a father's role is to protect, teach, and make sure they feel safe and comfortable, make sure they always have someone they can go to. A father is supposed to be someone they can always go to for anything, even when they get mad.

Participants placed a great deal of emphasis on being present, not just to provide financially, but as Carl stated, in all aspects of their child's life. John, who has a 3-month-old daughter, explained his role as her father is to:

Always be there, always provide for the child to make sure that, you know, she is ok, you know with any needs necessary, whether it's medical, physical, you know to make sure she is ok in all aspects of life. So I would say the whole role is well to make sure she's ok in general, all aspects of life make sure she's ok. Just be

there 24/7…so I would say the role is very important. You should just be there. At least that's how I feel about what I'm doing now.

Fathers expressed the different roles they employed depending on the sex of their child. Nate stated that as a father, he needed to be his daughter's first love and let her know that she will never need a man for anything as long as he is around. Frank, who has a 3-year-old daughter, stated:

It's important to see that my daughter sees a good example of a man and how men should treat women by the way I treat her and her mother…give her inside scoops about the world and a male perspective on things she wouldn't be able to get from her mother or females around her.

William has three sons and expressed the importance of his role "especially because I have boys. Showing them how to be independent, take care of themselves, and treat other people." Each participant expressed the importance of their role and the importance of being present in all aspects of their children's lives.

Responsibility

Responsibility was the second theme to originate from the data. As one of the reasons they were active fathers, participants identified demonstrating responsibility, as a man was critical. They extolled the importance of their role as having a positive and lasting impact on their children's wellbeing. John indicated that if "You are bold enough to have the child, be man enough to take care of the child." Paul mirrored those sentiments stating the importance of being present in his child's life and not being "just a donor."

Leo expressed that one of the reasons he accepted his responsibility, as a father was due to the example his father set for him. Henry and Tim also expressed that assuming their responsibility as a father was a result of their upbringing, in part due to having both their parents in their lives growing up, and the positive role their father played in their lives. Frank discussed the importance of responsibility, but from a different vantage point by saying no question that he would be an active and engaged father. He had seen the effects of a father not being around, as a result of his own childhood and the lives of his students who did not have involved fathers. William also indicated that his involvement was immediate and innate. He stated:

> I just couldn't go on living my life knowing that I brought someone into this world, and I'm not taking care of them or making sure they are safe or they have everything they need or that they are protected from the wilds of the world. You know it just doesn't sit right with me not to be there.

Regardless of their circumstances at the time they became a father, the participants expressed the need to take action to ensure that they would be in a position to care for their child. Nate stated:

> My daughter is a blessing and that is the honest God truth. She is a blessing and I'm not even going to sit here and lie to you, yeah when I had my daughter I was ready to be a daddy. I'd be lying to you. I was 19 years old and really just graduated from high school. I'm trying to find my way. Didn't go to college, but I knew I needed to do something now and that was get a job.

Participants who did not have a relationship with their own fathers expressed the notion of being responsible, so that their children would not experience what they did growing up. David expressed wanting to do a better job of being a father than his father: "My son will never say about me what I'm saying about him."

Fatherhood as a Priority

All participants expressed an understanding of the impact their presence had in the lives of their children, which was the third theme gleaned from the interviews. Each participant discussed how their role as a father took priority over everything else in their lives. Most participants were employed, some working two jobs to ensure they were financially able to provide for their children. Despite their other roles and responsibilities, the participants stated that nothing came before their role as a father. John expressed: "I want to be there for her 24/7, 365, any hours of the night. Even when I got to work, I just stay up with her." As a new father, Leo expressed that he took his role as a father seriously and wanted to make sure his daughter knew him from the start:

> I definitely want my daughter to know who I am. I don't want my girl doing all
> the work, so I do a lot. I try to do a lot of things with her, even within these two
> weeks, change her diaper myself, try to feed her, hold her, interact with her.

When asked what they would share with other fathers to promote involvement, they expressed similar sentiments regarding the significance of their role. Participants drew on their experiences, both positive and negative, to inform their advice. Frank stated, "just be there for them you know, even if you cannot afford child support or other things the mother needs, you can still be there." Henry shared those sentiments, "I say

spend as much time as possible with them. You're going to regret it in the future if you don't. Spend as much time as possible. No matter what the situation is." Paul and Carl both expressed concerns related to long-term consequences of fathers not being involved in their children's lives by stating that not being involved affected how children grew up and become adults. John stated:

> At the end of the day, it's not about you It's about the baby; it's about the wellbeing of the child. Like what you should be thinking about is what to do next. You and the momma fall out. It's not about y'all anymore. If y'all fall out, just work on taking care of the baby…. Black males is a definition of strength, knowledge, somebody who is holding something down. If you a Black male, an African American male, a man like you say you are, then you should be, you know, let's all stand up and be men and take care of our children, whether you buy one pack of wipes or two packs, you doing something. You haven't been doing something, well at least let's start small, let's just grow. You know nobody's perfect, but you can slowly ease your way in there, knowing that your daughter know you exist…So I just feel like if you're going to be involved, let's just start being involved. If you can't just jump right into it, at least ease your way into it.

Tim advised "being involved is major, it's a big responsibility, but it's a major part of your child's life. Not being there, that's kind of hard for them, so it's not even about you." Nate discussed his role and his appreciation for his foundation:

I'm trying to make a difference. You know, I kick it with the dudes, like 'man you got to be in your kids life because they the next generation.' That's why a lot of kids misguided. A lot of foolishness. That's why you see a lot of crazy stuff on the news. I'm just happy Mister was there for me, even for a minute when I was in high school. He told me to focus on them books before girls. Them years, that was that foundation, you know, put some stability in me.

Acceptance

The fourth theme identified was acceptance of the state of the participants' relationships with their own fathers. Participants whose fathers were actively involved in their lives as children expressed the importance of the relationship, as well as the strength and growth of their relationships with the fathers. Paul expressed a new level of understanding about his father now that he is a parent. "When I was a kid, you know, when I was disciplined, I didn't understand why he was doing it, but now that I am older, I understand a lot more being a parent."

Many participants indicated the role their father currently played in their lives was that of friend and confidant. Leo indicated that his father was one of his best friends and that he talks to him about almost everything. Henry shared those sentiments. As a child his father played the father role, "but now he like my homeboy. We hang out together, drink, he still look out, I look out for him too."

The participants whose fathers were absent from their lives discussed feelings of acceptance related to their childhood experiences. Carl and his father acknowledge each other, but he did not look to him to fulfill that role in his life anymore. He and his father

did not speak often, "but he's there." David shared those sentiments and indicated that he and his father called each other "every now and then, like hey, what's up man, you alright?" and that was fine with him.

Not having their fathers as active people in their lives served as a motivating factor for some participants to assume an active role in their children's lives. John indicated that because of his experiences with his father, he understands the importance of his role.

I would never want any child to go through what I did…I just feel like the word father is a very powerful word. I feel like father is different than daddy or baby daddy. Like when you say somebody's a father that means they are taking care of the child. You know they there…I feel like the word father is a distinct word that means hey I'm here taking care of my baby, I'm paying for everything…whatever she needs I'm here for her, I'm a father, I'm not just a daddy or a baby daddy. So I feel like that's what really motivated me to you know, whenever I had a child I wouldn't want her to go through what I went through, so I'm going to be a father to my child.

Nate explained that he saw his role as the foundation for his daughter because his father was murdered when he was 6 months. Nate stated his father was only 18, 19, when he was killed, right before his 20th birthday, which was significant to the time his daughter was born:

I had my daughter when I was 19 so I told myself that I was going to be something I never had. You know, I didn't have no handout or books on how to

be a daddy or even have one to show me how to be one. You know it's just my natural instinct to be there for my daughter because she didn't ask to be here.

Some participants expressed that their fathers were now more active in their role of grandfather. The grandfathers were making an attempt to be present and involved. Tim reported that his father was the disciplinarian when he was a child, but now that his is a grandfather, he is much more lenient. While the participants reported that the effort at times lacked consistency, they appreciated the effort being put forth with their children. Frank reported:

So I see him now trying to play a more active role with his grandkids. He has three total grandkids. I've noticed it. I appreciate it and I don't leave him out of things, but at the same time, I don't, you know, if I needed something, he wouldn't be the first person I call because I know getting things from him comes at a cost, hearing his mouth and having his expectations with the things that he provides.

Reciprocal Relationship

The final theme identified was the reciprocal relationship between the participants and their children. While participants expressed the importance of their roles with their children, they also discussed the important role their children played in their lives. The participants saw how their lives changed since becoming fathers and how their children motivated them. Nate reported that even though his daughter was only six years old, he wondered, "does she know I need her more than she needs me. That's what makes me go harder and grind [work] everyday." William stated being a father:

It's a gift, and I think it's one of the greatest gifts of living life, watching someone grow by your own hand. Seeing someone who relies on you every single day and being there for them. My children, they motivate me to get up everyday even when I don't want to and they help me to become a better person all around because without them I could be more lazy or more selfish, you know, they teach me a lot, just being them…Stepping up and being a father teaches you a lot. It shows you a lot of things you couldn't learn just being you, being a solo individual. It's a gift and a lesson.

Tim understood the role he played in his daughter's life and vice versa. However, he was learning and constantly working at being a good father. He aimed to find a balance between his own identity as a father and learning from the example, however good or bad, from his father with him. His father was strict and Tim worked to find a happy medium between setting guidelines and boundaries, and not being a strict disciplinarian as was his father.

Frank believed that he found that balance as he thinks his daughter sees him as "an authoritative figure and a loving figure, because you know, she'll run to me and miss me when I'm not there. At the same time, if something happens, I'm usually the one that has to do whatever punishment it is for a three year old." He worked hard, even at her young age, to make sure his daughter did not think of him the way he thinks of his father.

Each participant expressed that their role as a father and their relationship with their children was a source of joy and contentment for them. Henry expressed that he will do what he has to in order to make his kids happy. Leo reported that even though his

daughter was just a baby, he enjoyed interacting with her, holding her even when she cried, and playing with her. John always wanted his daughter to know who he is and that he loves her and genuinely cares for her. David saw a difference now between being a parent compared to the time when he grew up. Being a father "it's fun for one." He stated that being a father does not mean that your life is over, "you actually learn stuff from them as well…I learn from him and I stay young. It's fun. It's everyday learning. It ain't bad, it's cool." This speaks to the sentiments of the participants who referred to their role and responsibilities as a father with a sense of pride.

Summary

African American fathers shared their experiences of being fathered and being a father. While half of the participants expressed positive experiences with their own fathers, the other half shared their feelings regarding their fathers not being present. Regardless of their experiences of being fathered, all of the participants looked upon their role as a father with pride, a sense of responsibility, and an understanding of their impact on their children's lives. The participants also expressed appreciation for the important role that their children play in their lives. As evidenced by the themes identified, the participants acknowledged the importance of their role and being present for their children both physically and emotionally. Chapter 5 will provide a discussion of the findings as well as recommendations for future research and implications for social change.

Chapter Five: Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the lived experiences of 22-25 year old African American fathers, and of how those experiences shaped their involvement with their own children. Understanding the perceptions of this population was important because researchers have demonstrated that a significant number of African American children (80%) will spend at least half of their lives without their fathers (Perry, 2009). The consequences for these children include high rates of teenage pregnancy, poverty, mental health issues, and involvement with the juvenile justice system (Zhang & Fuller, 2012). My intention in this study was to understand how their experiences with their biological fathers or father figures affected (a) their perceptions of what it means to be a father, and (b) their involvement with their children. Participants described and defined a father's role and how they fulfilled that role. They also described the role their fathers played in their lives. Their descriptions and my findings will inform human service practitioners' work with fathers and their involvement with their children.

I used a collective case study design to uncover participant experiences in their natural context. Case study methodology has a focus on investigating a "contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (David, 2007, p. 300). The interviews provided an opportunity for participants to reflect on and share their experiences. I used an eight-step data analysis plan to explore the experiences and identify common themes.

The findings of the study showed that paternal involvement was directly related to or affected by being fathered. The participant's experiences or lack of experiences with their fathers did not affect their desire or ability to be an active and involved father with their own children. The participants expressed specific ideas of what being a father meant to them, the importance of the role, and how they enacted it. The participants understood the impact of their role on their children. Drawing on their own experiences, both positive and negative, the participant expressions of fatherhood showed an unwavering level of commitment to their role and their children.

Interpretation of the Findings

The issue of paternal involvement has been the focus of study as it relates to race, age, and extended family. Researchers have generally addressed questions of paternal involvement from the vantage point of mothers and Caucasian fathers (Hernandez & Cooley, 2007; Julion et al., 2007; Robbers, 2009), but some have called for the inclusion of African American fathers and their narratives into empirical research regarding father involvement (Hammond et al., 2011; Jordan-Zachary, 2009). Previous studies have included African American fathers; however, limited research has been dedicated solely to their perspectives and how those perspectives developed (Lawrence, Watson, & Stepeau-Watson, 2013). My intent in this study was to fill the gap in the research regarding African American fathers and how their perceptions and experiences of fatherhood influenced their involvement with their children.

I designed the research question for this study to focus on the experiences of fatherhood among 22-25 year old African American fathers. The themes I identified

from the interviews with the participants included: presence, responsibility, fatherhood as a priority, acceptance, and reciprocal relationships. These themes mirror the definition of father involvement, as provided by Pleck (2010), which included positive engagement activities, warmth and responsiveness, and control. The participants expressed their perception of fatherly involvement encompassing presence in their child's life in all areas. They explained their role as being important in providing guidance to show their children right from wrong and making sure the child is cared for physically, spiritually, financially, medically, and emotionally. For example, John expressed the significance of his role by defining what "father" means to him. "I just feel like the word *father* is a very powerful word. Like when you say somebody's a father, that means they there taking care of the child…the word father is a very distinct word…whatever she needs, I'm here for her, I'm a father."

The roles described by the participants falls in line with what Pleck (2010) termed as "process responsibility." Its definition is the combination of all aspects of fatherly involvement as it incorporates the father taking an active role in interacting with his children, but also being proactive in ensuring their needs are met. The participants discussed the importance of being employed in order to meet their child's concrete needs, but equally as important, being present and engaged in order to meet their emotional needs.

With regard to their experiences of fatherhood as African American men, participants expressed that African American males know that everything they do is watched and monitored, and being a father is no different. The participants

acknowledged the stereotypes of African American fathers, yet they reported that they knew they were doing right by their children. Participants whose fathers were active in their lives reported following in the footsteps of the strong role models they had growing up. The participants, particularly those whose fathers were not active in their lives, discussed the importance of breaking negative stereotypes and the cycle of absentee fathers. When asked how being African American has affected their roles as a father, the participants expressed their desire not to perpetuate the cycle of making babies, but not taking care of them. For example, John expressed, "As Black males you know it's a statistic out here that we don't take care of our babies. We always in jail, we get women pregnant and then leave them. You know what I'm saying, I want to be different." Instead of just talking about being different, he is living the difference by maintaining a job, taking care of his daughter, as well as her mother. It was not always easy, he noted, but it was definitely worth it.

Bioecical Model

The purpose of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model is to examine the dynamic, multi-dimensional levels of development, emphasizing the importance of person-context interrelatedness. The model has four elements: (a) person (the participant); (b) process (interactions between participant and his environment); (c) context (messages received from the micro-, meso- exo-, and macrosystems); and (d) time (chronological age and family's developmental stage). This bioecological model provided me a framework for understanding fatherly involvement from the viewpoint of the participants. The

contextual element provided the most information related to the participants and their perceptions of father involvement.

In addition to the nested systems, context includes messages received as a result of being fathered, as well as messages received by others. Half of the participants shared positive experiences of being fathered (i.e., their relationship growing up with their biological father or father figure), while the other half expressed having either no relationship with their biological father or an inconsistent, conflictual relationship. Participants who reported that their fathers were present expressed affirmative messages and interactions associated with their fathers. These interactions served as a motivator and positive reinforcement for being present and active with their own children.

Participants who reported negative relationships with their fathers also cited their relationships with their fathers as a catalyst for their involvement with their children, however, for different reasons. They indicated that growing up with the pain and disappointment of their fathers not being present in their lives motivated them to ensure their children do not have the same experiences. David expressed that his son would never describe his experiences with him as David described his experiences with his father. This finding mirrored the sentiments of participants in the Lemay et al. (2010) study in which fathers discussed issues of abandonment, as well as physical and emotional abuse by their biological fathers. Those issues were motivation for them to raise their children differently than they were raised.

Identity Theory

Identity theory offers a framework for exploring the impact of internal factors related to participant levels of involvement with their children. This theory holds that a father's perceptions of his role as father originate from interactions within his social environment, and that those perceptions guide the extent of his involvement (Habib, 2012; Zhang & Fuller, 2012). The constructs of identity theory, which include salience, centrality, and commitment, were evident in the experiences the participants shared. Salience indicates the probability a man will exhibit fathering behaviors, while centrality refers to the importance he places on his role as father. All participants, regardless of their experiences with their own fathers, were high as it relates to these two constructs.

In looking at probability, it would seem unlikely that the participants who did not have fathers in their lives growing up would be active fathers themselves. However, given the participants' own experiences, they wanted to ensure their children's experiences were different. With regard to centrality, all of the participants placed high importance on their role and its impact on their children.

High importance was also evident in the participant level of commitment, which indicates relationships the father would lose by abandoning his role as father. Extensiveness, a component of commitment that denotes the relationships supporting the identity and intensiveness as well as the importance of those relationships, was significant for the participants. They all expressed that the mother of their children supported them in their roles as father.

Half of the fathers resided with the mother of their children. The other half indicated they were not romantically involved with their children's mothers. Yet they maintained positive, co-parenting relationships with them. Nate reported he and his daughter's mother ended their relationship when their daughter was six months old. However, that ending did not deter him from remaining present in his daughter's life. He reported a positive relationship, noting, "How can I be mad at a woman, and she gave me the best thing that could possibly happen to me." Although the participants reported high levels of support, they placed the greatest significance and feeling of accomplishment from the relationship with their children.

With regard to race and identity as a father, the majority of the sample acknowledged society's perceptions of African American fathers as the media portrays them. However, race appeared to be a more prevalent factor for participants whose fathers were absent in their lives. These participants discussed their efforts and desire not to fall into the category of the stereotypical Black father who does not stay around to take care of his children. These participants felt it important not to follow their own father's example, but to break the cycle of the absent father. As with involvement, these participants wanted their children to have different experiences than they had growing up and, hoped that those experiences would carry on into the next generation.

Discrepant Cases

The participant, Henry, was a discrepant case due to his untimely death approximately one week after his initial interview. It was not possible to conduct member checking with him to review his interview responses.

Limitations of the Study

Relying solely on self-reports from the participants was the greatest limitation of the study. In order to cast themselves in a positive light, participants could have embellished their responses regarding their level of involvement. Protecting against this limitation involved taking care during the screening interview and in reviewing the consent form, the purpose of the study, confidentiality practices, the need for accurate feedback, and the use of the findings. Providing participants with the purpose of the study, confidentiality measures, and use of its results promoted them to be clear and forthright in presenting their perspectives. Member checking also occurred, allowing participants to review the information they provided for clarity and corroboration of their perspectives.

Recommendations

Future research regarding paternal involvement with their children can build on these findings, as well as findings from previous studies. In order to gain more in-depth information, an alternative methodology could be useful, for example a case study with 1-2 participants. A single case study instead of a collective case study could follow a father over a specified amount of time and could include field observations of him and his child, his father, and possibly his child's mother. Using a single case study approach would paint a dynamic and comprehensive picture of the father's involvement and give life to his own words and descriptions.

Conducting more than one interview with the participants is a recommendation for future studies regarding fatherly involvement. Seidman (2013) recommended a series

of three separate interviews with each participant. He posited that the three interviews allowed both the researcher and the participant to "explore the participant's experiences, place it in context, and reflect on its meaning" (Seidman, 2013, p. 20). The first interview was to obtain a focused life history. The second interview gathers the details of the experience, and the third interview involves asking the participant to reflect on the meaning of their experience. Conducting a series of interviews would yield more extensive data about the father's history and his own reflections of his experiences.

Using a single case study approach or conducting more than one interview in future studies could aid in generating a more in depth discussion with the participants. The responses by the participants in this study were brief. While they answered the interview questions and provided feedback relevant to the study, developing more rapport with the participants could have yield more detailed answers and information than a one time first meeting interview.

Replication of this study involving the participants' fathers to explore their experiences and perceptions of fatherhood would be important to explore the impact of generational fathering. The participants whose fathers were not involved discussed their experiences growing up and how they wanted different experiences for their own children. Conducting a study that revisited fatherhood with participants in this current study and their fathers could uncover factors that led to the participants' fathers not being involved. It could also help to identify what changes occurred that led to the participants' fathers seeking to engage in a relationship with the participants later in life.

Implications

Positive Social Change

The results of this study demonstrate the perseverance, dedication, and motivation of young African American fathers. Despite, or in light of, their own experiences with their fathers, they exhibited a desire to ensure positive experiences for their children. This information can have positive implications in the practice of working on their involvement. This study provides a glimpse of the perceptions and experiences related to father involvement for a small number of participants. The need for continued exploration of father involvement among young African American fathers is necessary in order for the development of comprehensive, research based programs to occur. Programs dedicated to engaging African American fathers in the lives of their children, such as father support groups and fatherhood parenting programs, are nearly nonexistent in the city where this study took place.

The development of programs dedicated to increasing paternal involvement would provide support for and benefit both fathers and their children. The participants in this study expressed understanding of their importance in their children's lives with regard to their own wellbeing, as well as meeting the child's immediate emotional and psychological needs. Father- oriented support groups and parenting programs could provide education on the long-term benefits of involvement such as decreased risk of involvement in juvenile justice and foster care systems, higher rate of academic achievement and school attendance, decreased rates of teenage pregnancy and poverty,

and increases a child's overall wellbeing (Stykes, 2015; Zhang & Fuller, 2010; Perry, 2009). These programs could provide encouragement and prolonged involvement.

One of the interview questions was what they would say to a group of fathers not actively involved with their children. The participants indicated they would encourage the fathers to think about their children and the impact of not having a father in their lives. For human service practitioners working with young fathers, it would be beneficial to include fathers who are actively involved with their children to work with and mentor uninvolved fathers to encourage their participation. As one participant indicated, he had no idea how to be a father. However, he knew it was important for his daughter to be there for her. Engaged fathers could provide invaluable support to new fathers or ambivalent fathers in their efforts by sharing their experiences. Hearing the first hand experiences of fathers who are involved with their children would carry more weight and provide more insight than information provided by human service practitioners (Carlson, Edleson, & Kimball, 2014).

Conclusion

Fatherly involvement has been the focus of many studies from different viewpoints, most commonly those of mothers and Caucasian fathers. Researchers have called for the inclusion of African American fathers, given their needs and issues are quite different than those of mothers and the dominant culture. This study gave a voice to young African American fathers and their perceptions and experiences of what it means to be a father. Of particular interest was that the fathers did not equate being a father with providing financial support, but placed significant emphasis on meeting the

emotional and psychological needs of their children. Most important was the idea of spending time with their children to provide love, support, and guidance. The fathers acknowledged the value and importance of their role in their children's lives. The experiences shared in this study by the participants extolled the joy, respect, adoration, and love for their children and their role as father.

While the findings of this study are not generalizable to the greater population, this study can serve as an indicator that young African American fathers have evolved past the idea that their role is merely that of the breadwinner, but more so a contributor to their child's physical and emotional wellbeing. Given that they understand their role, they demonstrate a willingness to share their knowledge and experiences with other fathers in order to benefit the lives of other children.

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Appendix A: Participant Recruitment Flyer

NOTICE TO AFRICAN AMERICAN FATHERS 18-22 YEARS OF AGE

Your participation is this doctoral research study is greatly appreciated.

➢ You will receive a $25.00 Visa Gift Card for your complete participation in an initial interview as well as a follow up interview.

➢ You will help to further understanding of what influences father's participation in the lives of their children.

➢ Your participation will help a doctoral student complete her dissertation.

Hello, my name is Irena Glover and I am a doctoral student at Walden University. I am conducting a study to understand how 18-22 year old African American men's perceptions and experiences impact their participation with their children. Participation will involve completing an interview that will occur over 60-90 minutes and a follow up interview to review your answers in the initial interview. If interested in participating in this study, please contact me by telephone at 313.288.8530 or email at irena.glover@waldenu.edu. Upon receivning a telephone call or email, we will discuss your suitability for the study. Interviews will be scheduled on a date and at a time that is convenient for you.

Participation Criteria:
➢ You must be an African American male between the ages of 18 and 22.
➢ You must be the father to at least one child.

For more information, please contact Irena Glover at XXX.XXX.XXXX or irena.glover@waldenu.edu.

Thank you

Appendix B: Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

You are invited to take part in a research study to understand how African American men's experiences and perceptions of fatherhood influence their participation in the lives of their children. The researcher is inviting 18-22 year old African American men who are fathers to be in the study. This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

A researcher named Irena Glover, who is a doctoral student at Walden University, is conducting this study.

Background Information:
The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the definitions and perceptions of fatherhood from African American fathers.

Procedures:
If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:
- Participate in an interview that is estimated to occur over 60-90 minutes.
- Review your answers to questions once all information has been compiled.

Here are some sample questions from the interview:
- Describe how you felt/reacted upon learning you were going to be a father.
- How would you describe a father's role in the lives of his children?
- When was the last time you saw your children and in what capacity?

Voluntary Nature of the Study:
This study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. No one will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:
Being in this type of study involves some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life; such as stress of becoming upset depending on the nature of your relationships with your children and/or other family members. Being in this study would not pose risk to your safety or wellbeing.

The benefits of participating in this study is that you will help to further the research and understanding of what influences father involvement among African American fathers. You will also have the opportunity to offer input on how to support fathers in their efforts to increase involvement.

Payment:
You will receive a $25 Visa Gift Card for full participation in the study. Full participation includes completion of the initial interview as well as completion of the follow up interview to review answers provided in the initial interview. The gift card will be provided at the end of the follow up interview.

Privacy:
Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. Data will be kept secure by the researcher in a locked file cabinet inside of a locked office to which only the researcher will have access. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

Contacts and Questions:
You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via telephone at XXX.XXX.XXXX or email address irena.glover@waldenu.edu. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is 612-312-1210. Walden University's approval number for this study is 10-05-15-026710 and it expires on 10-05-16.

The researcher will give you a copy of this form to keep.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By signing below, I understand that I am agreeing to the terms described above.

Printed Name of Participant

Date of consent   _____

Participant's Signature

Researcher's Signature   _____

_____

Appendix C: Interview Questions

Interview Questions

1. How would you define/describe a father's role in the lives of his children?

2. What has prevented you from or compelled you towards fulfilling that role with your child(ren)?

3. Describe the role your father played in your life when you were a child?

4. How does the role your father played during your childhood compare to the role he plays in your life now?

5. How do you think your father's role in your life impacted your role with your children?

6. What suggestions do you have for promoting involvement of fathers with their children?

Appendix D: Letter of Request

Letter of Request

Morae Cochran
Recreation Center Supervisor
Adam Butzel Recreation Complex
10500 Lyndon
Detroit, MI 48238

October 5, 2015

Dear Mr. Cochran,

Hello, my name is Irena Glover and I am a doctoral student at Walden University. I am conducting a research study to understand how 18-22 year old African American men's perceptions and experiences of fatherhood impacts their participation with their children. I am writing to request permission to recruit participants for my study from your facility. I have included the flyer I would like to post at your facility, which provides potential participants with information about the study and my contact information. In addition, I have included the Letter of Cooperation I would need you to sign indicating you give permission for me to post a flyer and recruit participants.

I would like to schedule a time within the next week to meet with you, if you would like additional information or have questions regarding this request and my study. I can be reached via telephone at XXX.XXX.XXXX or email at irena.glover@waldenu.edu.

Thank you for your time and I hope to hear from you soon.

Respectfully,

Irena J. Glover, LMSW

Letter of Request

Dennis Talbert
Chairman/CEO
Brightmoor Community Center
14451 Burt Rd.
Detroit, MI 48223

October 5, 2015

Dear Mr. Talbert,

Hello, my name is Irena Glover and I am a doctoral student at Walden University. I am conducting a research study to understand how 18-22 year old African American men's perceptions and experiences of fatherhood impacts their participation with their children. I am writing to request permission to recruit participants for my study from your facility. I have included the flyer I would like to post at your facility, which provides potential participants with information about the study and my contact information. In addition, I have included the Letter of Cooperation I would need you to sign indicating you give permission for me to post a flyer and recruit participants.

I would like to schedule a time within the next week to meet with you, if you would like additional information or have questions regarding this request and my study. I can be reached via telephone at XXX.XXX.XXXX or email at irena.glover@waldenu.edu.

Thank you for your time and I hope to hear from you soon.

Respectfully,

Irena J. Glover, LMSW

Letter of Request

Thomas Whitaker
Owner
Classic Effects Barber Shop
18456 W. McNichols Rd.
Detroit, MI 48219

October 5, 2015

Dear Mr. Whitaker,

Hello, my name is Irena Glover and I am a doctoral student at Walden University. I am conducting a research study to understand how 18-22 year old African American men's perceptions and experiences of fatherhood impacts their participation with their children. I am writing to request permission to recruit participants for my study from your facility. I have included the flyer I would like to post at your facility, which provides potential participants with information about the study and my contact information. In addition, I have included the Letter of Cooperation I would need you to sign indicating you give permission for me to post a flyer and recruit participants.

I would like to schedule a time within the next week to meet with you, if you would like additional information or have questions regarding this request and my study. I can be reached via telephone at XXX.XXX.XXXX or email at irena.glover@waldenu.edu.

Thank you for your time and I hope to hear from you soon.

Respectfully,

Irena J. Glover, LMSW

Letter of Request

Mr. Damon Bernard
Image Xpression LLC.
24740 Greenfield Rd.
Oak Park, MI 48237

October 5, 2015

Dear Mr. Bernard,

Hello, my name is Irena Glover and I am a doctoral student at Walden University. I am conducting a pilot research study to understand how 18-22 year old African American men's perceptions and experiences of fatherhood impacts their participation with their children. I am writing to request permission to recruit participants for my study from your facility. I have included the flyer I would like to post at your facility, which provides potential participants with information about the study and my contact information. In addition, I have included the Letter of Cooperation I would need you to sign indicating you give permission for me to post a flyer and recruit participants.

I would like to schedule a time within the next week to meet with you, if you would like additional information or have questions regarding this request and my study. I can be reached via telephone at XXX.XXX.XXXX or email at irena.glover@waldenu.edu.

Thank you for your time and I hope to hear from you soon.

Respectfully,

Irena J. Glover, LMSW

Appendix E

Letter of Cooperation

Damon Bernard
Image Xpressions, LLC.
24740 Greenfield Rd.
Oak Park, MI 48237

October 12, 2015

Dear Irena Glover,

Based on my review of your research proposal, I give permission for you to conduct the study entitled Through Their Eyes: Understanding Fatherhood as a Young African American Man within the Image Xpression Barber Shop. As part of this study, I authorize you to post flyers at the barber shop to recruit participants. Individuals' participation will be voluntary and at their own discretion. I reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time if our circumstances change.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research in this setting and that this plan complies with the organization's policies.

I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the student's supervising faculty/staff without permission from the Walden University IRB.

Sincerely,

Damon Bernard

Letter of Cooperation

Thomas Whitaker
Owner
Classic Effects Barber Shop
18456 W. McNichols Rd.
Detroit, MI 48219

October 12, 2015

Dear Irena Glover,

Based on my review of your research proposal, I give permission for you to conduct the study entitled Through Their Eyes: Understanding Fatherhood as a Young African American Man within the Classic Effects Barber Shop. As part of this study, I authorize you to post flyers at the shop to recruit participants. Individuals' participation will be voluntary and at their own discretion. We reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time if our circumstances change.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research in this setting and that this plan complies with the organization's policies.

I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the student's supervising faculty/staff without permission from the Walden University IRB.

Sincerely,

Thomas Whitaker

Appendix F

Screening Questionnaire

Thank you for contacting me about participating in my research study about African American men and their experiences of fatherhood.

May I ask, how did you learn about this study?

And you are calling to indicate that you would like to be a participant?

Before we continue, I need to make sure you are an appropriate participant for the research study. As it states on the flyer, this study will examine how African American men's experiences and perceptions of fatherhood influence their participation in the lives of their children. In order to be participate in this study, you must meet the following criteria:

> Are you an African American?
> Are you between the ages of 18 and 22? What is your age?
> Do you have at least one child?

You have (have not) met the criteria to participate in this study.

Do you have any questions or concerns about participating in this study?

At this point, would it be ok to schedule an interview with you?

Ok, so your interview is scheduled for _____ at _____am/pm. My office is located XXXX E. Canfield.

In preparation for the interview, I would like to send you a copy of the consent form to review. I can mail this to you or send it by email. Which would you prefer?

I will call you the day before our scheduled interview to confirm.

Before we end, are there any questions you have for me right now?

Thank you for your time and I look forward to meeting with you.