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Perceptions of Fatherhood Programs from the Experiences of Uninvolved Fathers

Rahsaan Roland Turpin
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Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Rahsaan R. Turpin

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Walden University
2019

Abstract

Perceptions of Fatherhood Programs from the Experiences of Uninvolved Fathers

by

Rahsaan R. Turpin

M.S.Ed., The George Washington University, 2007

B.S., The Lincoln University, 1999

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Human Services

Walden University

August 2019

Abstract

Past researchers have reported that father absence and low engagement affects 24 million children in the United States. African American fathers make up the largest group with low involvement. Fatherhood programs support men in their roles, yet little is known about why this group still exhibits low engagement. Using the family systems theory as a foundation, the purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of African American fathers who participated in fatherhood programs and their engagement after these programs. This study used purposeful sampling and semi-structured interviews to collect information from 9 African American men aged 18-45 from Philadelphia, PA who participated in fatherhood programs and self-identified as uninvolved. The research question focused on how the lived experiences of noncustodial African American fathers who participated in fatherhood programs influenced their involvement and engagement in their children's lives. Nine audio-recorded interviews were transcribed and coded for themes using a classification system based on key terms and repetitive words. Fathers while part of the family system were found to exhibit low accountability and blaming behavior, resulting in continued low involvement. Future research should include a quantitative or mixed methods study to consider distinct variables such as stated intent, actual behavior, blame, and personal accountability, and influence on involvement. This study contributes to positive social change by informing program modules with interventions for fathers by proposing a shift from lecture models to peer support models considering accountability, support, and the coparenting relationship.

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to every individual who paved the way for me to explore this area and also share the same passion I have to help forge a greater relationship between all fathers and their children. I also dedicate it to the daring men who helped contribute to my study by stepping beyond the boundaries of their comfort zone to share their stories with me.

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I could not start without first acknowledging my Heavenly Father for choosing me for such an assignment as this. I would like to thank Dr. Tracey Phillips for not only being my committee chair, but also being invested enough to challenge me to unbridle the researcher in me while talking me ‘off the ledge’ time and time again. You have no idea how much I needed it and how much your pushing means to me. To that, I say, ‘THANK YOU.’ Dr. Andrew Garland-Forshee, thank you for your sincere words of encouragement and confirming that writing is truly a part of my calling. To my wife and family, thank you for standing by me with your patience and sharing me with this process for such a long time. I am back!!! To my children who are my greatest inspiration to accomplish more and be more in life, I hope I have set the bar higher and set a new standard for you and our family for generations to come. Please do not be strangers to hard work in any capacity. Finally, to everyone who supported me from day one, thank you for your encouragement and being there for me.

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Chapter 1: Introduction of the Study

Introduction

Throughout the adolescence, individuals encounter many relationships that help shape their interactions with the world. One of the most formative of these relationships is the relationship with their father. Academic research conducted in recent years has brought fathers and fatherhood to the forefront of issues concerning families and the importance of the father and child relationship (Adamsons & Pasley, 2016; Coates & Stover, 2014; Levant, Gerdes, Jadaszewski, & Alto, 2018). One aspect of the exploration of these studies pertains to father engagement. Statistical data has revealed that approximately 17.4 million children in the United States live in homes without the presence of a father or father figure (National Fatherhood Initiative, 2016; U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). Father absence and poor father engagement by biological fathers is a phenomenon affecting approximately 24 million children in the United States (National Fatherhood Initiative, 2016). African American families are severely affected by this epidemic, as it has been reported that African American fathers make up the largest group of absentee fathers in this country (Bocknek, Brophy-Herb, Fitzgerald, Schiffman, & Vogel, 2014). Threlfall and Kohl (2015) found that 67% of African American children grow up in situations where there is no father in the home.

Paternal involvement is an essential factor, which maintains a favorable influence on a child's academic achievement, behavior, and cognitive development (Brodie, Paddock, Gilliam, & Chavez, 2014; Frank, Keown, & Sanders, 2015; Guendelman, Nussbaum, Soliday, & Lahiff, 2018; Hibbs, Rankin, DeSisto, & Collins, 2018). As

children develop, paternal involvement has a direct association with their level of self-confidence for environmental exploration and risk taking (Hill, Leyva, & DelPriore, 2016). Therefore, when the father is not present, the experience growing up in a single parent fatherless home can adversely alter their socioeconomic, cognitive, and behavioral development (Stack et al., 2017). As a result of these child-related issues and others such as father absence and incarceration, scholarly studies on these topics have increased the last few decades in order to explore the impact of absence and the programs that address engagement (Flouri, Narayanan, & Midouhas, 2015; La Guardia, Nelson, & Lertora, 2014; Lechowicz et al., 2018). While initiatives have been developed to improve this issue, there continues to be a prevalence of meager engagement among African American fathers.

Although fatherhood education programs and parenting programs exist with father participation, studies have reported that poor involvement from single fathers continues to be an issue after program participation. In their study on interventions for fragile families, Mchale, Waller, and Pearson (2012) reported that fathers are not more likely to spend time with children or provide financial support than fathers in control groups. In their evaluation of *Building Strong Families* (BSF), Wood, Moore, Clarkwest, and Killewald (2014) found that after a 3-year follow-up, BSF had slight negative effects on some aspects of father involvement.

Programs that focus on fatherhood deliver parenting interventions which are intended to increase the amount of time fathers spend with their children as well as the quality of that time (Panter-Brick et al., 2014). According to recent research, some of

these programs have achieved a moderate amount of success in engaging fathers while maintaining successful program delivery leading to a positive impact on children (Glynn & Dale, 2015; Tompkins, Rosa, Henry, & Benavente, 2014; Wilson, Havighurst, Kehoe, & Harley, 2016). However, with these achievements, this societal issue is ongoing. In reviewing previous studies on the topic, I have been unable to locate scholarly research findings regarding African American men who participated in fatherhood programs yet remained uninvolved with their children. Therefore, further investigation is necessary to produce data relevant to increasing the understanding of the issues and needs of this population. In this chapter, I will introduce the topic being explored, the background of the problem, the problem statement, the purpose of the study, my research question, the conceptual framework, and the nature and significance of this study. The succeeding literature review will discuss the theoretical foundations that shaped my present understanding of this group.

Background of Problem

Father involvement is an intriguing subject that has been studied from numerous perceptions and positions. The topic has especially been explored through the lens of understanding why fathers do not remain actively involved and to the factors and experiences that influence father behavior. Jessee and Adamsons (2018) considered the risk and resilience factors for fathers to predict paternal engagement with their children at varying points in time: at childbirth and when the children are 1 and 3 years old. Just as important in their investigation of paternal attitudes and behavior, Perry and Lewis (2016) reported on the relationships of African American men and their fathers of origin.

Studying these topics included consideration of fathers from diverse backgrounds, regions, and classes. Investigators have concentrated on married and unmarried fathers, nonresidential and residential fathers, single fathers, young fathers, and fathers across diverse regions (Flouri, Narayanan, & Midouhas, 2015; La Guardia, Nelson, & Lertora, 2014; Lechowicz et al., 2018). These findings have informed future research and present the opportunity to continue the exploration of African American father engagement behavior.

One expanding focus that is becoming more common in scholarly research pertains to programs that instruct, mentor, and support men in their role as fathers. Through societal support and educational opportunities, these programs help fathers strengthen their parental abilities (Wilson et al., 2016). As a result of their efforts, financial backing for these educational programs has improved significantly in recent years (Fagan & Kaufman, 2015). These programs have begun to move towards the forefront of fatherhood research to provide an understanding of what outcomes are produced for clients. Therefore, the benefits and hindrances of these programs must be studied through effective qualitative research.

Fatherhood programs were first developed in the 1990s to provide support and encouragement to fathers by reassuring their role as active fathers in the lives of their children (Anderson, Aller, Piercy, & Roggman, 2015). Funding for these programs is often provided through both federal allotments and private sector financing (Dion, Zaveri, & Holcomb, 2015). Such educational programs were initially targeting the establishment of paternity and collecting child support payments owed by fathers

(Anderson et al., 2015). They provided men with assistance in filing paperwork, work release programs, and housing (Anderson et al., 2015). Men entered the programs voluntarily and via court order (Anderson et al., 2015). Ultimately, they provided fathers with a sense of pride and the desire to provide for their children (Anderson et al., 2015). While programs claim to help fathers, research has left unanswered questions about their effectiveness (Dion, Zaveri, & Holcomb, 2015). Therefore, this study is imperative in learning how fathers are responding to these programs in addition to their needs.

Earlier research by investigators like Bronte-Tinkew, Burkhauser, and Metz (2014) has assessed fatherhood programs and interventions to understand what is effective without insight from the fathers. Some analyses have been based on examining the delivery of parenting classes, counseling services, relationship skill building, education and employment supports, efforts to address risky behaviors such as substance abuse and, for incarcerated fathers, visitation and post-release assistance (Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2014; Wilson et al., 2016). Others have looked at programs whose goals are to strengthen a father's abilities, self-awareness, and self-confidence as it pertains to performing the nurturing dimensions of his fathering role (Dion, Zaveri, & Holcomb, 2015; Philip & O'Brien, 2017). What these studies found was that many of these programs lack true evidence of the effects on the well-being of fathers and their children (Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2014). Also noteworthy are the gaps pertaining to the exploration of how fathers are impacted based on their report upon the termination of these programs. Bronte-Tinkew et al. affirmed that rigorous evaluations are more likely to provide evidence of whether the programs produce the desired effect on father attitudes,

knowledge and behavior. Therefore, this study is essential to examining and illuminating the thoughts of African American fathers who participate in these programs to learn how they can be served better.

Problem Statement

Father absence in the United States and the African-American family has been on the rise since 1960 (Gillette & Gudmunson, 2014). Guendelman et al. (2018) and Hibbs et al. (2018) found a higher prevalence of homes with single mothers in minority households than minority households. Currently, 70% of African-American infants and 50% of Hispanic infants are born to single mothers and growing up without fathers (Guendelman et al., 2018; Hibbs et al., 2018). Kids Count Data Center reported that as of 2013, 67% of African-American children were being raised in a fatherless household (Kids Count Data Center, 2015). Some studies have attended to this problem from the position of how it affects children in the short and long term (Easterbrooks, Raskin, & McBrien, 2014; Stack et al., 2017). While these studies have focused on the reasons why children grow up fatherless, they also support the involvement of African-American fathers in the lives of their children (Baum, 2015; Caldwell, Rafferty, Reischl, De Loney, & Brooks, 2014).

Although much is known about the effects of fatherlessness on children, a review of the literature did not return an abundance of information displaying concrete reasons fathers do not remain present and involved. Caldwell et al. (2014) noted in their study on nonresident African-American fathers that one of the best predictors of father involvement was coparenting with the children's mother. Other potential causes of

uninvolvement have included unemployment and criminal justice issues (Fagan & Kaufman, 2015). Baum (2015) confirmed that African-American nonresident fathers embody a historically underserved population. They further reported this group, particularly young fathers, need to be adequately supported for the sake of their children (Baum, 2015) Although the research mentioned above regarding absent father experiences illuminates important findings, I have found no study that has examined the reasons fathers choose not to be involved with their children from the father's perspective. Given such, further investigation is warranted that could examine to address the documented problem of declining father involvement in African American single parent homes (McLeod, 2015).

Purpose of the Study

The underlying goal of this study was to contribute to the existing scholarship on the topic of father engagement in the African American family by illuminating an understanding of how engagement is impacted after fathers participate in fatherhood programs. Through this study, I intend to provide readers with an understanding based on the lived experiences of the defined group of fathers who have participated in fatherhood programs and their parental engagement after their participation in these programs. Recent academic literature afforded me background information on engagement and interventions designed to improve it. I employed a phenomenological methodology to examine this aspect of fatherhood as directly related to African American fathers. Chapter 3 provides a discussion the chosen method of investigation and interviews questions in further detail.

Research Question

This study was grounded in the following research question: How have the lived experiences of noncustodial African American fathers aged 18-45 years old who participated in fatherhood programs influenced their lack of involvement and engagement in the lives of their children?

Conceptual Framework

For this study, I drew its theoretical orientation from one theoretical model: family systems theory. The field of psychology produced many theories that discuss human behavior and why individuals perform and act as they do. One of the original theories, which have been connected to father engagement studies, is Bowen's (1974) family systems theory. Family systems theorists view the family system as a unit of several segments, and each segment maintains a connection to the others (Karakurt & Silver, 2014). Sun (2016) claimed that family systems theory identifies the family as a unit with interdependent members who impact each other's thoughts, emotions, and actions. Therefore, to gain an accurate understanding of the individual, the researcher must recognize the individual as an interactive part of the family system. Family systems theory has been used previously to frame studies on engagement and fatherhood programs effectively. In their report on the evaluation of fatherhood programs, Fagan and Kaufman (2015) suggested the use of systems theory in conceptualizing measures and outcomes of father involvement and engagement. This is true with exploring fatherhood programs because nonresidential fathers are less likely to be involved with their children

if family members do not accept them as part of the family system (Fagan & Kaufman, 2015). This framework is expounded in detail in Chapter 2.

Nature of the Study

The nature of this research study was that of a qualitative methodology with a phenomenological approach along with hermeneutic inquiry. Qualitative research was used to explore and convey what fathers encounter in their lives and the impression these incidents made on their involvement with their children, which was the primary focus of this dissertation. Phenomenological research, along with hermeneutic inquiry, was appropriate for my study on father engagement because it allowed me to acquire information directly from the reported experiences of the participants. I investigated the experiences of a group of 9 African American fathers ages 18 through 45 who participated in fatherhood programs yet remained uninvolved with their child. Previous studies effectively used phenomenology and hermeneutics to investigate the lived experiences of men who became fathers and displayed violence towards their partners (Haland, Lundgren, Eri, & Liden, 2014) and how fatherhood was affected when the husband has a substance use disorder (Williams, 2014). This approach was important for my research as it allowed the use of semistructured, face-to-face interviews, which afforded these African American fathers an opportunity to transfer their fatherhood experiences.

Operational Definitions

Father: For purposes of this study, a father was a male responsible for the care of his biological children.

Father engagement: Fathers' direct contact with their child through shared activities. (Goldberg, 2015).

Fatherhood program: A public program designed to strengthen positive father-child engagement, improve healthy relationships (including couple and coparenting) and marriage, and improve employment and economic mobility opportunities for noncustodial fathers (Solomon-Fears & Tollestrup, 2016).

Involvement: Motivated parental attitudes and behaviors intended to influence children's educational well-being (Vukovic, Roberts, & Green Wright, 2013).

Parental Engagement: Parents' engagement in their children's lives to influence the children's overall actions (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014).

Uninvolved: For this study, an uninvolved is a father who had no more than 36 hours of face-to-face interaction with their child in 30 days.

Assumptions

- Participants would respond honestly to all interview questions.
- Participants would provide straightforward responses regarding their perspectives during their interviews.
- Participants would have the ability to recall their life histories as it pertained to their origins and responsibilities as fathers
- Participants would provide information in the interviews that would answer the research question.

Scope and Delimitations

This study focused on African American fathers aged 18-45 who were not presently married to their child's mother. The research sample was composed of nine fathers residing in the Philadelphia metropolitan areas. The primary method of data collection was semistructured face-to-face interviews to determine the father's views of fatherhood programs based on their experiences and interactions with their respective programs. For this research, I employed purposive sampling in which an equal representation of gender and age level between the respondents was applied. Considering the selected participants in the study, the results were not generalizable to all African American fathers. Nor were they generalizable to fathers residing in areas outside of the chosen geographic and demographic region. The study was delimited to men from community-based businesses and organizations in the socially underprivileged urban area.

Limitations

The sample size of this study was a limitation. Smaller samples in research allow for depth in studying the phenomenon, but not breadth (Malterud, Siersma, & Guassora, 2016). Considering that I relied on the participants' self-reports, another limitation was the potential for fathers to embellish their responses about their behaviors and involvement with their children. To safeguard these limitations, I provided participants with vivid details about the importance of the study and answered participants' questions on how the information would be used to support the research. Other steps included

practices that ensured privacy and confidentiality and maintained the integrity of their responses.

Significance

Poor father engagement presents various developmental challenges to children while impacting the family unit (Frank, Keown, & Sanders, 2015). My extensive search of academic literature produced no results in regards to understanding the connection between experiences of African American fathers who participated in fatherhood programs and maintained ongoing poor involvement with their children. While I identified various limitations, this research was of significance for multiple reasons. Initially, the study further substantiated the importance of active fatherhood in the lives of children by illuminating and increasing the understanding of how the experiences of these fathers had an effect on their desire to be involved with their children. The outcome of this study also influences programming and services that are available to help fathers learn how to fulfill their roles. As participants disclosed their needs from fatherhood programs and findings from this study can be combined with existing research regarding program development. Fatherhood programs have been reported as increasing fathers' availability to their children, the connection with their children, along with their support of children's learning while decreasing reports of children's problematic behaviors (Lechowicz et al., 2018). Therefore, conducting study can inform these programs of current trends and needs for this population of men.

The findings of this study can positively impact social change for the children of African American fathers who lack engagement in their lives. It served as a voice for

fathers by allowing others to understand what African American fathers needed to improve accessibility to their children.

Additionally, the study provided empowerment to the participants by letting them know that their voice was important. As new information was disclosed for fatherhood programs, implementation of new interventions can help fathers begin to present a more proactive role with self-advocacy and the family court system. Social welfare systems will gain awareness of the importance of supporting father stability, which also benefits child outcomes (Carlson, Edleson, & Kimball, 2014). By having a voice, politicians, social service workers, and other government representatives may be able to respond more effectively to the needs of men as it pertains to visitation, child support, and custody.

Summary

The low level of involvement from African American fathers in the lives of their children has drawn increased attention in recent years. Researchers investigated this epidemic from numerous perspectives with intentions of understanding why it remains prevalent. Some of the factors connected to lack of engagement have been societal factors, fathers' personal factors, family factors, and child welfare agency factors (Coakley, Shears, & Randolph, 2014). While there is much research that exists regarding father involvement, much of the data has not been gathered based on the perspective of African American fathers (Agache, Leyendecker, Schäfermeier, & Schölmerich, 2014). This study intended to obtain the perspectives of this group of fathers based on their experiences as participants in fatherhood programs and how their experience persuaded

their level of involvement with their children. This chapter is immediately followed by a literature review in Chapter 2 and a detailed description of the study design in Chapter 3. The two remaining chapters present the results of my study, implications, and suggestions for further studies.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The issue of father absence in the United States and the African American family has been a principal concern for almost half of a century (Gillette & Gudmunson, 2013). As of 2013, 67% of African American children were being raised in fatherless households (Kids Count Data Center, 2015). It was also previously determined that father absence has adverse effects on their children (Stack et al., 2017). Fatherless homes can result in children who demonstrate aggression, develop substance abuse issues, have poor academic achievement, and may experience a continuing cycle of fatherlessness for their children (Stack et al., 2017). Conversely, research proved that father engagement could make a positive imprint on children's psychosocial, academic, and permanence outcomes (Brodie et al., 2014; Frank, Keown, & Sanders, 2015).

Recent research demonstrated that father engagement might be impacted by several factors including motivation, personal well-being, and employment status (Miller & Maskaly 2014). To improve engagement and enhance the father-child relationship, parenting programs for fathers have risen in recent years (Dion, Zaveri, & Holcomb, 2015). These father-focused programs are often comprised of interventions designed to increase the quantity and enhance the quality of fathers' relationship and involvement with their children (Panter-Brick et al., 2014). Research suggested that some of these programs achieved some level of success in engaging fathers in the programs along with successful program delivery thus creating a positive impact on children (Glynn & Dale, 2015). However, despite the abundance of research on father engagement and a thorough

review of the literature, I was unable to find research on the experiences of African American fathers who participated in fatherhood programs yet continued to demonstrate poor engagement. I sought to explore and fill this gap by exploring the experiences of these fathers and providing possible explanations for this phenomenon. Participants in this study attested to their knowledge and experience with these programs. They were requested to provide insight into their needs and what fatherhood programs have offered or should offer to assist them.

This study addressed existing gaps by selecting participants who participated in fatherhood programs. In order to address the limitation of withheld information or dishonesty, it was important to build a relationship with the participants and to build confidence about the confidentiality of their participation in the study. According to Stanley and Nayar (2014), informing participants of ethical principles prior to beginning interviews increased the probability of honesty. With that in mind, it was important that during the interview process of this study I performed an inquiry with the most appropriate questions for the research and made adequate interpretations of revealed and withheld information. It was also important to maintain attentiveness to participants' body language and recognize resistance and differentiate truth from authenticity. Furthermore, it was imperative for me to address these issues early in the process by increasing comfort, building rapport, and developing a cooperative relationship with the participants.

The purpose of this literature review was to explore previous research about the problem of program participation and engagement outcomes in fatherhood programs and

to substantiate the research as relevant within the current body of research. A systematic consideration of the current literature guided this study by offering the foundational components necessary for investigating an important subject that was worthwhile (Rudestam & Newton, 2015). My choice in topic and review of the literature involved the incorporation of a writing strategy, which started by focusing on father absence as a broad topic, then narrowing the focus to inquiring about the causes of absence and the experiences of fathers as well as the impact on their involvement and engagement in the lives of their children. During this process, research findings were synthesized about current statistics surrounding father absence and the subtopics generated from existing studies. I also took into consideration gaps in the research and disclosed how these gaps provide implications for my research. Chapter 2 also specified an explanation of the literature review strategies that I used to locate seminal works and recent, peer-reviewed studies related to the following identifying criteria:

- *Father experience*: The experiences of fathers during their growth and development into adulthood provided a foundation for a discussion around what was already known about the family origins of fathers and how these dynamics affected their perception and approach towards fatherhood and parenting. These investigations offered the foundation for supporting this study as a contributor to social change initiatives for improving father involvement and relationship building.
- *Father absence*: Statistics and research on the existence and impact of father absence for African American fathers were described.

- *Predictors and barriers*: I discussed the findings of predictors and barriers to father engagement and involvement.
- *Father identity*: Research suggested how fathers established an identity for their roles as fathers in regards to engagement and involvement.
- *Fatherhood programs*: Research on the benefits of fatherhood programs, attendance and completion rates, and the need for improvements in building paternal skills were presented.

Literature Review Strategies

This academic investigation encompassed numerous overlapping subjects and areas of study. Subsequently, multiple databases and keyword arrangements were used to explore and collect peer-reviewed scholarly articles. The Walden Library was used to search PsycINFO, SocINDEX, PsycARTICLES, ERIC, EBSCOhost, and Education Resource Complete. In addition to the above, I also used Google Scholar, which allowed me to access articles from Sage journals, ProQuest, and Academic Search Completed. Like the Walden Library, Google Scholar was effective in removing non-peer reviewed journals.

In most searches, I limited my exploration to include empirical studies that addressed aspects of father absence and were published within the last 5 years. In order to establish an adequate list of reference publications for review, I used combinations of the following keywords to search the literature with Boolean identifiers on the aforementioned databases: *father, absence, nonresidential, noncustodial, parents, paternal, fatherhood, involvement, involvement definition, engagement, engagement*

definition, attitude, paternal deprivation, paternal engagement, parenting behaviors, non-resident, custody, sole custody, divorce, unmarried, parental, parental involvement, parental involvement definition, financial, support, unmarried custody, involve, engage, absent, custody, child, children, identity, identify, program, success, outcome, complete, and *African American or Black*. The search generated 133 studies and two dissertations published between 2006 and 2017.

The initial searches presented several articles written by the same author or authors. Thus, I created a new search for articles from these respective authors using the same databases and author search tool in the search engine. I conducted this search using articles that were published between 2006 and 2017 in order to examine the authors' contributions over the last 15 years. The intent behind this approach was to explore recent studies and works by other scholars. The articles in consideration were only those directly connected to father absence. Chapter 2 includes a review of the literature as associated with the problem of African American father involvement; the lived experiences of this group including participation in fatherhood programs, factors related to absence, and the factors that impact their level of engagement.

Conceptual Framework

The field of psychology has produced many theories that discuss human behavior and why individuals perform and act as they do. One primary theory that was previously connected to father engagement studies was family systems. Systems theory was built on the assumption that each part of the family system is connected and a true understanding of the individual is developed by understanding that individual as an interactive part of

the system (Karakurt & Silver, 2014). Varying forms of systems theory have been used and expertly framed studies on engagement and fatherhood programs. For example, Soderstrom and Skarderud (2013) reported on a father involvement program focusing on family systems risk-protection outcome model, which asserted the presence of multiple systemic factors that shape the quantity and quality of father engagement with children. This model suggested that to have more constructive outcomes, program interventions must focus on diminishing the multiple risks and enhancing the protective factors associated with father engagement by focusing on the five family domains of family life (Soderstrom & Skarderud, 2013).

One of the issues related to father involvement pertained the acknowledgment and acceptance of the father's role in the life of their children and the family structure. Fagan and Kaufman (2014) affirmed the rationale for applying systems theory to fatherhood studies and fatherhood programs is that nonresident fathers will remain uninvolved until they see their relevance in the family system. This notion confirmed the idea behind family systems theory that well-functioning families maintain proper boundaries between the family and the surrounding environment for the sake of the family (Karakurt & Silver, 2014). Mothers, children, and the legal system play a part in setting improper boundaries for fathers (Fagan & Kaufman, 2014). Family systems theory helped to assure that boundaries are properly aligned. This theory was connected to attachment theory when studying father influence on children.

According to Palm (2014), when the father is present, he has considerable influence over the social-emotional development of the children. His presence allows him

to perform three individual roles that affect attachment patterns in the family contexts (Palm, 2014). Initially, fathers provide a direct impact through father-child interactions as a protector, which leads to secure attachment patterns (Pasley, Petren, & Fish, 2014). Next, fathers have an essential indirect influence through the parental relationship with their child's mother, by which they offer the mother support and model parenting relationships (Palm, 2014). Their final role impacts the family system as they perform the role of a coprovider thus adding stability to the family system (Palm, 2014). Therefore, this concept encourages the goal areas of for parent education activities, which focus on fathers. Palm supported the use of family systems theory in exploring the father-child relationship in program practice.

Father Engagement

Exploration of previous research presented several classifications of fathers in our society when considering unmarried and nonresidential fathers (Loper, Phillips, Nichols, & Dallaire, 2014). Two commonly identified groups that result from these situations are either involved fathers or uninvolved fathers (McClain, & DeMaris, 2013). Direct participation of these men in fatherhood studies is essential in adding to the knowledge base on the issue of father engagement. In their investigations, some researchers took the perspectives of mothers, children, social workers, and city officials (Coakley et al., 2014; Viry, 2014). In past years, numerous studies did not consider the perceptions of fathers in their investigations (Baum, 2015; Fagan & Palkovitz, 2018; Gillette & Gudmunson, 2013). Recent studies considered using fathers as the participants in their studies (Bar-On & Scharf, 2016; Herland, Hauge, & Helgeland, 2015). In a dissertation on father

experience, Ingram (2014) conducted an exploratory study on the experiences of young African American fathers aged 18-27 and their preparation for and transition into fatherhood. This study represented the importance of understanding the lived experiences of fathers to understand their behaviors. My study offered an alternative perspective by exploring the experiences of fathers who attended fatherhood programs but continued to be considered underinvolved or not involved.

For this dissertation, the subject of father involvement was explored based on the lived experiences of African American fathers as reported by them. I examined the experiences of fathers who were either mandated to attend fatherhood programs or were identified as underinvolved fathers to contribute to the existing body of research related to father involvement. This topic was important to the field of human services in that it created a connection between father involvement, fatherhood programming, and youth outcomes. Findings from this study can be disseminated widely to assist other scholars and researchers who desire to further this topic. As the findings are presented to psychologists, social/case workers, program directors, and others who work with nonresidential fathers or advocate for youth living in fatherless homes, it will provide a greater understanding of paternal behavior and their responses to fatherhood programs. It can help fatherhood programs better serve fathers by educating clients on methods to increase paternal involvement by understanding the factors that lower or raise levels of involvement, thus allowing them to become more proactive in their roles. Additionally, it should provide essential resources to enhance father involvement with children.

Recent themes and trends in research studies pertained to and discussed barriers to involvement, levels and types of father engagement, effects of involvement on maternal health, coparenting relationship, limitations to involvement, influences of positive involvement, the role of relationship quality, parenting skills, father experience, and father support (Caldwell et al. 2014; Coakley, Shears, & Randolph, 2014; Fagan, & Kaufman, 2015; Fagan & Lee, 2014; Kim & Meyer, 2014; Long, Fish, Scheffler, & Hanert, 2014). These questions were explored using grounded theory, longitudinal studies, data analysis, and intervention trials as methodologies. Much of the literature within the last 5 years explored nonresident fatherhood based on using mothers as participants, limited use of fathers, observations from birth samples, and data sampling (Anderson et al., 2015; Carlson et al., 2014; Coates & Phares, 2014; Cowan et al., 2014). While these studies primarily sought to find ways to offer support to fathers to increase and enrich involvement, they made fathers the primary resource in their studies. This study investigated the experiences of fathers directly from their shared experiences as fathers to their participation in programs, which were designed to help them improve in their roles.

Father Experience

This review of the literature on father engagement also led to several findings on the influence of the fathers' experiences in their paternal role as well as their transition into fatherhood. These experiences not only related to their current situation as a father but also their past experiences. In a study on men and women's childhood experiences, it was reported that social learning played a vital role in how children evolve into adults

(Lee, Storr, Ialongo, & Martins, 2013). Research showed that boys learn family roles and father interaction patterns through the observations of the adults around them (Roy, 2014). Therefore, boys who do not grow up with positive examples of father interaction are more likely to lack partnering skills and are more likely to become nonresidential fathers more than those boys who have fathers that model positive parenting behavior (Roy, 2014). Herland et al. (2015) argued the importance of having balance in the lives of children while adding that unstable relationships in the life course of a male can cause problematic feelings that are carried throughout their own experiences as parents. The results of such studies showed that the effects of unstable family structures were more prevalent in males who were nonresidential fathers than those who were residential (Herland et al., 2015). While these studies focused on fathers who experienced unstable family backgrounds, they did not consider uninvolved nonresidential fathers who had positive upbringings in stable homes. Consequently, this study examined these perspectives.

In their articles on parenting experiences, Baum (2015) and Bar-On and Scharf (2016) addressed the need to draw connections between fathers past relations with their fathers of origin and the relationships with their children. Other studies found three circumstances that shaped men's attainment of family roles as parents and partners: the family structures they experienced, their financial well-being in childhood, and the period in which they grew up (Hurt, Shears, O'Connor, & Hodge, 2017; Kuo & Ward, 2016; Prioste, Narciso, Gonçalves, & Pereira, 2017). Collectively, these conditions may impact the possibility of taking more or less traditional family constructs of their own and offer

selections for continued education that would discourage early family formation (Roy, 2014).

In another study, men reported that their current parental negligence was also tied to their past experiences (Herland et al., 2015). Herland et al. (2015) found a connection between men with poor parental experiences and adolescent delinquency and their present capacities as fathers. Findings from this study confirmed the likelihood of fathers struggling to be available for their children when they continued to relive their troubled experiences with one or both parents (Herland et al., 2015). However, their capacity to do better as fathers increased with support from the coparent(s), public services, and other significant relationships (Herland et al., 2015). Although there were fathers who found a way to make a distinct separation from their past and remain present for their children, many did not participate in the study. This finding suggested the possibility of men who had negative father experiences still demonstrating engagement with their children. The writers suggested the importance of fathers exploring their experiences with their fathers of origin to better understand fatherhood as a whole and their perspectives of fathering their children (Herland et al., 2015).

Other studies found that fathers used their fatherhood experiences to either model the positive father figures they encountered or to compensate for their disengaged fathers (Long et al., 2014; Perry & Lewis, 2016). What this demonstrated was the desire for fathers to either emulate their own positive experiences or avoid negative ones by creating a new legacy. However, Perry and Lewis (2016) also discussed previous studies that found fathers who had negative experiences also mirrored those experiences with

their children. This was indicative of patterns of mimicked behaviors in both situations of positive and negative experiences. What was not reported in the studies was fathers who had positive father experiences, but still, lacked engagement with their children. This served as one of the limitations in the studies because the studies were based on self-report or some fathers opted not to reveal this information when it came to their own experience in being a father (Perry & Lewis, 2016). This limitation must be addressed by selecting participants who have participated in fatherhood programs.

An additional gap noticed with these studies pertained to the participants and the focus only on current fathering behaviors. In one study, the population interviewed was middle to upper-class African American fathers who were financially stable (Perry & Lewis, 2016). None of the fathers in this study were from urban areas or considered of lower socioeconomic status (Perry & Lewis, 2016). Additionally, most of them were in active marriages. Fourteen were on their first marriage and three were divorced and remarried while one was single having never been married (Perry & Lewis, 2016). Seven were single due to divorce (Perry & Lewis, 2016).

Additionally, the interviews in the investigations were based on capturing the participants' present fathering behavior and reflective recollections of their fathers' parenting behavior (Perry & Lewis, 2016). This created singular data collection waves and left the studies void of understanding how the participants' views may have changed between their childhood and parenthood (Long et al., 2014; Perry & Lewis, 2016). These facts depicted the importance of understanding how fathers perceive their fathering identity based on their past experiences on fatherhood.

Father Identity

As fathers tend to mimic fathering behaviors they experienced in their past, research also showed that father identity is also shaped by prior experience (Adamsons, 2013). Recent studies focused on identity theory and father identity as mediators between empowerment and father involvement (Adamsons, 2013; Fox, Nordquist, Billen, & Savoca, 2015). The studies also confirmed that factors such as sociodemographic characteristics and relationship reflected varying levels of importance (salience) in different situations (Fox et al., 2015). The commitment one has to a given role determines the importance of their identity in that role, in the hierarchy, and how they construct their identity in that role (Pasley, Petren, & Fish, 2014). With that, father identity can predict future levels of involvement (Goldberg, 2015). Therefore, the higher their role-identity, the more likely they will function within that role following the expectations of significant others and the greater society (Goldberg, 2015). Likewise, identity role importance serves as a predictor of father involvement (Adamsons & Pasley, 2016; Troilo & Coleman, 2012). Troilo and Coleman (2012) also reported more involvement of nonresidential fathers who possessed higher salience in their fatherhood roles than those with lower salience.

According to the existing research, the source of identity development stems from different contexts such as biological ties and income (Fox et al., 2015). Pasley et al. (2014) and Adamsons and Pasley (2016) reported that identity was closely associated with the social and economic aspects of a man's life. Some studies focused on role models as the basis for identity (Hofferth & Goldscheider, 2010; Lemay, Cashman,

Elfenbein, & Felice, 2010; Perry & Lewis, 2016) while others affirmed that identity is formed by the conversations, interactions, and relationships within one's groups (Long et al., 2014). What this supposed was that the person an individual becomes regarding the roles they fulfill is impacted by the circumstances and experiences they encounter throughout their life. Therefore, the type of father a man develops into is influenced by his experience with his father of origin, the definition of father that is presented to them, and what their socioeconomic status dictated to them.

Research has produced inconsistent findings of identity and influence on father involvement, primarily due to the scope of identity measures and measures of fathering behaviors. Additionally, father identity has been examined without considering interactions with mothers (Adamsons & Pasley, 2016). In their study, Adamsons and Pasley (2016) investigated this interaction with romantically involved residential fathers/couples. However, one limitation pertained to understanding parental communication with nonresidential fathers. The researchers suggested examining identity standards such as time spent and parental competence in roles. This study attempted to understand what unmarried African American fathers with low engagement were taught regarding identity, from which they learned their roles and identities, how these expectations and understandings impacted who they are in their roles, and how interaction with the coparent effected their involvement. The intent was to understand what fathers believed is expected of them, what they believed they should provide (personal importance), and how this is represented in their involvement.

Role Identity and African American Men

An unpopular alternative view was presented on role and identity as it pertained specifically to the African American male (Allen, 2016). One study affirmed that while African American fathers also gain their identity through their experiences, their involvement is severely hindered by structural barriers such as unemployment, wealth inequalities, and a lack of role models when compared to their White counterparts (Allen, 2016). Furthermore, these experiences were reported to lead to absentee fathering (Allen, 2016). It should be noted that exploration of the research on this subtopic did not produce any studies that compared African American fathers to Latino fathers or other ethnicities. The literature review did produce investigations that were centered on mothers' perceptions of father identity and involvement, low-income family functioning, and the origins of father-child relationships. Other researchers reported that the social experiences of the African American male impacts on his parenting practices (Cooper, Smalls-Glover, Metzger, & Griffin, 2015). What this indicated was that while this population is subjected to the same identity-related processes; they are also subjected to additional obstacles, which oppose dominant ideologies of manhood and role-identity. With that, it was necessary to understand how structural barriers of the target population impact their involvement. This aspect of the phenomenon was addressed by exploring father engagement.

Father Engagement

The role of the father has changed over time. Fathers were historically viewed strictly as breadwinners for their families (Goldberg, 2015). More recently, their role has

also been classified as caretaker, with attributes which include providing love, support, guidance, education, protection, supervision, and serving as a confidant, role model, and collaborator with mothers, and educator (Wilson et al., 2016). Nevertheless, way fathers see their roles may not be the same as it is classified in society or by cultural norms.

Bryan (2013) affirmed that father behaviors do not always align with the expectations placed on them by cultural standards. As a result, many men have negative perceptions of themselves in addition to enduring the negative views maintained by others (Bryan, 2013).

In situations of unmarried or divorced families, father engagement is an expression often used interchangeably with other terms such as father absence, (un)involvement, and fatherless(ness). For this reason, a single definition has been challenging to identify. McLeod (2015) found that involvement maintains a multidimensional approach that is consistent with the direction taken in related fields such as social support in which emotional, informational, instrumental, and financial domains of support are frequently characterized and give guidance to the development of interventions. One definition of paternal engagement, which was grounded in the seminal work of Lamb defined engagement as one-on-one contact and interactions fathers have with their child in activities such as caretaking and playing (Malette, Futris, Brown, & Oshri, 2015). Twamley, Brunton, Sutcliffe, Hinds, and Thomas (2013) study identified father *involvement* as a three-part entity made up of engagement, accessibility, and responsibility. In their explanation, engagement was denoted as time spent in one-to-one interaction with their child. Accessibility was described by physical availability to the

child and responsibility was noted as the extent to which the parent takes ultimate responsibility for the child's welfare and care (Twamley et al., 2013). For this research investigation, the focus was on the term father engagement while referring to other terms as addressed by previous researchers and participants.

The literature review demonstrated a need to explore familial relationship, levels of engagement, father attitudes about engagement, and understanding of roles. One of the factors surrounding father engagement was that it tended to be contingent upon the parental relationship. One study by Bellamy, Thullen, and Hans (2015) found correlations between engagement and the parental relationship. According to Goldberg (2015), men's involvement with their children tended to weaken when the romantic relationship with the mother disbands. However, levels of engagement can be impacted when the mother reinforces the father's identity as a father and encourage his involvement in the child's life (Goldberg, 2015).

Newer studies which have implemented techniques to understand fathering trends determined that nonresident fathers tend to maintain either high or low levels of engagement with their children as opposed to decreasing or increasing their over time (McLeod, 2015; Waller & Emory, 2014). These findings supported by longitudinal data found that about half of unmarried nonresidential fathers exhibited consistently low levels of involvement, while one-quarter had consistently high involvement, with the remaining quarter increasing or decreasing their involvement (McLeod, 2015; Waller & Emory, 2014). The evidence found in these studies supported the notion that engagement levels often do not change over time. A limitation from the studies was the focus on

young (14-21 year-old) low-income African American mother perspectives rather than the fathers. The authors encouraged future studies to focus on reports from young low-income fathers as opposed to mothers. Goldberg (2015) contended that the more men know about their role and identity, the more they will work to fulfill the expectations placed on them. Therefore, this research explored participants ideas and attitudes about their roles versus what they understood others expected from them as well as what barriers prevented them from fulfilling their roles.

Predictors and Barriers to Engagement

Previous research identified the obstacles to father engagement across various categories (Miller & Maskaly 2014). Some of the primary barriers to engagement were economic difficulty or circumstances. Miller and Maskaly (2014) and Kane, Nelson, and Edin (2015) reported that many fathers do not pay child support because they cannot afford to due to an inability to maintain stable employment. The common themes for non-paying fathers are unemployment and salaries that are below the poverty line (Miller & Maskaly, 2014; Turner & Waller, 2017). Another deterrent was that some fathers had multiple children with multiple women. Fathers with children by more than one woman are less likely to pay child support than fathers with children of the same mother (Coakley, Shears, & Randolph, 2014). The underlying reasons for this is that fathers in these situations feel that their contributions are insignificant when they must distribute finances to each child or they believe is it more important to focus primarily on supporting their newest born or the children they live with to demonstrate commitment to the family (Coakley et al., 2014). Empirical research suggested that fathers identify

financial support as a characteristic of being a good provider for their children (Coakley et al., 2014; Levant, Gerdes, Jadaszewski, & Alto, 2018; Threlfall & Kohl, 2015).

However, some men believe the legal system is biased against them and forces them to pay too much child support which in turn limits their level of involvement with children (Troilo & Coleman, 2013). Essentially their thought is that if they paid less, they would have more resources and could spend more time with their children (Troilo & Coleman, 2013). These findings clarified the reasons for lack of payment as well as a reason why the experience might motivate fathers not to spend active time with their children.

Additionally, some studies discovered that many fathers still did not pay financial support due to their relationship with the child's mother even if they had the means (Coakley et al., 2014; Goldberg, 2015). This issue was addressed at a later time.

Father involvement can be affected by the relationship between the parents, the relationship between the parent and the child, as well as by the father's psychological well-being (Wilson et al., 2016). Research also showed that men are less likely to be involved with their children if they are not motivated to do so (Caldwell et al., 2014). According to Cowan, Cowan, and Knox (2010), father involvement was impacted by circumstances such as their legal status, the relationship with the child's mother, and the father's relationship status. Their level of motivation to be involved was also impacted when there was lack confidence in their role as a parent, minimal social support, or precarious work or housing environments (Wilson et al., 2016). Additionally, it was also determined that fathers often depend on communication with the mother to obtain access

to their child when parental conflict was present (Castillo & Sarver, 2012). This subsequently lead to restrictions from the child (Castillo & Sarver, 2012).

Research conducted over the last few years explored various aspects of engagement and absence (Caldwell et al., 2014; Castillo & Sarver, 2012; Gillette & Gudmunson, 2014). As of 2014, the United States Census Bureau reported that 23.6% of children (17.4 million) were living in fatherless homes (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). Additionally, 3.9% of children live in single-father families while 3.8% reside with neither parent (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). Research also determined that this issue plagues the African American community more than other races and that father absence in African American families is continuing to rise (Fagan & Kaufman, 2015; Gillette & Gudmunson, 2014; Gonzalez, Jones, & Parent, 2014). Bocknek, Fitzgerald, Schiffman, and Vogel (2014) reported that in 2009, 67% of African American children, 40% of Hispanic children, and 24% of Caucasian children were raised in single-parent families. In 2010, 52% of children in the United States resided in single-mother households while two-thirds (67%) of African American infants were born to unmarried mothers (Gillette & Gudmunson, 2014). This is triple the amount documented in 1960 (Gillette & Gudmunson, 2014). Child well-being, behavior, and academic outcomes are thoroughly acknowledged in research as being adversely affected by poor father engagement (Yoon, Bellamy, Kim, & Yoon, 2018).

When fathers have difficulty providing financially, the surrounding stress and pressure to do so builds up (Coakley et al., 2014). As a result, some fathers attempt to avoid being tracked down by legal systems (Coakley et al., 2014). In response to keeping

track of fathers and retrieving funds, the federal government executed several measures over recent decades to reinforce child support enforcement to increase financial support from non-resident fathers and to reduce residential parents' reliance on state funding (Huang & Han, 2012). This act mandated that states keep a directory of child support orders while monitoring child support payments. As a result of enforcement, employers are required to report new hires to the state so support payments could be taken directly from the father's paychecks (Xu, Pirog, & Vargas, 2016).

The enforcement of this act presents a snowball process as it pertains to fathers. Fathers who fail to pay child support are subject to various penalties. They can lose potential income tax refunds, have liens placed on their property, and incur criminal penalties for nonpayment of support; and, most recently, they can be listed on a centralized database where employers report information about new hires (Xu et al., 2016). Additionally, fathers who are in arrears cannot obtain a passport, can experience negative marks on their credit, and potentially face time in jail (Coakley et al., 2014). When jail time is imposed, they have more difficulty trying to obtain employment due to attaining a criminal record (Coakley et al., 2014). When these actions occur, some fathers take drastic measures such as terminating their parental rights or passively allowing the courts to relinquish them (Coakley et al., 2014). Termination of rights may solve the problem of jail time and wage garnishment, but it has also lead to a lack of engagement and further separation, due to the emotional toll on the father (Coakley et al., 2014).

Another barrier to engagement pertained to the physical proximity between men and their children. Geographical distance was identified as a significant obstacle to a

high-quality parenting relationship (Viry, 2014). Shorter distances between parents in unmarried and divorce situations help to facilitate father engagement. Longer distances can lead to difficulties in coparenting and child well-being. In child support cases, the law often does not consider distance and relocation as a part of child support obligations (Ellman & Braver, 2015). However, some states like California have laws in place to prevent custodial parents from relocating to areas that are not close to the noncustodial parent (Viry, 2014). Several investigations have proven that fathers believed distance was the most significant detractor from seeing their children or being physically involved on a consistent basis (Troilo & Coleman, 2013).

According to Viry (2014), previous studies did not determine the depth of the effect of geographic distance on children and fathers. They merely found that the presence of great distances minimized face-to-face father contact with the mother, and children (Viry, 2014). Ellman and Braver (2015) found that distance was often created due to mother relocation after divorce. In their study, Ellman and Braver (2015) discovered that male participants believed the custodial parent's remarriage and relocation matters should be considered along with setting the father's support obligations. They also found that relocation issues related to men and women but were more familiar with women. The result of this study was the support and encouragement of child support reform with parental relocation as a primary issue of concern (Ellman & Braver, 2015). One of the limitations of this study was that it primarily focused on the issue of distance from a financial standpoint and not the impact on fathers and children.

What frequently occurs in child custody situations is an obligation of the

nonresidential parent to pay child support but no obligation for either parent to ensure that physical involvement takes place or is considered (Ellman & Braver, 2015). This absence led to the question of where policies and family courts stand regarding mandated visitation. A search was conducted on the topic of court-mandated visitation however no research studies were found identifying the legal system holding nonresidential fathers responsible for performing the physical care of their children. One article by Garasky, Stewart, Gundersen, and Lohman (2010) confirmed several policy initiatives were placing attention on increasing father involvement and encouraging positive parenting practices in men along with the payment of child support but did not find a formal enactment of policies. Many of the articles found in this search addressed voluntary visitation on behalf of fathers, but no official mandate by courts or child support programs (Stewart, 2010). An article published by Williams and Haas (2014) in the *Georgetown Journal of Gender and the Law* discussed child custody and visitation law. The report confirmed that judges deny parental visitation if child welfare is an issue. However, the article did not mention mandatory/forced visitation or physical care from noncustodial parents who have financial support orders. Upon researching the topic of compulsory visitation, no articles or studies were located on the enactment of this form of visitation. What was apparent was that courts cannot deny visitation rights to the noncustodial parent who is following the child support order (Ellman & Braver, 2015). This indicated an area that was worthy of future study.

Fatherhood and Public Agencies

Child welfare agencies and social service workers reportedly assist fathers in the

case-planning processes while the legal system regulates cases, which maintain shared parenting agreements for children (Coakley, Washington, & Gruber, 2018). The review of the literature on these public agencies found that many agencies were not providing the best services for African American fathers (Coakley, 2013). These agencies did not include the impact of fatherhood programs, which maintain a different role in assisting fathers. Some social agencies have unaddressed barriers that result in minimal progress in enhancing fathers' strengths (Coakley, 2013). In some reports, fathers believed an agency's unfair policies and practices, disrespect by social workers, and judgmental attitudes put them at a disadvantage (Coakley, 2013; Coakley et al., 2014).

For this reason, studies found it essential to gain the perspective of fathers and understand what they believe is needed from agencies and staff in order to improve relations and enhance the quality of the relationships with their families (Baum 2015; Coakley, 2013). Coakley (2013) affirmed the division between what fathers want and what an agency feels fathers can do is a serious issue, which affects children's durability. Ultimately, the responsibility is on the agencies to find resolutions (Coakley, 2013).

Another study by Baum (2015) which explored the difficulties of serving African American fathers in social services and counseling found that there are fewer services specifically designed to meet the needs of African American fathers. Some of the reported barriers in this study were early age criminal records, involvement in and 'aging out' of the child welfare system, and incarceration (Baum, 2015). Fathers in this study reported an absence of friendliness towards fathers and a primary motivation to serve the needs of women and children (Braxton-Newby & Jones, 2014). This was further

substantiated by fathers also believing that they walk into a ‘punitive’ situation that centered on money and accountability, which differed from that of women (Baum, 2015). The second theme found that racism from society and within agencies played a role in the treatment of fathers (Baum, 2015; Braxton-Newby & Jones, 2014; Taylor, 2013). Participants also described these factors through self-report during interviews. The remaining themes of ‘father and their children’ and ‘father and women’ found that despite the assumptions of society, fathers genuinely are distraught over the loss of involvement with their children and a large aspect of decreased involvement is due to the mother preventing the father from seeing their child (Baum, 2015). This theme is discussed later in another section.

In a study which gauged the thoughts of divorced fathers about barriers that influence their abilities to remain involved, men identified the legal system as the primary catalyst that is working against them due to bias (Troilo & Coleman, 2013). More specifically, the legal system was noted as a barrier to physical involvement due to bias and unfairly favoring mothers (Troilo & Coleman, 2013). According to Brodie et al. (2014), unintentional bias is unfair treatment, which can unconsciously affect the level of paternal involvement in child protective service cases because of discrepant service provisions. Participants in the Troilo and Coleman study (2013) further affirmed that they felt they were presumed to be the one at fault and discriminated against by agencies. None of the participants believed the court demonstrated fairness in determining parenting time for fathers but focused on financial contributions (Troilo & Coleman, 2013). This was indicative of the legal system’s focus on monetary donations over

physical contributions (Taylor, 2013). The study by Troilo and Coleman (2013) stated that fathers were hesitant to request more physical custody at any time because it would be pointless. One father discussed the mother was interfering with his time (Troilo & Coleman, 2013). This fact contributes to father's identification of the coparenting relationship as a barrier to engagement.

Gaps and implications in these studies pertained to reducing negative stereotyping from social service professionals as opposed to focusing on mandatory father education programs (Taylor, 2013; Troilo & Coleman, 2013). Taylor (2013) also reported the need to understand how fatherhood programs can better support fathers. Brodie et al. (2014) highlighted the need to focus these studies on issues that are more common with African American fathers. These needs were addressed in this study on father experience by exploring what fathers believed fatherhood programs should provide to serve them better and assist them in becoming successful fathers.

Additionally, the findings from these studies demonstrated the importance of enhancing the overall relationship between unmarried and nonresidential fathers with agency staff and court officials (Brodie et al. 2014; Troilo & Coleman, 2013). The authors apprised that the results of the study suggested that successful interventions for fathers can lead to renewed responses to barriers that result in poor engagement including those that pertained to the relationship with the mother (Troilo & Coleman, 2013).

Coparenting Relationship

The fourth major barrier, which required exploration, concerned the coparenting relationship. Many fathers attested to their relationship with their child's mother as a

principal reason they do not maintain an active relationship with their child(ren) (Barthelemy & Coakley, 2017). According to Coakley et al. (2014), the key predictors of paternal engagement were the status and quality of the unmarried parental relationship. Therefore, when that relationship is negative or strained, the effect on father engagement is adverse. This can be partly due to different perspectives on the role of the father. In their study on paternal involvement, Sano, Smith, and Lanigan (2011) reported that the mothers' assessments of the fathers' competency or desire to actively parent affected his involvement. According to Austin, Pruett, Kirkpatrick, Flens, and Gould (2013), mothers typically have the role of the primary caregiver and are also the ones who most often question the competence of the other and decide what time with the child is optimal. On the other hand, fathers connected their level of involvement in the parental relationship to levels of education, employment stability, and income status with lower levels leading to lower involvement (Barthelemy & Coakley, 2017).

A common term that was identified when discussing coparenting was the idea of gatekeeping. Gatekeeping generally known as parental gatekeeping was described as the attitude and behavior presented by either parent that affect the quality of the other parent's relationship and level of involvement with the child (Austin, et al., 2013). The alternative to this was maternal gatekeeping, which was identified as a component of the coparenting relationship (Schoppe-Sullivan, Altenburger, Lee, Bower, & Dush, 2015). Maternal gatekeeping is usually connected to the role of the mother after the romantic relationship is severed (Coakley et al., 2014). Maternal gatekeeping pertains to the beliefs held by the mother that inhibit a collaborative effort between the parents, which results in

limited opportunities for the father to care of the children (Austin et al., 2013).

Studies on gatekeeping often focus on family systems theory to understand how it impacts father involvement with the children (Holmes, Dunn, Harper, Dyer, & Day, 2013; Puhlman & Pasley, 2013). Puhlman and Pasley (2013) discussed how the structure and organization in families influence children. They proposed a three-dimensional model of gatekeeping that outlined control, encouragement, and discouragement as the core dynamics of gatekeeping. Their study found that although there are many circumstances where the mother initiated gatekeeping, there are situations where mothers use gatekeeping to encourage involvement. Their investigation also found that gatekeeping can also be reciprocal when the father rejects invitations by the mother to be involved (Puhlman & Pasley, 2013). This can lead to a reduction in invites, which in turn can lead to less father involvement (Holmes et al., 2013).

In their study on the relationship between maternal gatekeeping and paternal competence, Fagan and Cherson (2015) focused on the boundaries of systems theory, which are to protect the autonomy of the family and its subsystems. They reported that mothers have influence over the father's level of involvement when together and when separated. Even in divorce, maternal support was a key factor in the degree to which fathers participate in coparenting interaction (Fagan & Cherson, 2015). As a result, researchers often concluded that some mothers apply substantial influence over fathers by limiting their involvement with children (Fagan & Cherson, 2015; Puhlman & Pasley, 2013). In their quantitative study, Schoppe-Sullivan et al. (2015) identified this behavior as gate closing and affirmed that it was more likely to occur in situations of separation or

divorce. As with the qualitative studies on this topic, these researchers strongly associated maternal gatekeeping with expectations and psychological functioning of the mother rather than with maternal traditional gender attitudes (Austin et al., 2013). This signified the idea that mothers possibly served as a deterrent to father engagement especially when the coparenting relationship is poor (Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2015). Fathers commonly believed this issue was perpetuated by a child welfare and support system that was biased towards and favors women (Threlfall & Kohl, 2015). Therefore, as this study used family systems theory, it was important to understand from the father's perspectives the primary conditions under which gatekeeping occurred and how fathers could become educated and equipped to help reduce the parental conflict which leads to and encourages gatekeeping (Holmes et al., 2013). Since fathers were reported to receive education about their rights and responsibilities from fatherhood programs, it was important for this study to explore their views about the effects of coparenting interventions (Threlfall & Kohl, 2015).

Fatherhood Programs

With the increase in father absence issues in the United States and its effect on society, new initiatives rapidly developed over the last few decades to combat this documented social issue (Fagan & Kaufman, 2015). There was an emergence of fatherhood programs. These programs are known to instruct, mentor, and support men in becoming better fathers. According to Threlfall and Kohl (2015), approximately \$300 million has been devoted to Responsible Fatherhood (RF) grants with the broader aim of encouraging healthy marriage and responsible parenting. The investment was remarkably

greater for low-income men (Threlfall & Kohl, 2015). Wilson et al. (2016) reported that such programs strengthened the parenting abilities of fathers. As fathers actively participated in these forms of education programs, it produced a positive impact on child development, behavior, and outcomes (Glynn & Dale, 2015). The welfare of children was even more enhanced when both parents participate in parenting programs (Glynn & Dale, 2015). According to Bronte-Tinkew et al. (2014), some fatherhood programs were evaluated for their usefulness and successes in addition to attempting to understand what was beneficial and what was not. There was evident that as fathers actively participate in these forms of education programs, it produced a positive impact on child development, behavior, and outcomes (Glynn & Dale, 2015). Participants in this present study contributed to the study's findings by attesting to their knowledge and experience with these programs. They also provided insight into their needs and what fatherhood programs offered or should offer to assist them.

While fatherhood programs exist, participation and completion rates are either inconsistent or as low as 20% according to Soderstrom and Skarderud (2013). In their research on engagement for low-income families, Lechowicz et al. (2018) reported that low participation was a primary issue for married and single fathers. From their review of a study by Cowan, Cowan, Pruett, Pruett, and Wong from 2009, Soderstrom and Skarderud (2013) found that the median attendance (67%) for their 16-week group meetings was higher than expected primarily due to better relationships between the parents. Other numbers relating to the range of attendance were lower: 9% of the fathers

attended every meeting (32 hours); 40% attended more than 25 hours, 67% more than 19 hours, and 81% more than 13 hours (Soderstrom & Skarderud, 2013).

Glynn and Dale (2015) reported that the primary issues that influenced participation were the qualities of the leader, the program content, and the organizational philosophy. A study by Bronte-Tinkew et al. (2014) found that staff expertise impacts the outcomes of some programs. In their research on a local fatherhood program, Frank, Keown, and Sanders (2015) addressed several areas of consideration about the participation of fathers in programs. One of the primary barriers cited by fathers in the study was a lack of awareness that programs existed or what they encompassed (Frank, Keown, & Sanders, 2015). Fathers reported that they would participate in programs if they knew they existed. A study by Lechowicz et al. (2018) found that the best way to make fathers aware of these programs and improve recruitment was by word of mouth from fathers who participated in the programs. Other studies reported economic stress and family conflict as deterrents to participation in parenting interventions (Threlfall & Kohl, 2015; Wong et al., 2013). Implications from the study by Wong et al. (2013) asserted that future studies should find effective ways to recruit fathers by engaging fathers in research to give attention to the context in which endorse and articulate the paternal role. Other reported implications were in regards to understanding outcomes for fathers who engage in programs (Glynn & Dale, 2015).

I found few studies that focused on the evaluating the outcomes of fatherhood programs (Threlfall & Kohl, 2015; Wilson et al., 2016). According to Bronte-Tinkew et al. (2014), while there was an increase in programs that focused on the betterment of

fathers, there remained limited information on the effectiveness of these programs and what worked for them. Additionally, the few programs that were assessed were primarily based on child outcomes as opposed to father outcomes (Cowan et al., 2010). Possible father outcomes would be enrollment, participation, completion, and impact/results. Furthermore, in researching this aspect of fatherhood programs, I was unable to locate literature that explored completion rates as well as success and failure rates when fathers attend programs. Several studies focused on recruitment and the desire to increase fathers' engagement in the programs (Stahlschmidt, Threlfall, Seay, Lewis, & Kohl, 2013; Wilson et al., 2016) while others focused on outcomes of parenting skills (Caldwell, Rafferty, Reischl, De Loney, & Brooks, 2010). This deficiency of literature confirms a need for this present study.

Outcomes of Fatherhood Programs

The current review of literature found minimal results on outcomes of fatherhood programs. However, several articles focused on interventions provided for married couples, coparents, and fathers (Cowan et al., 2010; Mchale, Waller, & Pearson, 2012; Panter-Brick et al., 2014). The study conducted by Mchale et al. (2012) confirmed that father participation in structured interventions was profoundly affected by the parental relationship. When parents had a working relationship, fathers were more likely to participate in the intervention (Mchale et al., 2012). Once the obstacle of getting the father to participate was resolved, both parents engaged in the mediation process. The result was an improvement in parent-child contact as well as increases in child support

payments. This study did not indicate how the results of father participation in fatherhood programs compared to coparenting programs.

Similarly, Cowan et al. (2010) demonstrated similar coparenting outcomes in their study, which benefitted from implementing a joint program for fathers and mothers. On the other hand, they cited the unanswered questions concerning interventions explicitly designed for fathers as a limitation of the study. Lastly, Pruett et al. (2017) reported that many interventions focus on the mother and child even though are based on the coparenting relationship. They confirmed that these interventions could work against father inclusion. One factor reported as important for future research was focusing on engaging fathers by focusing on reach sustainability and scale-up (Pruett et al., 2017).

An opposing finding to the studies that focused on parenting interventions came from two articles that focused on outcomes in fatherhood programs. Julion, Breitenstein, and Waddell (2012) conducted a study on a videotaped fatherhood intervention, which focused on defining the problem within the target population, determining the conceptual framework for the proposed intervention, and determining delivery methods and dosage. These authors selected 12 African America fathers as part of the Fathers Advisory Council to help develop a fatherhood program in their community. The intervention employed community-based research seeking to engage community members in a Fathers' Advisory Council to help fathers overcome restrictions to involvement with their children (Julion et al., 2012). The study found that after fathers committed to participate in the meetings (as part of the criteria for participation), most only attended six of the twelve sessions (Julion et al., 2012). Four (33%) attended 1-3 meetings, three (25%)

attended 4-6 meetings, and only five (42%) attended more than 6 meetings (Julion et al., 2012). The researchers reported that the primary reasons for non-attendance were different work and school schedules and child-related commitments. The fathers provided insight on the format, length of sessions, duration of the program, and the use of practice or homework assignments. Their perspectives were based on what they believed would encourage fathers to engage in the program. The researchers affirmed that future research would examine the program for effectiveness however no further studies have been located from this research team.

The second investigation included a Fathers' Parenting Program (Tuning into Kids- TIK), which used a randomized control with 162 fathers with preschool children as the participants targeted paternal emotion-socialization practices related to children's social and emotional functioning and explored whether fathers showed parenting improvements following participation in a program previously geared towards mothers (Wilson et al., 2016). The study also used an intervention group and a waitlist control group who started after a 10-month delay (Wilson et al., 2016). Fathers were excluded from the study if they did not complete baseline data or could not attend one of the first two sessions (Wilson et al., 2016). The primary focus was not on African American fathers or fathers in urban U.S. cities. It did, however, consist of well-educated and middle-to high-income fathers (Wilson et al., 2016). As a result, reported outcomes might not be generalizable to less educated or lower-income populations (Wilson et al., 2016).

This study briefly presented some of its attendance findings and completion rates for participants in the intervention group. There was one reported dropout from this group

after the first session (Wilson et al., 2016). The researchers indicated that all participants did not make every session and those who missed sessions with notification were provided materials from the session via email. Those participants who missed a session without prior notifications were offered a ‘catch-up’ consultation call by their group leader (Wilson et al., 2016). The attendance report stated that 38 fathers (43.7%) attended all seven of the program sessions, 24 fathers (27.6%) attended six sessions, 14 fathers (16.1%) attended five, 7 fathers (8.0%) attended four, and 3 fathers (3.4%) attended three sessions. The overall findings indicated that fathers who attended the ‘Tuning In’ reported improvements on some outcomes compared to those in the waitlist control condition (Wilson et al., 2016). Additionally, the study proved that skills taught in father-targeted programs ultimately lead to improved child outcomes. While some fathers completed the program, the study did not state what led to the commitment from fathers to start and finish the program. The researchers indicated that future research should investigate programming with fathers from disadvantaged communities or those with known risk factors.

Summary and Conclusion

Research proved the detrimental effects of father absence on children and single mothers (Coates & Phares, 2014; Stack et al., 2017). More recent studies turned attention to how fathers were impacted by economic stress, depression, and loss of time with children (Caldwell et al., 2013; Hunt, Caldwell, & Assari, 2015; Troilo & Coleman, 2013). Although there was much information about the effects of fatherlessness on children and families, it was necessary to gather new information based on the fathers’

experiences as participants in fatherhood and parenting education programs. In addition, the role these experiences had on their willingness to complete programs and their ability to be present and remain engaged in the upbringing of their children was also critical. Various studies did not account for the program outcomes and insights of fathers who participated in these programs (Fagan & Cabrera, 2012; Gillette & Gudmunson, 2013). However, new research had recently begun to build studies around fathers as the participants (Bar-On & Scharf, 2016; Herland et al., 2015). This study helped to fill such gaps in research by directly sanctioning fathers to provide an understanding of their participation in fatherhood programs, the outcomes of their participation, and involvement after that.

It is evident that father absence is a major social issue within our society today. More specifically, Gillette and Gudmunson (2014) reported that this issue is more prevalent in African American families with two-thirds of African American children growing up in homes led by single mothers. As a result of this finding, this study intended to focus on African American fathers who were still under-involved with their children even after participating in a parenting education program. Studies determined that the level of involvement of a father could be impacted by multiple factors (Castillo & Sarver, 2012; Xue, He, Chua, Wang, & Shorey, 2018). Some research affirmed that a father will be less likely to participate in the life of his child if he lacks the motivation to do so, possesses little confidence in his role as parent, feels no social support, or is overwhelmed by external matters such as unemployment and lack of stable residency (Tsai, O'Toole, & Kearney, 2017). Additional factors, which were considered, were the

relationship between the parents and the father's psychological well-being (Xue et al., 2018).

This review of literature identified five key areas that need further exploration as it pertained to the experiences of African American fathers. While studies began to consider the views of fathers in determining the impact of poor involvement, this study explored the perspectives of fathers to determine how their experiences with fatherhood programs led to the behaviors they exhibit in their roles after participation. With these areas highlighted, the study produced insight into how this group of fathers was directly impacted within each area, what needs they possessed, and what would help them become more involved. The study also provided empowerment to participants by allowing them to know that their voice was important. As their needs are considered, they can begin to present a more proactive role in terms self-advocacy and working with the family court system.

This literature review provided evidence of significant factors related to father involvement. There appeared to be a shortage of information giving insight as to why African American fathers represent the greatest population for lack of involvement (Gillette & Gudmunson, 2013). Other authors identified the reasons as diverse and complex possibly due to the shift in the structure of family (Gonzalez, Jones, & Parent, 2014). This study filled the gap in literature by providing information relative to how African American fathers report the experiences they encounter as participants of fatherhood programs and the impact on their attendance to their children. The chosen research methodology was hermeneutic phenomenology, as it was used to highlight the

lived experiences of fathers while considering the dynamics of the family system. A detailed plan for the proposed study, including the choice of hermeneutic phenomenology as a methodological approach to understand the lived experiences of fathers, is discussed in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the qualitative methodology that I used to gather and analyze data for this study. This analysis implemented a qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological research method. In research, a phenomenon is any problem, dispute, or issue that originates in the practical world of affairs, a theoretical discipline, or personal experience and is chosen as the subject of an inquiry (Van de Ven, 2016). Phenomenology is a theoretical perspective that advocates studying individuals' experiences as human behavior is determined by experiential phenomena not an objective, the described reality that is external to the individual (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). The purpose of this phenomenological study was to survey the lived experiences of men who have participated in fatherhood programs yet were still considered to be under-involved with their children.

Phenomenological research offers a range of research methods for the investigator. This chapter provides justification and rationalization for the chosen phenomenological research approach. Additionally, it describes the research design and presents a description of my role and responsibilities as the researcher within the study. I discuss the sampling strategy, which included the sample size and the data collection procedures, as well as the data collection site and an explanation of the methods that were used to collect and analyze the data. I conclude the chapter with a discussion regarding the quality and dependability of the data, maintaining the confidentiality of participants, and any ethical concerns that developed during the study.

Research Design and Rationale

The following research question guided this study:

1. How have the lived experiences of noncustodial African-American fathers who participated in fatherhood programs influenced their lack of involvement and engagement in the lives of their children?

Phenomenology

A principal goal of scientific research is to uncover laws and suggest theories that can explain natural or social phenomena to build scientific knowledge (Bhattacharjee, 2012). Englander (2016) affirmed that phenomenological studies help researchers achieve this goal by identifying and describing the commonalities based on the lived experiences of several individuals. According to Englander (2012), the leading standard in determining what research method will be used is the initial research question. The research question for this study focused on the experiences of noncustodial African American fathers who remained uninvolved with their children after participating in parenting education programs.

Historically, phenomenology is a traditional philosophical approach, which was first applied to social science by Husserl (Giorgi, 2015). Phenomenology allows a researcher to analyze how their participants describe and experience a phenomenon to develop a description of the experience for all individuals (Muth & Walker, 2013). Therefore, a research design must be supported by a consistent and quality approach in order to be presented as a unique and complex study, which can be appropriately assessed (Roller & Lavrakas, 2018).

According to Alvarez (2018), a deep understanding of an organism comes from examining how the organism's interpretation of their experience governs their behavior. For this investigation, analyzing the lived experiences of fathers who by definition were established as absent or uninvolved after having participated in fatherhood programs, a phenomenological based approach was appropriate. Bawa and Watson (2017) claimed that phenomenology permits investigators to collect information based on the lived world experiences of other individuals. As the investigator reflects on the views and experiences of participants, they can then describe and explain the classifications, developments, conditions, and actions for a particular phenomenon (Hays & Wood, 2011).

According to Willis, Sullivan-Bolyai, Knafl, and Cohen (2016), phenomenological studies provide meaning for cooperative associations dwelling within the experiences of participants related to phenomena in its social and historical contexts. The use of this method allowed me to present an unbiased perspective of the participants' real-world experiences (Sousa, 2014). While limited father engagement exists, the reasons why men remain uninvolved with their children even after participating in education programs remained underresearched. Therefore, this phenomenological approach obtained the perspectives of fathers by illuminating the problem and discovering new information. Ultimately, phenomenology was advantageous due to the ability to minimize researcher bias and building relationships (Hays & Wood, 2011). Furthermore, this approach was beneficial in allowing me to provide new assumptions on the phenomenon and bracket those assumptions (Hays & Wood, 2011).

Hermeneutics Phenomenology

According to Tavallaei and Talib (2010), Moustakas split phenomenology into two major approaches: empirical transcendental or psychological phenomenology and hermeneutics phenomenology. Transcendental phenomenology (descriptive), which is Husserl's phenomenology, was proposed to produce pure awareness and therefore temporarily abandons any presumptions (Tavallaei & Talib, 2010). Hermeneutics phenomenology, which was introduced by Heidegger and developed by Van Manen is described as concentrating on the lived experience, to interpret the stories of life (Tavallaei & Talib, 2010). Therefore, in this research method, the interviewees were trying to understand their world while I tried to make sense of the interviewee trying to comprehend their world (Nelson, Onwuegbuzie, Wines, & Frels, 2013).

Sloan and Bowe (2014) affirmed that hermeneutics provides a theoretical framework for interpretation and understanding experiences. Therefore, a researcher applying hermeneutic phenomenology is required to examine the text, reflect on the shared content to discover something *telling*, *meaningful*, and *thematic* (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). This process allows the investigator to uncover separated phenomenal themes and rewrite the theme while interpreting the meaning of the lived experience (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). In their article describing the historical contexts of hermeneutics, Sloan and Bowe found that hermeneutic phenomenology best describes the experiences of individuals and gives the best opportunity to give voice to those experiences.

Through hermeneutics phenomenology, I investigated the experiences fathers had as participants in parenting programs. The inquiry sought to discover how they believed

their involvement in these programs affected their willingness and ability to be involved with their children at the conclusion of the program. This approach also gauged the motivations behind the fathers' lack of involvement. Hermeneutics was also appropriate for this study on father engagement because it allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of fathers' experiences while they were engaged in fatherhood programs. It also allowed me to collect and interpret data as well as the construction of a description of the experiences (see Aagaard, 2017).

Role of the Researcher

The primary role I maintained at the onset of the study was to select a methodology that allowed me to achieve my research goals (see Kumar, 2012). Beyond this, I served as the central instrument in data collection and interpretation in this qualitative research (see Stewart, 2010; Xu & Storr, 2012). As the primary researcher and instrument in this qualitative study, I retained consciousness of the predispositions, assumptions, and beliefs I might have brought to the research setting (see Peredaryenko & Krauss, 2013). Understanding those tendencies and biases were essential, as this study included unstructured qualitative interviews. Stewart (2010) affirmed this reflexivity as an ongoing consideration of what was known, how it was known, and how the researcher responds to participants. Essentially, it retained researcher reliability by focusing on the choices and decisions that were made during the research procedures (Fusch & Ness, 2017). Therefore, this awareness was necessary for understanding my ability to impact the collection of empirical data and avoid threatening the trustworthiness of the research (Pezalla, Pettigrew, & Miller-Day, 2012).

Disclosure from the participants served as the description of their experience of the phenomenon. To prevent bias and overanalyzing of data, a third-party consultant was employed to review themes and codes to determine the quality and effectiveness of transcript evaluation (see Turner, 2010). According to Chenail (2011), without humility, proper preparation, and reflexivity, the researcher as the instrument serves as the ultimate threat to the fidelity and trustworthiness of qualitative research. Furthermore, without rigor and bias management, these challenges endanger the quality of the study (Chenail, 2011). While it was essential to understand the study from the perspective of participants, it was also important to maintain proper boundaries about subjectivity and objectivity (Peredaryenko & Krauss, 2013). Reflexivity as a technique helped to keep this balance in avoiding bias (Peredaryenko & Krauss, 2013). One method of implementing reflexivity was by using reflective writing or reflective journaling to maintain a boundary between the observed phenomenon and subjectivity (Peredaryenko & Krauss, 2013). The implementation of these techniques helped to avoid bias and give true meaning to the reported experiences.

Reflective journaling allowed me to examine personal assumptions and belief systems about the topic (see Fusch & Ness, 2017). As the topic of fatherhood is one that is personal to me due to personal and professional experiences, the need to control for personal biases was critical. Practicing reflective journaling allowed me to visualize the thoughts I had towards the study and participant responses. Therefore, if my viewpoints or experiences were in danger of threatening the research, journaling permitted changes to be made to the research design, methods, and approaches (see Fusch & Ness, 2017).

One of the potential changes that could have resulted pertained to the interview protocol. As with any study, I needed to consider personal bias, judgment, and personal beliefs about the phenomenon (Bourke, 2014). Bias in research can occur for several reasons. Chenail (2011) suggested these reasons can include researcher mental uneasiness, poor preparation, or conducting inappropriate interviews. Pilot testing was a procedure that allowed me to test my methods and determine if they performed as expected (see Chenail, 2011). The pilot study was conducted by enlisting a small group of participants with similar criteria as the actual participants to partake in an abbreviated format of the study (see Chenail, 2011). As a result, any necessary adjustments were made based on the performance of the pilot.

Within the actual research data collection process, I also had additional responsibilities. For this study, I made connections to locate participants, established rapport with participants, and oversaw data collection and analysis procedures. Realizing that I was a part of the dominant culture in society, I also understood how variables such as my beliefs, political stance, and the cultural background could affect the research process (see Bourke, 2014). Therefore, it was imperative to establish trust with participants and recognize personal biases to avoid harm and creating further ostracism (Bourke, 2014). Furthermore, to maintain the integrity of the study, it was necessary to describe what was given in immediate experience without being, “obstructed by pre-conceptions and theoretical notions” (Kafle, 2011, p. 189).

My interest in researching this topic stemmed from my childhood that existed without the regular involvement of my father. He ultimately passed away when I was 19

years old. Growing up while having resentment for him, I vowed to be a better father than the one I had. As the youngest of my father's three children, I continue to experience the drawbacks resulting from his absence and wonder what caused him not to remain present. As a young adult, I eventually became a single father who was engaged in every aspect of my child's life despite the circumstances I had to endure. I never had to be encouraged to take care of my child. Instead, I have always been self-motivated. I previously attended a court-ordered parenting class for my daughter's mother as well as myself. This class was for the betterment of our parenting relationship as opposed to addressing the issue directly related to my being a father. I believe acknowledgment of these experiences was important when considering the experiences of the participants of this study. I also understood the potential conflicting information that might be shared by these participants.

I also previously worked in a fatherhood-parenting program for fathers who were court-ordered to attend and graduate the program to improve their situation with their children. Circumstances surrounding their admittance into the program included child support, visitation, absence, discipline, and the coparenting relationship. What I learned from my participation in this program was that some fathers were eager to participate, some were displeased that they needed to attend, and others lacked motivation and dropped out after the first few sessions. It was unclear why these men opted not to see the program through. However, other personal observations revealed facilitators who were not invested as they held side conversations during classes or were not always welcoming to these men who might have felt some level of vulnerability about having to attend such

a program. Other personal observations revealed men who were disinterested in learning how to improve their situations. These observations supported some of the findings of previous researchers who reported that some parenting programs do not adequately meet the needs of African American and minority fathers. These factors along with my experiences with fatherhood served as an inspiration to conduct this study. To avoid the bias that could have existed during this phase of data collection and analysis, self-reflection became an integral part of the process concerning recognizing my subjectivity (Peredaryenko & Krauss, 2013). I demonstrated the mindfulness to question the influence of my personal experiences and presumptions on my observations.

Two additional phenomenological reduction methods for addressing bias were the ideas of epoche and bracketing. The concept of doing the epoche meant I suspended personal beliefs and laid aside the natural attitude and assumptions that would otherwise arrest the lived experience explored through phenomenological research (Butler, 2016). Doing the epoche also involved me acquiring a new point of view (Yüksel & Yıldırım, 2015) and ridding myself of bracketed knowledge that would hinder the authenticity of the phenomenon (Bevan, 2014). Bracketing was also used to alleviate the possible adverse effects of silent preconceptions about the phenomenon (Tufford & Newman, 2012). Bracketing safeguarded me from the collective effects of material that could be emotionally challenging (Tufford & Newman, 2012). One way to assume phenomenological reduction and bracket when interviewing or interacting with participants was by avoiding questions and statements that were saturated in theory (Bevan, 2014). Committing to this process allowed me to remain accurate with recording

the experiential descriptions of the participants subsequently conserving a necessary level of validity (Bevan, 2014). Through the implementation of these steps, I separated myself from the forethoughts in order to gain unhindered knowledge from the participants.

Methodology

Participant Selection

The purpose of this study was to acquire a deep understanding of the experiences of fathers and how these experiences structured their involvement with their children. The participants for this study were uninvolved or underinvolved African-American fathers between the ages of 18-45, who participated in and completed a fatherhood program. Additional criteria included their relationship with their child or children being infrequent, irregular, or nonexistent. Uninvolved was defined as having minimal to no contact with their children, meaning they had no face to face interaction with their child within the past 6 months to a year. Furthermore, their interactions totaled no more than three to four connections in a year.

Participants were 9 African American men recruited from the Philadelphia metropolitan area. These individuals were selected based upon their attendance and involvement in fatherhood programs situated within their respective communities. To assure protection of confidentiality of the participants, their names and the names of the programs were not mentioned. The sample size was based upon qualitative inquiry, which uses small sample sizes. Considering that qualitative research designs seek an in-depth, rich understanding that participants have of a phenomenon, this methodology used

a small sample to focus on their experiences (Malterud et al., 2016). This focus on quality interviews with a smaller sample of participants added empirical rigor (see Hunt, 2011).

The use of purposeful sampling focused on obtaining participants who fit the sampling criteria age range of 18-45 years old. This age range was selected with the intent of acquiring a variety of individuals who had knowledge and awareness of the phenomenon (Palinkas et al., 2015). Previous studies on fathers also used purposeful sampling with ages ranging from 18-55 with median ages being 29 and 34 years old (Bryan, 2013; Jessee & Adamsons, 2018). Purposeful sampling is often used in qualitative research with limited resources to locate information-rich cases who have direct knowledge of or experience with the phenomenon (Palinkas et al., 2015). This indicates that the selection approach is deliberate as it seeks to have participants who have had the specific experience of the phenomenon the researcher is looking for (Englander, 2012). As with this study I desired to make sense of fathers' experiences in fatherhood programs, the participants were designated cautiously and provided a demonstrative illustration of the phenomenon (see Gentles, Charles, Ploeg, & McKibbin, 2015). Therefore, participants for this research study were purposefully selected using a homogeneous sampling strategy.

Sample Size

Qualitative research methods use small samples to obtain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon (Dworkin, 2012). While many research experts have varying perspectives on determining sample size, most agree that qualitative samples should be large enough to confirm that the majority of important perceptions are

disclosed to clarify the specifics (Malterud et al., 2016). Samples sizes that are unfitting can be repetitive if they are too large while those that are too small can leave questionable findings (Suri, 2011). While there are no particular guidelines for sample sizes, all chosen sample sizes should be large enough to capture an assortment of experiences but small enough to avoid repetition (see O'reilly & Parker, 2013).

Choosing a reduced number of interpretations aids in verifying the appropriateness of a sampling strategy (Griffith, 2013). This holds if the smaller samples are truly in-depth (Dworkin, 2012). Homogeneous samples help to describe a subgroup in depth (Suri, 2011). Patton recommends purposeful sampling as it gives the researcher flexibility to construct a larger or smaller sample if necessary (Griffith, 2013).

Ultimately, smaller purposeful sampling will be successful if the investigator identifies sampling strategies, which speak to the synthesis purpose efficiently, appropriately, and ethically (Suri, 2011). For this study, I sought a sample size of eight to ten individuals.

Accessing Participants

Participants were recruited from various community organizations including fatherhood programs, community centers, barbershops, and churches located in the Philadelphia, Pennsylvania area. If more participants needed to be recruited, they would also have been recruited from an additional metropolitan area. Fatherhood programs, community centers, and churches offer an array of programming, services, and activities that are catered towards the needs of African American males from the community for varying means. Barbershops in urban areas are also a commonplace that solicits the business of men.

To recruit at these businesses, I met with program directors, church clergy, and the barbershop owners from each site. Information on the study was provided to them along with the manner in which the collected data would be used after the interviews. Additionally, I explained to them how the study could potentially benefit the community. In return, I sought written proof and permission for their approval to promote the study at their organizations and places of business. Once permission was granted, I provided each establishment with the informational letters and flyers for the study to post on their bulletin and information boards. My contact information for the study was also provided on the literature to allow potential participants to contact me to set initial interviews to determine if they met the criteria as listed in the following section.

African American Fathers

For this study, the research population was comprised of African American males over the age of eighteen at the time of their child's birth and no older than 45 years old. They were unmarried, a nonresidential biological father, and responsible for the care of at least one biological child. They also had residency in an urban community in the Philadelphia metropolitan area. The fathers previously participated in a fatherhood program via court order or voluntarily within the last five years for at least six weeks or six sessions depending on the organization of the program. This timeline was chosen to assure that the participant attended at least half of the sessions in the program considering many fatherhood programs consisted of at least 8-12 sessions (Cowan et al., 2010) and could also provide specific details related to their experiences. This also guaranteed that

the father granted himself the opportunity to engage in the coursework before stepping away from the program.

Additionally, they were classified as under or uninvolved by the study's defining criteria. To be considered uninvolved, they demonstrated minimal to no contact with their child by not seeing their child or sporadically interacting with them for six months or longer with no more than 3-4 contacts in a year. Those who met these requirements progressed on to the interview phase of the research process.

Program Attendance

The participants were selected based upon attendance to and involvement in programs situated in urban communities. To qualify as a program attendee, participants needed to be officially enrolled in a fatherhood or parenting program and attended the program a minimum of six weeks or half of the program's sessions.

Involvement

For the purpose of this study, an under or uninvolved father was defined as a nonresidential biological caregiver who was primarily physically absent from their child(ren) without incarceration, court orders, or other involuntary reasons serving as factors. Participants were selected on the basis of being permanent residents outside of the child's physical home.

Instrumentation

During the study, participants participated in a semistructured interview to explore their experiences as members of their respective parenting programs and their involvement after that. Interviewing is one of the most prevalent forms of qualitative data

collection when studying phenomenon because it gathers the meaning of the participant's experience within a phenomenon and while producing understanding (Anyan, 2013). I developed and posed general questions to obtain their experiences and backgrounds to gather data, which led to textural and structural descriptions. Participants were asked to engage in a discussion about their experiences before, during, and after participation in the fatherhood programs. The information collected during the interviews led to an in-depth understanding of their experiences as fathers before and after attending the programs. Interviewing also intended to enhance rapport building and trust by clarifying my role as the researcher, as well as my experiences with the phenomenon. Additionally, creating a comfortable environment where the participants did not feel constrained or uncomfortable led to more productive interviews where the participants were willing to share information (Turner III, 2010).

For this study, the interview was scheduled with open-ended questions, which were flexible in their ordering and relevant to the research topic (Madill, 2011). These questions were designed to produce the most relevant information for this study by examining their experiences as consumers of the fatherhood programs (see Appendix A). The use of the semistructured interview permitted the implementation of additional open-ended questions that further investigated the topic based on participant responses. Questions were developed based upon previously reviewed father engagement literature and discussing the study with other experts (Coakley, 2013; Doyle et al., 2014). Participants were interviewed on an individual basis.

Data Collection Techniques

Participants had the opportunity to contact me via phone and email in response to the recruitment flyers, which were placed on information boards and areas of the recruitment establishments. Volunteers were verified for meeting the inclusion criteria during the initial phone or email contact. Thereafter, they were scheduled for a face-to-face meeting to receive information for the study and all data collection procedures to assure awareness of the process and involved steps. At that time, a consent form was provided for participants to accept the confidential nature of the study, their input, and the right to withdraw at any given time. Once consent was given, participants completed a brief demographic form during this meeting. Thereafter, they met with me for the semi-structured interview and to review the results. Confidentiality was ensured before beginning the interview process, through the use of pseudonyms for each participant.

I chose the face-to-face interview as my strategy of data collection due to its effectiveness and reliability in obtaining information directly from the individual while taking into account the revelation of the individual's story based on their experiences. Face-to-face interviews also helped build trust and rapport (Nandi & Platt, 2017). These factors were a result of me listening and endeavoring to make participants feel comfortable and able to disclose their experiences (Miller, 2017). Ultimately, it was necessary to demonstrate empathic responding, multicultural awareness, knowledge, and reflexivity among other skills as the researcher in order to obtain successful interviews (Nelson et al., 2013).

Face-to-face interviews took place in a setting that had minimal distractions (see Turner, 2010). For my study, this was in the quiet room of a church or the participant's home to maintain confidentiality and privacy. I conducted one to two interviews per week based upon the participants' availability. Additionally, while doing interviews, researchers have a responsibility to collect, analyze and report data without compromising the identities of their respondents (Kafle, 2011). To ensure confidentiality of the data and participants, neither their names nor the names of their affiliated agencies were used. Instead, pseudonyms were used to avoid identification.

Upon completion of the interviews, I transcribed the recordings verbatim and analyzed the data as summarized in the Data Analysis section. The transcripts were evaluated to distinguish common themes. Thereafter, I arranged an additional interview to implement member checking to appraise and validate themes. Upon completion of this follow-up interview, participants received a \$25 gift card as a "Thank You" for their contribution to the study.

The interview process for this data collection utilized an interview protocol. An interview protocol is designed to create a 'trial' version of what will be said before the interview and at the conclusion of the interview (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). It also provides prompts for collecting informed consent and reminders to remind the interviewer of the information that she or he is interested in collecting (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). The interview protocol was comprised of three background questions for the participants and six to eight open-ended interview questions designed around the research questions. This method was chosen due to its ability to use appropriate

questioning in probing into the participants' experiences. This made the data collection procedure appropriate for the study with the fathers' perspectives.

Data Management and Analysis Techniques

This qualitative study used an inductive approach to help construct a theory. Induction was appropriate for phenomenological research because it allowed the essential elements to materialize from the patterns, which were uncovered through the cases in the study (Tavallaei & Talib, 2010). This type of analysis employed specific foundational sources, which included documentation, observations, and records (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013). The inductive analysis allowed me to become immersed in the data and move through a process of discovery of the inquired topic thus discovering important patterns, themes, and interrelationships (El Hussein, Hirst, Salyers, & Osuji, 2014). Accordingly, other data analysis strategies such as iterative classification were implemented to help support this approach. Iterative categorization is a systematic technique for managing analysis that is compatible with analytical induction (Neale, 2016). Ideally, reflexivity was a part of the analysis process as it allowed me to use empathy and relevant prior experience to analyze data and interpret meanings (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). From each transcript, new documents containing 'hermeneutic reductions' represented findings for each participant emerged (Sloan & Bowe, 2014).

As the participants were interviewed and provided responses, field notes were taken. Taking notes is a strategy, which is encouraged for reflection and analysis purposes (Fleck, Hudson, Abbott, & Reisbig, 2013). Note taking for this study was done by hand and recorded with an appropriate audio device. This recorder was useful in

providing a reliable means of storing, labeling, and time stamping each interview.

Another strategy was identifying codes and comparing data. Coding was important and appropriate as it was essential to the process of reducing data into meaningful segments (Neale, 2016). Codes were applied to chunks of interview data after the information was read carefully and reflected on for its core meaning (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). These reoccurring patterns were further clustered into smaller pattern codes and themes. This strategy was appropriate as it provided analytic meanings for assertions.

The final strategy of comparisons was the comparison and contrasting of the data. Woods, Paulus, Atkins, and Macklin (2016) upheld the appropriateness of these strategies for data analysis and representation in phenomenology. Collectively, data collection measures resulted in copious notes and transcripts for me to evaluate. Data collection was essential as participants shared their thoughts on their predicaments, needs, expectations, experiences, and understandings as partakers in the respective programs (Anyan, 2013).

Other forms of data management and analysis were lent to the use of software programs. The use of qualitative data analysis software simplified storage, coding, comparing, recovering material, and linking information (Woods et al., 2016). Computer-based software was advantageous for protecting data, organizing handwritten information in digital format, and assisting with coding information. The interviews were transcribed verbatim with Microsoft Word. This strategy was appropriate as it provided analytic meanings for assertions.

The general analysis process for a qualitative study consists of three main phases: preparation, organizing and reporting (Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013). After all

the interviews were transcribed, I saved and organized each in a protected file. A number system was implemented along with pseudonyms to substitute the participants' names to further establish confidentiality. The process of identifying common factors between the participants' reports began after I carefully read all the interviews. This phenomenological study implemented Colaizzi's (1978) method for data analysis. Colaizzi's (1978) method calls for validation of results by returning to participants of the study (Chan, Fung, & Chien, 2013). This process helped to confirm that participants' experience was correctly interpreted and determine if their responses to any questions needed to be corrected (Chan, Fung, & Chien, 2013). It also guaranteed that the researcher took measures to avoid misinterpreting the data. Colaizzi's (1978) methodology included a total of eight steps.

Step 1: Transcription

I appraised all field notes, recordings, and transcripts from the interviews several times to gain an initial understanding of the participants' experiences and insights related to participating in fatherhood programs (Shosha, 2012). This stage afforded me the opportunity to engage in the data with meaning while coding the opinions, feelings, and ideas that arose from the participants.

Step 2: Extraction

The second phase presented the opportunity to extract noteworthy phrases from each transcript to gain more in-depth focus on the data (Shosha, 2012). Findings from these statements were recorded on a separate sheet.

Step 3: Creation of Formulated Meanings

Upon reviewing the interviews a second time, meanings were then formulated from these statements and coded in categories that reflected exhaustive descriptions (Shosha, 2012). Thereafter, commonalities were documented.

Step 4: Aggregation and Theme Development

This stage lent itself to organizing formulated meanings into similar groups of themed clusters (Abalos, Rivera, Locsin, & Schoenhofer, 2016). Each themed cluster was then coded to encompass all of the formulated meanings associated with that group of meanings. After that, groups of clusters that reflected a particular vision issue were incorporated together to form a distinctive construct.

Step 5: Exhaustive Description

An exhaustive description was developed based on the experiences communicated by the participants. This description was generated by way of a synthesis of the theme clusters and formulated meanings (Abalos et al., 2016).

Step 6: Interpretive Analysis

At this stage, I analyzed the data to articulate symbolic representations (Edward & Welch, 2011).

Step 7: Identifying the Structure

This stage produced an elimination of redundant descriptions that weakened the description (Shosha, 2012). Colaizzi (1978) suggested implementing a rigorous analysis of the exhaustive explanation of the phenomenon subsequently leading to the identification of the structure of the phenomenon (Abalos et al., 2016).

Step 8: Returning to Participants for Validation

This stage was of great importance, as it used member checking by making a return to the participants to validate their responses. At this stage, I scheduled a follow-up appointment with the participants and performed any adjustments based on their feedback (Abalos et al., 2016). Any additional information from the participants was also be added at this time.

Data Confidentiality

Confidentiality was important to the integrity of the study (Petrova, Dewing, & Camilleri, 2016). Therefore, all materials collected for the research study were kept confidential. Records included informed consent forms, surveys/questionnaires, notes, recordings, transcribed documents, and journals. Additional types of data management were lent to the use of software programs. The software was relied on more so for data management and interpretation procedures rather than analysis. Digital and electronic documents were stored on this researcher's password-protected computer and locked in storage devices to be kept for five years and only viewed by the researcher or anyone working on the study in a private setting until destroyed. While there are no formal rules for destruction, the data for this study will be destroyed when it is no longer needed for the purpose of the study. This information was disclosed during the initial interviews and be incorporated in the written agreement. Destruction of data will include shredding paper documents, deleting electronic files from computers and associated equipment, and destroying at a granular level if necessary.

Data Interpretation

Qualitative data interpretation or explaining findings to answer ‘why’ questions is a fundamental principle of research that begins with interpreting meanings (Leung, 2015). In this hermeneutic study, participant stories were examined based on the evidence stemming from interviews as the study was concerned with the understanding and interpretation of the phenomenon (Leung, 2015). Next, it cycled through the three steps of the hermeneutic circle: naïve reading, structural analysis, and comprehensive understanding or interpreted whole (Holm & Dreyer, 2018). Each interview was worked exhaustively to understand how the participants made sense of their experiences (West, 2013). During the analysis and interpretation phase, reflexivity led to continual reflection of interpretations of my experience and the phenomenon to move beyond partiality and assure trustworthiness (Leung, 2015).

Verification of Trustworthiness/Authenticity

The trustworthiness of quality research is encompassed in credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and authenticity (Elo et al., 2014). To maintain trustworthiness and authenticity in a study, a stance of neutrality is required by the researcher (Coakley, 2013). Neutrality is not easy to attain; therefore research strategies for this study maintained freedom from personal biases, theoretical predispositions, and selective perception (Coakley, 2013). In this study, trustworthiness was scrutinized in every phase of the analysis process including preparation, organization, and reporting (Elo et al., 2014). Using member checking supported this idea.

In order to maintain trustworthiness and neutrality, I accurately depicted the fathers' perceptions about their experiences and as previously stated presented a comfortable interview process. I conducted and recorded all of the interviews and transcribed them verbatim. All themes that emerged were included to ensure variability of data, even if the theme came from the report from only one father. My personal bias was kept to a minimum by adhering to the interview guide, using reflection journals, pilot testing, member checking, and using a third-party consultant before and during the official research process.

Establishing Credibility and Reliability

Member checking is a qualitative procedure that helps demonstrate credibility by avoiding traps via soliciting participants' views of findings and interpretations (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016). That is, it allows the participants the opportunity to affirm whether or not the analysis is consistent with their experiences (Birt et al., 2016). In this study, participants were able to observe the categories that developed from the data and transcripts of narratives made by the researcher. Where necessary, individuals were able to edit, elaborate, clarify, and remove their words from narratives. Providing participants with my interpretations of the narratives verified plausibility (Birt et al., 2016).

In order to accomplish trustworthiness through credibility and reliability, I only used proven techniques with sustained engagement in the field. Evidence that supported my observations, understandings, and suppositions was presented. Just as important, I maintained ethical validation and substantive validation. With that, my interactions with

participants was in their best interest to avoid being led by any personal biases or fulfilling any personal motives. I also routinely questioned my moral assumptions as well as political and ethical viewpoints. Other validation strategies included clarifying my biases through reflection and reflexivity in addition to external audits. Reliability was addressed through the use of proper instruments, detailed field notes, and intercoder agreement.

Additional Ethical Procedures

Solicitation of participants for studies bears a responsibility to consider ethical issues when handling confidential information. Foremost, affiliations like the American Psychological Association and Institutional Review Boards condemn deceitful and covert research practices and other procedures that do not protect human subjects (Bhattacharjee, 2012; Warrell & Jacobsen, 2014). Participants of this study were provided with details about the purpose and procedures of this study, which were approved by the institutional review board (IRB). Those who chose to contribute were provided with a form of consent outlining these details, the purpose and use of disclosed information, and how their confidentiality would be protected. Beyond these steps, volunteers were assured that they had the right to discontinue participating at any given time. Should the need have risen for outside counseling due to the individuals' participation, I previously obtained advance agreement to have information available for counseling services at several local agencies to support them.

Each aspect of this research study was conducted objectively and scientifically to decrease judgment and biases. I ensured that all participants and their views remained

private. I refrained from using the names of participants in documentation except for informed consent. Any written or verbal information surrendered to the researcher, or any assistants remained confidential, properly stored, within the confines of the study, until appropriately discarded. Additionally, undisclosed information that was necessary for a client was requested from them privately. The final ethical consideration related to ethical guidelines for the American Psychological Association and American Counseling Association. All statutes of these organizations were respected and obeyed with regards to solicitation of participants, use of technology, confidential information, and maintaining discretion.

Summary of Research Design

The research design practice is much dependent upon the researcher's ability to understand the topic, facilitate interaction with participants, and share rich data regarding their experiences (Chenail, 2011). Therefore, the research methodology is built upon the procedures implemented by the researcher (Chenail, 2011). As the evaluator, I carefully scrutinized my choices to ensure that my efforts were purposeful, appropriate, and ethical. Each step of this design maintained a rationale for the chosen strategies and methods. In the scope of a phenomenological study, I employed a hermeneutical approach to understanding the lived experiences of African American fathers who remained under-involved after participating in fathering programs. A sample of eight to ten African American fathers aged 18-45 was the chosen source to gather data based on their experiences as participants in fatherhood programs and their involvement thereafter.

The plan for this study was to use methods that were previously proven useful in studying father engagement.

I believe the chosen methodology was appropriate for this research study because it captured the essence of participants' lived experiences about their participation in fatherhood programs and the impact on their involvement. The study gauged their thoughts and feelings about the value of the programs, impact on their parenting skillset, satisfaction with the programs, as well as perceptions about their closeness to their children. The information that was disclosed by them was coded into themes while using member checking as a part of the process of ensuring credibility. Ideally, the methods for this study were appropriate, as they were used in other studies on fatherhood issues related to involvement and programs. The themes and findings from the participant interviews are outlined in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to gain understanding of the experiences of African American fathers who have participated in fatherhood programs but remained uninvolved with their children thereafter. I applied a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to collect the data. The conceptual framework used for the study was the family systems theory. To gather the data for this study, I conducted semistructured interviews from nine different participants. The study was shaped by the following research question:

1. How have the lived experiences of noncustodial African-American fathers aged 18-45 years old who participated in fatherhood programs influenced their lack of involvement and engagement in the lives of their children?

In this chapter, I present the discoveries from this phenomenological study. Data was produced for the study by obtaining participant demographics, conducting semi-structured interviews, creating transcripts, and coding for themes. Using hermeneutic phenomenology allowed the study to progress by illuminating details from participant experiences. Additionally, member checking was used to appraise and validate themes during data analysis. These approaches were applied to ensure credibility, transferability, dependability, conformability, and authenticity and are subsequently discussed. The chapter concludes with a detailed summary of the major outcomes pertaining to the research question.

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted for the purpose of checking for personal bias and establishing efficacy of the interview process and selected questions. Three fathers who did not qualify for the actual study due to age or ethnicity volunteered to participate in this process. These participants encountered the same protocol that the main study participants followed. When these individuals contacted me for participation in the study, it was determined that they did not meet all of the eligibility requirements as two were beyond the age range (46 and 49) and one was of Hispanic descent. I conducted the interviews at a scheduled time agreed upon with each participant. During the interviews, I implemented the same questions that were eventually used for the main study. The pilot study did not result in any suggested changes to the main study. The participants expressed their understanding of the study and its purpose and demonstrated their ability to effectively provide answers to the questions without any setbacks. Additionally, they declared that the study posed no obvious bias.

Research Setting

The research was primarily conducted using face-to-face interviews in the City of Philadelphia. Six participants agreed to hold their interviews in a living room or family room within their respective homes when no one else was present. Another participant completed his interview in a private classroom in his home church. Two participants who could not meet in person requested a phone interview and a video call. To ensure privacy and confidentiality, I requested that each of them choose a time when no one was home or would be present with them. Additionally, I clarified that no else was physically

present or able to see or hear me. Prior to the start of each interview, participants were given background information on the study, then completed and signed the informed consent form.

Participants Using Pseudonyms

Nick

Nick, a 42-year-old father with court appointed visitation rights has a 14-year-old daughter and 11-year-old son. He described his fatherhood experience as rewarding because he believed his relationship with his children was improving overall. However, his report confirmed that his involvement with his children remained inconsistent. Nick attended a fatherhood program due to court order, but also stated that he believed attending this program did not improve his involvement as it offered him no support with his situation.

Jerome

Jerome, age 42, has five children ranging from ages 6 to 19. Three of the children live near him and he spends time with them once or twice per year. He sees the other children who do not live in close proximity no more than once per year to once each year and a half. Jerome attributed his poor relationship with his children to strained relationships with their mothers and the children's residence. He also stated that he tries to avoid stress related to the coparenting relationships. He attended a fatherhood program after he was taken to court by one of his children's mothers and stated that the program was of no benefit to him.

Blake

Forty-four-year-old Blake has two biological children aged 8 and 11. He has a parenting agreement that was established through the courts but admitted that it is not consistently adhered. The agreement was established upon his request due to being unable to see his children after his divorce. Blake reported going as long as 6 months at a time without seeing his children. He chose to participate in a fatherhood program while working through his situation in family court and shared that the program had minimal impact on his involvement.

Reese

Reese, a 35-year-old father is the only father who was recently awarded legal custody and can be considered residential after previously not having consistent physical contact with his child. He attained guardianship of his 7-year-old daughter as a result of the mother relinquishing her rights after she relocated to another part of the country with a man she started dating. He was chosen as a part of the study as he shared why he was previously uninvolved and why he still recognizes himself as underinvolved. He also admitted that his daughter continues to spend months at a time with his mother and sister. He stated that he has a very busy life between work and other obligations. Although the mother relinquished her rights, his daughter is allowed to spend time with her when requested. Reese stated that years prior, the mother made it extremely difficult for him to see her as he would not see her 6 or more months at a time. He blamed his poor attendance and lack of fight for his daughter on his own passivity and unawareness.

Reese reported that his participation in a fatherhood program showed him shared experiences with others, but did not provide him with any tools to aid his involvement.

Wally

Wally is a married 42-year-old father with a 15-year-old son. Wally attended a fatherhood program upon the referral of a friend after experiencing extended periods of time without seeing his son and one occasion where he only saw him twice within a year. He believes that fatherhood programs try to help men stay active by giving ideas on how spending time with their children. However, he felt the program did not offer him any relevant assistance.

Lenny

A divorce several years ago led Lenny, aged 41 to become a nonresidential father to his 4-year-old daughter. He admitted to being very passive with his daughter's mother and not seeing his daughter for extended periods of time. Lenny eventually sought help from a father enrichment program. He attested that his participation in the program did not result in him spending more time with his daughter, but rather taught him how to better navigate their interactions.

William

At 41 years old, William has four children ages (19, 16, 14, and 11) with two different women. He described his fatherhood experience as *horrible* and not how he intended it to be. He confirmed that he does not see his children due to stress he endures from the mothers seeking revenge on him by leveraging the children. He stated that out of frustration and for his peace of mind, he chose to stop trying to see them and have distant

relationships with them until they are older. William stated his participation in a fatherhood program did not improve his situation, as he has not seen any of his children in over 2 years.

Carlton

Carlton age 44, attended a fatherhood program hoping to attain consistent time with his 13-year-old daughter and 10-year-old son after he and his wife divorced. He has biweekly visitation but explained that he does not see the children according to this schedule. While participating, he noticed the curriculum focused on what fathers could do to be better parents as opposed to how coparenting could be more amicable. He reported that he grew frustrated with the program and stopped attending after five sessions.

Roland

Roland is a 28-year old the nonresidential father of an 11-year-old daughter and 4-year-old twin boys. Roland was initially court ordered to attend a fatherhood program due to his lack of physical and financial involvement. He affirmed that during that period of his life, he was young and immature and could not handle the responsibilities of being a father. Roland stated that he attended fatherhood programs at two different time periods in his life and only benefited from the first program as it stressed the importance of being employed and staying out of jail. Presently, he still does not see his daughter more than twice per year.

Demographics

The recruitment efforts produced a total of nine men who qualified for the study. Table 1 highlights the demographic information of these men and residence status with

their children. All nine of the participants self-identified as African American in the age range of 28 to 44 years old having between one to five children. They all reported going six or more months without having face-to-face with their child(ren). They also specified if they had children with more than one woman and the nature of their relationship with their child's mother. Eight of the nine men did not presently live with their children while one recently obtained primary legal custody after he initially had no relationship with his child. He is now the legal guardian of his child due to the mother relinquishing her rights.

The participants' current visitation rights as awarded by the court are also depicted in Table 1. Three of the participants have biweekly visitation rights with their children. While they have the right to have their children at these times, their level of engagement was reported as going as far as 6-7 months and one to two times per year with seeing their children. Jerome was the only participant who has no court order in place. He reported that he sees three of his children once or twice per year and the others every year to year and a half. The remaining four participants are granted one weekend per month with their children. Wally reported seeing his son two times per year. The other three fathers confirmed seeing their children one to two times per year.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Name	Age	No. of Children	Residency Status with Children	Visitation Rights	Level of Engagement
Nick	42	2	Nonresident	Bi-weekly	6-7 months
Jerome	42	5	Nonresident	No order	1-2

					times/year
Blake	44	2	Nonresident	Bi-weekly	6 months
Reese	35	1	Part-time Resident	Legal custody	6-7 months
Wally	42	1	Nonresident	1 weekend/month	2 times/year
Lenny	41	1	Nonresident	1 weekend/month	1-2 times/year
William	41	4	Nonresident	1 weekend/month	2 years ago
Carlton	44	2	Nonresident	Bi-weekly	1-2 times/year
Roland	28	3	Nonresident	1 weekend/month	1-2 times/year

Table 2 outlines the type of programs attended and the nature of the fathers' attendance in the fatherhood programs. The reports of the men determined that none of them attended the same programs and the programs they attended were either community-based or religious based. Public offices in the city or other nonprofit organizations offered the community programs. Local churches provided the religious programs. Nick and Blake were the only fathers who attended the programs in a church. Nick's participation was mandatory as part of his court order. Blake chose to attend his program in search of assistance with his court proceedings. Both participants stated that they completed the program. When asked why they completed the program, they both stated that being in the program allowed them to feel as though they were not alone as others surrounded them with similar circumstances. Nick also confirmed that he knew in the back of his mind he should not quit since his attendance was mandatory.

Seven of the participants attended programs that were afforded to the local community. Three of the fathers (Jerome, Carlton, Roland) attended via court mandate. Carlton was the only one out the three who did not finish the program. He confirmed that

he grew frustrated with the program and as a result stopped attending. He stated, “I got absolutely nothing out of that program. I would not go back.” Jerome and Roland confirmed they finished the duration of their programs due to the court mandate.

The remaining four participants attended on a voluntary basis for support with their individual situations. William and Wally did not complete the programs. In his interview, William stated,

It just wasn't for me. It wasn't what I was looking for. I thought they would be able to tell me how to deal with the stress and work with the mothers, but it was just a lot of complaining and encouraging us to step our game up.

Wally reported that his termination from the program was connected to ongoing troubles he was having with his children's mother. He stated in his interview, “I just didn't care anymore. I was tired. She was getting on my nerves and I was wondering what I was fighting for.” These perspectives purported the notion from several of the participants that the outcomes were through no fault of their own.

Reese and Lenny were the two participants who completed the program. Both confirmed that they wanted to obtain all they could from their programs. Reese stated,

To be honest, I wanted to do better, and I still do, so that was the only reason I stuck with it. I don't believe it offered me anything that led to me doing more, but I also did not want to turn my back on my child.

Lenny attested to appreciating the insight his program provided on dealing with the ranging emotions his child might present and her overall development. He recounted, “It

did give me some tools to work with my daughter, but I can't say it showed me how to manage the stress I encounter dealing with her mother.”

Table 2

Nature of Program Participation

Name	Type of Program	Program Participation	Completed Program
Nick	Religious Based	Mandatory	Yes
Jerome	Community-Based	Mandatory	Yes
Blake	Religious Based	Voluntary	Yes
Reese	Community-Based	Voluntary	Yes
Wally	Community-Based	Voluntary	No
Lenny	Community-Based	Voluntary	Yes
William	Community-Based	Voluntary	No
Carlton	Community-Based	Mandatory	No
Roland	Community-Based	Mandatory	Yes

Data Collection Procedures

As the central instrument in the data collection and analysis process, I understood my responsibility to remain aware of any biases or assumptions I could bring to the research setting. Two steps I implemented to avoid this were using reflective journaling and consulting with a third-party to review themes and codes. Journaling allowed me to examine and suspend my personal assumptions and beliefs (epoche) while the consultation regulated the quality and effectiveness of my transcript evaluation.

Once contacted by potential participants, I made arrangements to have a prescreening via telephone and scheduled a date to review informed consent information and conduct the interview. During the prescreening call, all participants were deemed eligible based on the inclusion criteria. Callers who met the criteria arranged a meeting day and time to complete the interview at a location of their choice.

Prior to beginning each interview, I reviewed the background of the study, my motivation for conducting the research topic, and asked each participant to read and sign the informed consent form. This consent presented a written summary of the study, the IRB approval number, expiration date, IRB contact information and \$25 gift card provided as a thank you for their participation. Additionally, the consent form included the inclusion criteria, data collection procedures as well as the voluntary nature of the study risks and benefits. After participants confirmed they understood everything on the form and had no further questions, they signed a copy of the consent form for my records and received a copy to take with them.

I implemented seven face-to-face interviews, one phone interview, and one video call using semistructured interviews and questions I created for the study. The interview protocol also included follow-up probing questions to extricate more details based on the participants' responses. A copy of the interview questions is located in Appendix C. The times of the interviews lasted between 43 and 79 minutes, with an average time of 58 minutes. Face-to-face interviews were conducted in the participants' home or in a private room in a local church. Two interviews were conducted via telephone call and video call respectively. During all interviews, I remained attentive with active listening to provide support and comfort. I also offered participants the opportunity to break from questioning if needed. No participants required a break from the interviews. There were no significant interruptions or issues during completion of interviews. Participants were provided a thank you card and \$25 gift certificate after the interview in appreciation of their contributions.

The implementation of semistructured interviews and open-ended questions allowed participants to respond to the interview in a relaxed manner with transparent responses. A recurrence during many of the interviews was the participants answering later questions without me having to ask. Many of their responses were extensive and carried into the other questions. Another adjustment made during some interviews was reordering the questions as the responses dictated the flow of the interview. While the participants spoke, I also attended to body language, eye contact, voice tone, and changes in speech to determine any areas I needed to revisit at the end of the interview or during analysis. All of the participants provided deep detailed responses that demonstrated passion and in many cases, frustration in their disclosure as evidenced by word choices and changes in their tone. For example, eight of the nine participants used vituperative language when speaking of their children's mothers and sounded vulnerable at times when speaking of their children. The participants validated these findings when I acknowledged them. At the conclusion of each interview, the participants affirmed their willingness to discuss the results of the findings and confirm the accuracy of their responses.

To record the interviews, I used a digital recorder and a voice recording application to document each interview. Checking the recorder prior to the start of every interview assessed its proper functioning. I also informed the participants that I would be taking field notes as necessary to take account of nonverbal cues, specific responses, and additional questions during their interview. I later used these notes during analysis procedures and for clarification purposes during member checking. The recordings were

manually transcribed verbatim within 3-5 days of each interview and saved in a secure file in Microsoft Word. The recordings had to be played multiple times to assure accuracy in transcription.

Qualitative research demands that the researcher collect data until saturation occurs (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). Upon completion and review of the nine interviews, no new data was materializing as indicative of saturation, thus I withdrew the search for further participants. With this realization, I continued to follow the procedures outlined in Chapter 3 for analyzing the data.

Data Analysis

I conducted an inductive, phenomenological design along with iterative categorization to theorize the participants' experiences by allowing meaningful patterns and themes to emerge in response to the interview questions (El Hussein, Hirst, Salyers, & Osuji, 2014). Next, I identified common factors between the participants' reports by implementing Colaizzi's (1978) method for data analysis without the additional step of symbolic representation. This process included the following steps to benefit the development of themes:

Step 1: Transcription

This phase of analysis consisted of reviewing the field notes, digital recordings, and transcripts from the interviews several times to gain an understanding of the participants' experiences and perceptions based on the questions. At the transcription, broad concepts began to emerge amongst the participants.

Step 2: Extraction

The second stage of analysis provided the opportunity to excerpt noteworthy phrases from the transcripts to gain a comprehensive focus on the data. The discoveries from this phase were compiled on a separate sheet of paper.

Step 3: Creation of Formulated Meanings

At this juncture, meanings were reformulated into general statements stemming from the participants' narratives (Edward & Welch, 2011). In order to accomplish this, I needed to review the interviews multiple times. This process allowed participants' individual statements to illuminate. These types of narratives reoccurred and began to lead to emergent themes. Some of these themes were 'Lack of Personal Accountability' and 'Personal Motivation to be Present and Involved'. Thereafter, they were coded in categories. According to El Hussein et al. (2014), these categories should reflect the exhaustive descriptions gathered from the participants.

Step 4: Aggregation and Theme Development

The fourth step of the analysis process consisted of aggregating formulated meanings into themed clusters. Colaizzi (1978) recommended organizing formulated meanings into similar groups (Edward & Welch, 2011). Some of these developed from statements such as "staying consistent", "remaining present", and "having a great relationship". One theme that developed from this cluster was 'Awareness of the Fatherhood Relationship'.

Step 5: Exhaustive Description

This step was constructed by synthesizing the theme clusters and formulation of meanings (Edward & Welch, 2011). For example, when the participants made comments such as, “She’s selfish”, “It’s supposed to be about the kids”, and “I can’t stand that broad”, I was able surmise their discontent with their children’s mother. These factors were indicative of their desire to be active in their children’s lives and their discontent with the mothers. This led to the determination of ‘Negative coparenting relationship’ as evidence supporting the theme ‘Lack of Personal Motivation to be Involved’.

Step 6: Identifying the Structure

This identification of the phenomenon’s fundamental structure was developed through thorough analysis of the exhaustive description of the experiences. Understanding the structure included understanding participants’ intentionality, awareness, desires, emotions, and actions. These factors became evident during this extensive explanation. Completion of this step allowed the themes to take form from common narratives.

Step 7: Returning to Participants for Validation

The final step consisted of member checking which is defined as returning to the participants to validate the findings. At this point, any alterations to the findings are adjusted if participants found that they did not align with the meaning they intended to convey. During this phase, no alterations were made. However, four participants further elaborated on their needs and suggestions for the programs.

Thematic Outcomes

The data analysis resulted in several overarching themes: awareness, personal motivation, emotional stress, support, program dissatisfaction, accountability, and fathering behavior. These themes are outlined in Table 3 along with the evidence that supports them.

Table 3

Theme Identification

Theme	Evidence
Lack of Personal accountability	False Blame (mothers & system) Choice to be uninvolved Low involvement Self-interest Attitude about program Premature termination from program Fathering behavior after - (what about it) Consistent No change after participation Presence
Awareness of the Fatherhood Relationship	Rewarding Challenging Great Good Not good Stressful Difficult Horrible Conflicting thoughts versus actions

Continued on next page

Theme	Evidence
Motivation to be present and involved	Desire Positive thoughts about children Regular time/visits Giving my children what I didn't have Positive role model Belief vs behavior Support- Financial/Economic Legal/Emotional/Mental
Lack of motivation to be involved	Negative coparenting relationship Avoidance of Mental/emotional stress Anger Lack of access to child Sadness Anxiety

Lack of Personal Accountability

The foremost theme that was evident and consistent throughout the subsequent themes pertained to the participants' level of personal accountability for his low engagement. This theme was repetitive throughout the data analysis process that was represented by each participant and pertained to their hesitance to take responsibility for their ongoing lack of involvement after they attended their program. Some of the evidence that supported the theme was false blaming the mothers, the family court system and the fatherhood programs. The participants frequently talked about their decisions to take a step back to preserve their stress levels. Essentially, they seemed to place blame everywhere but on themselves. While the men repeatedly stated they wanted to be involved, their testimonies presented the reasons they allowed themselves to be less involved. The participants repeatedly directed their attention to the external factors they believed prohibited them from being involved as opposed to acknowledging the internal

factor of their own motives which allowed them to remove themselves from their children. This theme is evidenced by the men who focused on the strained relationships with their children's mothers, struggles with the court system, and the stress they endure. Other evident factors consisted of the participants not acknowledging their level of involvement as a problem and the notion that their personal interests and desires outweighed the importance of their children's needs.

When asked why they do not remain present despite their stated desire to be actively involved and be a good father, the participants struggled with giving earnest and self-reflective responses. None of the participants provided a response that confidently confirmed or denied if these external circumstances are used as a reason to avoid personal responsibility. One observation noted was the physiological responses to the question. For example, Nick presented a calm demeanor letting out a peaceful sigh. He then acknowledged his actions as a desire to avoid the parental conflict that he described as repetitive. He did not address the variance between stated wishes for his children and chosen actions. Nick stated, "When I fall back, I'm just thinking about my sanity because it is so much stress. I do want to see my children, but I don't know how to manage the constant drama and not take it out on them." Similarly, Jerome turned his head as to look to the side and made a 'hmmm' sound before stating, "Honestly, I never thought about it that way. I figure it's easier to avoid the nonsense by not dealing with the mom. While I know it doesn't replace me seeing them, I do still try to call my kids." Reese appeared to be surprised as his eyes widened slightly. He shared that he could be focused on his own needs more than his daughter's. He responded stating, "Wow!" When asked the meaning

behind his response, he replied, “Not sure what to say about that. It sounds a little selfish.” He also blamed his early absence on being passive and unaware of his rights. Each participant gave similar responses of surprise or perplexity. Only one of the participants gave a response that did not reflect the others.

William shared the most candid and emphatic response of all participants while reiterating why he terminated his program attendance prematurely. His body language and verbal response expressed his willingness to do what he wanted for himself first as opposed to his children. William released a noticeable sigh and uttered,

Listen. Despite my frustration about what I’ve been through behind these kids, I love all of them. But dealing with them two b*****.....I need peace of mind even if it means I can’t see my kids. They brainwashing them anyway. Plus, I ain’t gon’ be no good to them anyway if I’m stressed behind the moms. So I might as well do what I can for me and not have the unnecessary stress.”

He went on to disclose his frustration with the program instructors telling the fathers there was no reason to not be involved which led to him terminating after four sessions. These statements supported similar responses he provided at other points of his interview where he stated he could have a relationship once they are older. I asked if he was implying that his happiness was more important than being involved while enduring stress. He responded, “I guess it is. And that’s probably bad to say, but I guess so.”

The men were also invited to reflect on information they heard during the father programs along with personal changes they noticed thereafter. The responses to this question yielded findings that contributed a narrative confirming their belief that the

fatherhood programs did not benefit them and they were not responsible for their lack of involvement. Blake affirmed that he took his program seriously and remained invested through completion. However, he did not believe his participation in the program produced any new revelations about himself or made him take notice of his level of involvement. This revelation was echoed by other participants who also drew on their recollections. Wally stated, "I see myself as the same man. No better, no worse. Not saying I'm bad, but you know. I'm doing the best I can." Lenny appeared to take pride in his increased ability to exercise more patience with his daughter as he shared how he can remain calm when she does not understand instruction he is giving her. Contrarily, he affirmed he could not offer any insight on how he could be more patient with his daughter's mother in order to see his daughter more often. These reflective thoughts demonstrated an inability to consider the conflict between what they say they desire with their children versus how they actually decide not to perform.

Responses pertaining to their attitudes about the program regarded when termination took place, whether or not the programs improved their involvement, and how fathers believe programs view them. Many of the participants placed blame for their low involvement on the programs. When asked if they completed the program, 6 fathers completed the entire program while 3 did not. Of the six that completed their programs Nick, Jerome, and Roland were mandated to attend. Carlton was also ordered to attend but did not complete the program. He stated "I attended a few sessions, but realized they talked to us like deadbeats and I know I'm not that type of father." Wally and William attended programs voluntarily and opted to terminate early. Wally affirmed that he left

because the program did not help him. William stated, “It was a waste of time to be honest. They had us sit there listening to them tell us why we need to be more involved when the problem wasn’t that I didn’t want to be but their moms wouldn’t let me.”

The other fathers who attended voluntarily and completed their programs had similar thoughts to Roland, William, and Wally. Blake stated “They meant well and their intentions are good, but when you’re a man or should I say father trying to do right by your kids and you have other factors preventing that, you don’t want to hear about what you need to do to be a better father. You want help with your circumstances.” Reese affirmed that he possessed desire to be active prior to joining a program, but did not gain anything that showed him how. Lenny affirmed that his program did help him partially with managing his emotions, but not with feeling alone. He explained, “It would have been nice if they could have referred me to a therapist or counselor, but they didn’t have that information.”

When asked about the purpose of fatherhood programs, the men described it as supporting men becoming better fathers. The participants seemed to believe these programs only want to hear men’s stories, tell them how to discipline properly, and how to interact with their children. Each father with the exception of William and Jerome stated they anticipated more from the program than what was offered. William stated that his only expectation was that he would gain some peace of mind about his coparenting relationships. Several of the fathers scoffed at the notion that they could have possibly not been as invested in the programs as they thought they were. Jerome admitted that he did not want to do his program and completed it because it was mandatory. When we

reviewed this portion of his interview, he stated that he did not believe his attitude toward the program had a subsequent effect on decisions he made pertaining to his involvement with his children.

While the participants believed the fatherhood programs offered some positive attributes with helping single men, they also believed their behavior was not impacted as it pertains to the amount of involvement with their children. Carlton recollected his experience saying, “Nah there was no change for me. I’m fine with my kids. I just want more time. That program didn’t give me that.” Wally reported, “It was okay and it dropped a jewel here and there, but nothing I didn’t know already and nothing to increase my access.” These responses continued to sustain their notion that the programs should have done something for them as opposed to them taking more initiative to engage with their children.

Each participant repeatedly expressed the idea that they wanted more time with their children, but continuously reported doing the opposite. When responding to the inquiry about their desires and actions conflicting, they repeatedly diverted their focus back to stress and parental conflict. The fathers did not identify their lack of initiative to increase interaction with their children as something that required significant change. William summed up his interview stating he does not have much faith in fatherhood programs because they do not do enough to hold mothers accountable like they do fathers. Jerome presented an opposing perspective as he stated, “They just need to make some changes and not make us out to be the bad guys.” These testimonies speak to what

the participants generally believe is missing from fatherhood programs as opposed to what they might be avoiding with their actions.

Awareness of the Fatherhood Relationship

This secondary theme related to the participants' personal awareness of their relationship with their children coupled with their experiences. When asked to describe their experiences as a father, the men presented several descriptions, which were either positive or negative. The positive responses described how the men felt about their general relationship with their children. Nick, Reese, Wally, and Lenny described the interaction and relationship as, "rewarding," "great," or "good." Nick based his experience on the ability to witness his children growth transitions and learn lessons from him. Lenny also indicated that he enjoyed watching his daughter learn from their unscripted experiences as well as the skills he purposefully attempts to teach her. He stated, "I love being able to witness her grasp and understand math and chess skills I show her when we're together." Reese and Wally also offered positive descriptions of their experiences. Reese stated, "I was blessed to gain primary custody while she is a very young age and have the influence I wanted on her. And I see that paying off. My family is a big part of that." Wally demonstrated appreciation for what his experience has taught him such as being less selfish, learning patience for his child, and dealing with the circumstances by attempting to maintain a working relationship with the mother.

Noteworthy, was the men acknowledging these ideas despite having limited engagement. When Nick was asked how he believes his absence impacts his children, he stated that he knows it hurts them, but does not believe they are suffering. He confirmed

that he tries to make the time together meaningful by teaching his son sports and talking to his daughter about topics that are important to her. Wally stated that there is often conflict with his son if they speak via telephone and his son has canceled some of their visits with short notice. He also stated that he thinks this behavior is attributed to his son's age rather than his lack of engagement. At one point, he stated, "I know I have to just let him be a teen." Responses like these from the participants presented a lack of connection between their actions, their thoughts about their relationship with their children, and their limited involvement with their children.

The single area the participants identified as a negative experience pertained to not seeing their children as much as they desire. When questioned about the reason for this occurrence, they attributed it to their relationship with their children's mother. Their responses did not demonstrate consideration for their role in exhibiting low engagement. Seven of the nine fathers described this experience as 'challenging'. The other two men described their experiences as 'difficult' and 'horrible'. As they disclosed their thoughts, they focused on their children's mothers and what they believed these women added to the coparenting relationship. Carlton reported his children's mother as evil and vindictive stating, "She couldn't handle herself financially and while I couldn't see them, she enforced child support on me. Her intentions towards me were just evil and vindictive. And to avoid the conflict, I just talk to them on the phone." When asked about his decision to avoid conflict, he spoke about personal health struggles and the need to take care of himself. His response about his actions conflicted with his stated desire to have time with his children.

During their narratives about their experiences, seven of the fathers placed much emphasis on how they felt about their ability to have direct involvement with their children. They spoke about the satisfaction of noticing their children's mental and physical growth when they do see them. Two fathers did not share the same sentiments. Roland and William attested to their absence causing them to miss out on many milestones and routine moments. William confirmed that his time with his children was better when they were younger and his relationship with the mothers contained less turmoil. At one point he explained:

In the past my experience was great. I loved seeing them grow up, do different things and actually watch them have both of our personalities. It was good going to visit them when they were in daycares and stuff like that. Now, my experience as a father is not great. It's terrible. I just want them to grow up.

Motivation to be Present and Involved

The third theme, which surfaced from the data was the expressed motivation to be present and involved in their children's lives. Notably, their expressed motivation was unaligned with their inability to be personally accountable. Except for William, each participant directly stated his desire to be involved or have more involvement with his child(ren). When asked to describe their motivation for fatherhood or what motivates them to be present, participants used phrases such as "my duty", "they didn't ask to be here", and "it's my job". Each father verified in their own way their individual importance in their children's lives. Blake avowed, "I'm their father. It's my responsibility." Reese verified his sentiments stating his responsibility as a man and also

remembering what it was like to not have his own father. He stated, “She’s my child. That’s what a man is supposed to do. My father wasn’t there for me.” Nick’s perspective partially aligned with Reese’s as he recalled his father being around but not always being present and engaged. He affirmed his thoughts declaring, “I want to give them things I didn’t have.”

While the other fathers exhibited motivation, their reasons for wanting to be involved remained distinct. Wally who grew up with is father involved verbalized the importance of sacrificing to be present. He stated that he truly desires to be a good involved father similar to his own. While he sees his son about twice per year, he still asserted, “Part of my motivation is so my son could never say I wasn’t there. He needs to know that I sacrificed to be around.” This statement presented a direct conflict between his thoughts and actions. Lenny’s stated desire was to be a positive role model. He stated, “I do not want my kids to be jacked up. I had a great life. I want to give my children that.” William and Roland who both have multiple children whom they do not see up to a year or more at a time expressed wanting better circumstances, but also seemed to have just as much motivation to prove a point. Roland indicated “I give my twin boys extra love and attention because I am not able to do that with my oldest daughter. I’d like to show her mom that I can be a good father. I’m not getting that opportunity with my daughter and despite what her mom thinks about me, I’m not that guy I was over ten years ago.”

Regardless of their personal experiences, the fathers expressed the importance of their children having better experiences as they developed. Jerome stated, “I want a great

relationship with them. I think my experience could have been better which ultimately for me is just having a great relationship with my children.” Carlton also reflected on his upbringing pertaining to his experiences and who his father was a parent. He stated that his father was far from perfect, but always provided resources and taught him some valuable lessons. He articulated, “What I didn’t have from my dad is who I became. What my dad was is who I want to be for my kids.”

As identified with the first theme, the reports from the participants presented a contradiction between what was expressed versus what was actually performed. Each account from the participants openly articulated a desire to be involved, but also inadvertently demonstrated opposing behaviors. Jerome and William expressed love for their children and the desire to give them a stable life, but also stated that they made conscious decisions to remove themselves from their children when they experienced tension and stress. Roland emphasized his longing for an increased relationship with his daughter, but continuously identified her mother as the reason he allows extensive periods to occur without spending time.

Eight of the nine participants confirmed court approved visitations for their children, but also described their involvement to be less than what they had been granted. When asked why they elect not to focus on the opportunities they have to be involved as opposed to the stated barriers, the fathers struggled to offer a definitive response. Blake seemed unsure of himself attesting that he puts forth the effort, but occasionally allows his emotions to dictate his actions. Wally and Nick both believed they should not take blame for their children’s mothers making the coparenting process more difficult. Nick

asked, “How can I be viewed as the bad parent when I tell her my plans and she fights it? So I step back to avoid the issue.” Carlton stated, “The reality is my kids’ mom makes this process harder than it should be. You have a father that wants to be here, but you’re pushing him away.”

Additional evidence pertained to the expression of a need for support in their roles. The men believed with specific types of support in place, they would be more involved. This idea was closely connected to their motivation to be involved as they identified stress as a reason they avoided responsibility. The fathers identified mental and emotional support, legal advice, economic support and resources as needs to help them improve their situations in order to be more present with their children. Most faulted the programs for not providing this resource. This idea is later tied into the suggestions they provided for improving fatherhood programs.

The primary words that illuminated from the narratives in relation to support were “support”, “advice”, “help” and “resources.” Most of the fathers indicated that they believe fatherhood programs mean well, but do not provide the necessary tools to navigate coparenting. Blake stated in his interview,

“One thing I was looking for was for that program to have at least a session where we got into dealing with the mother, what to do when she tries to sabotage our time with our children, and the emotional stress that comes with that. And that never happened.”

All nine participants stated that they believed the outcome of their situation would have been better if they could afford an attorney or legal assistance. Nick reported that

during his time in family court, “I had one of those mediators because the lawyers I talked to weren’t in my range. You know the money.” Roland spoke of his court appointed attorney. He stated, “I had a lawyer around 23 when she took me back to court for child support. I asked him to talk about my visits and he said the judge wouldn’t grant it because I missed a few payments. That’s helping me? If I had the money, I would have sent it.” Reese, Blake, and Carlton all narrated that they did not believe they would receive a fair hearing and decided not to talk to attorneys. Wally maintained that fathers should know their rights and have access to resources that can help them understand what they are entitled to and how to advocate for themselves.

Lack of Motivation to be Involved

The final theme that emerged from the data pertained to the fathers’ motivation to be involved. The previous themes reported that the participants’ stated desires did not coincide with the actions they demonstrated. The actions they expressed were indicative of a desire to satisfy their personal needs as opposed to remain consistently engaged with their children. The participants often focused on the parental relationship and emotional stress as reasons they made the choice to step away from their duties. The participants often described the relationship as “challenging”, “not good”, and “stressful”. Jerome described his relationship with two of his children’s mothers as challenging due to them no longer being together. Nick identified mental and physical stress as part of his experience and attributed it to opposing perspectives with his ex-wife. He stated, “So it was the mental thing that mental stress and the physical. So it's the challenge of being a parent or being a father....It's just making sure that your kids are whole enough to handle

the parent that's not trying to be on the same page.” William responded to a follow up question stating, “It’s not good. My relationship with my kids’ moms is not good. That’s the nicest way I could describe it.”

All but three of the participants repeatedly spoke about their coparenting experiences as negative and a motive for their hesitation to be engaged. Blake and Reese mentioned their children’s mothers from the aspect of what led to their present situations. They did not provide much insight about them during their interviews. Wally stated that his coparenting relationship with his son’s mother is positive primarily, however “There are times when she makes this more difficult than it needs to be.

Some of the participants indicated strong feelings of anger about their overall situations, stepping away in response to the anger, and the need for emotional support. These expressions related to statements that conveyed hostility and resentment. At one point in his interview, Roland exclaimed, “I mean, what the hell am I supposed to do? I’m trying to see my damn kid and all she wants to do is tell me I’m not a man and why my daughter will never respect me! Part of me has wanted to choke her, but that’s not an option.”

Additional emotions exhibited by fathers were sadness and anxiety. Nick, William, Lenny, and Reese expressed being in a dark or sad place when they went for extensive periods without seeing their children. Nick articulated, “I think I was more hurt and sad than angry. I isolated myself from my family. My friends couldn’t help me.” William’s tone changed and sounded more grief stricken as he reflected. He stated, “I reached a point of depression and not really wanting to live anymore. I couldn’t really

understand how it could get better.” He ultimately stated that he felt it was best for him to leave the situation and deal with his children when they are older. Lenny stated “I’m just not the same when I don’t have my daughter. It’s almost like a state of depression and anxiety.” The participants used these sentiments as a means to validate their inconsistent involvement. These thoughts and attitudes confirm the displaced connection between their stated motivations and performed behaviors.

Summary

The African American men in this study shared their experiences as non-residential fathers both before and after participating in fatherhood programs. While some fathers were mandated to attend these programs and some attended voluntarily, they gave distinct reasons why they did or did not complete the programs. For most, they identified external factors as the reasons for their low engagement. They placed blame on the programs not addressing their specific circumstances and the mothers of their children making the coparenting relationship more difficult than they believed it should be. Overall, these men expressed a desire to have an active part in their children’s lives. However, this desire did not prove accurate based on their stated actions. The fathers believed their greatest needs pertained to being able to effectively respond to the external situations that they feel deter their parenting as opposed what could be occurring with them mentally and emotionally. As evidenced by the themes that emerged from their experiences, the participants acknowledged the improvements that fatherhood programs and mothers could make to better serve them without identifying what they can do to improve their circumstances and level of engagement. In Chapter 5, I offer a discussion

of the findings as well as recommendations and implications for social change and future research.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to acquire an understanding of the lived experiences of African American fathers between ages 18 and 45 who attended fatherhood programs and how their experiences with these programs affected their involvement with their children thereafter. Procuring the insights of this population was significant because previous research found that while more than \$300 million has been invested in fatherhood programs, 17.4 million children (67%) still reside in households without a biological father (Threlfall & Kohl, 2015). This lack of presence leads to an unfavorable impact on their children's behavior, cognitive development, academic achievement, and self-confidence (Frank et al., 2015; Hill et al., 2016). My objective for conducting this study was to recognize how their experiences in these programs impacted their involvement with their children and how fatherhood programs contributed to their fathering experience. Participants explained their experiences that led to participation in these programs, their understanding of fatherhood programs, and what programs should do to better serve them. They also described their current relationship with their children. Their disclosure and my conclusions will function as a voice for fathers to inform fatherhood programs, social welfare agencies, and other government representatives who provide services to nonresidential fathers.

Seven of the nine participants reported having negative or unproductive relationships with their children's mother. They repeatedly confirmed that this leads to undue emotional stress and frustration and often resulted in them not making efforts to

see their children. Other than avoidance, they did not specifically state alternative reasons why they allowed the stress to dictate their actions. Five of those seven men confirmed that they made attempts to have an amicable relationship with the mother to no avail. In total, eight of the nine men expressed frustration in their situations and of often falling back as a result of the emotional stress. Of the nine participants, five were court ordered to attend a fatherhood program. The other four attended their respective programs voluntarily.

My study employed a phenomenological methodology with hermeneutic inquiry to allow nine African American nonresidential fathers to openly share their experiences. Hermeneutic inquiry concentrates on discovering the experiences of individuals by obtaining their narratives and giving a voice to their experiences (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). The use of semistructured interviews afforded an opportunity for participants to reflect on and provide transparent responses about their experiences and share them in a peaceful manner. To identify common themes between their experiences, I used an eight-step data analysis strategy to explore their narratives.

The outcomes of this study revealed that participation in fatherhood programs did not result in a direct impact on fathers' behaviors. More specifically, the occurrences experienced by these fathers in their respective programs did not result in an increase in engagement or increased desire to be engaged in the lives of their children. The participants articulated their ideas about what motivate them to be an active father and what deters this process from taking place as they see and desire it. They demonstrated their thoughts about their willingness to fight against obstacles or to relinquish their

involvement to their personal circumstances. Reflecting on these positive and negative experiences, their expressions presented a firm desire to be involved with their children than may be understood by others. Within this chapter, I submit the findings based on the conceptual framework and previously reported literature. I also present limitations of the study, social change implications, and make recommendations for future research.

Interpretation of the Findings

Fatherhood and the importance of the father and child relationship have been the focus of academic research in recent years (Adamsons, 2013; Adamsons & Pasley, 2016; Coates & Stover, 2014). One finding from studies is that African American fathers make up the largest group of inattentive fathers in this country (Bocknek, Brophy-Herb, Fitzgerald, Schiffman, & Vogel, 2014) despite the existence of and participation in fatherhood education programs and parenting programs (Mchale et al., 2012). Previous studies have reported a lack of evidence of the effects of programming on the well-being of fathers and their children (Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2014; Glynn & Dale, 2015; Wilson et al., 2016). My intention for this study was to fill the research gaps regarding to African American fathers' perceptions and experiences related to their engagement with their children after participating in a fatherhood program and how they can be better served.

My designed research question for this study focused on the experiences of nonresidential African American fathers aged 18 to 45 who participated in fatherhood programs. The research question resulted in seven themes, which emerged from the interview narratives. These themes included (a) awareness, (b) fatherhood motivation, (c) emotional stress, (d) desire for support, (e) personal accountability, (f) program

dissatisfaction, and (g) fathering behaviors. These themes reflect previous factors confirmed to impact men as reported in previous studies (Castillo & Sarver, 2012; Fagan & Cherson, 2015; Ferguson & Morley, 2011; Miller & Maskaly 2014). Each participant communicated his perception of his fathering experiences, his experience as a program member, and what he recognized as reasons why he continued to present poor involvement after attending his program. They described their history with their children's mother, nonresidential status, desire to be present, involvement with fatherhood programs, and suggestions for improved support. Noteworthy was the fact that these men did not directly acknowledge their lack of involvement. For example, most of the participants expressed a desire to have a good relationship with the children, but repeatedly exhibited ambiguous behaviors in times of emotional stress. The stress reported by the fathers was reported in previous studies that focused on the coparenting relationship and father engagement (Fagan & Lee, 2014; Threlfall & Kohl, 2015; Wong et al., 2013). When questioned about this reality, many of the participants seemed astonished or bewildered based on their commentaries and body language. What this indicated is that their stated beliefs did not align with their actual beliefs.

The recollections of their accounts generally aligned with the findings of Cooper et al. (2015), who reported that the social experiences of African American males have an impact on their parenting practices. Through individual reports, the fathers testified that their historical interaction with their children's mothers before and after program attendance as the primary factor impacting their involvement. In addition, they denied any influence from the fatherhood programs or their own willingness to remain involved.

The participants discussed their belief that it is important for programs and government agencies to not see them as the problem, but also recognize how mothers impede their involvement and needs resulting from this. The participants repeatedly did not discuss the notion that their lack of involvement is personal choice as much as it is circumstantial. The denial of personal accountability was evident throughout the research process.

As it pertains to fatherhood programs, participants expressed their understanding of these programs as designed to encourage men to take responsibility for their children and improving their relationships. The participants acknowledged that while there are many men who have no interest in being fathers, this is not their story. They indicated that despite their own experiences with their father, it has no bearing on their current desire to be present. While they accounted negative relationships with their children's mothers, they expressed an ultimate desire to be active participants with their children. Contrary to this, they affirmed that in many instances they chose their well-being over the stress of constantly fighting about their children. Surprisingly, they struggled to recognize themselves as a part of the issue.

Family Systems Theory Represented in Findings

The family systems theory provides a framework for investigating father engagement in relation to fatherhood programs. Fagan and Kaufman (2014) previously reported that fathers remain involved or uninvolved depending on the level to which they are viewed as a relevant and essential part of the family system (Fagan & Kaufman, 2014). A significant finding of this study is that all of the fathers reported their children's mothers as the primary reason their involvement with their children is strained but did not

identify themselves also as a cause in this phenomenon. Furthermore, it is indicative that they did not recognize their own importance and impact in the family system as they continued to remove themselves from maintaining a relevant role in their children's lives. This finding is supported by Sun's (2016) report that family systems theory identifies the family as a unit with interdependent members who impact each other's thoughts, emotions, and actions. Responses and behaviors presented by the participants during their interviews substantiated major concepts and fundamentals associated with family systems theory. Their admissions indicated that behaviors of members in a system affect all members as their lack of involvement did not improve their engagement with their children or their interaction with the coparent.

In their interviews, all of the fathers reported that adverse behaviors presented by their children's mother at some point impacted their level of involvement with their children. Each participant, regardless of their current status affirmed that their relationship with their child diminished as the relationship with the mother became more strained. Absent was a personal focus on their internal decision to walk away during stressful periods as opposed to taking advantage of their parental rights. Also absent was an awareness of the role they have in their diminished relationship with their children. This finding emulated a conclusion made in a 2014 study on outcome measures of fatherhood programs. Fagan and Kaufman (2014) concluded that a nonresidential father is less likely to be involved with his child if other family members do not accept him as an equal part of the system. The participants in this study validated this notion, but also

presented the idea that they do not hold themselves as accountable for their circumstances as they do the external factors they described.

Themes that emerged based on the participants' narratives included their lack of personal accountability for their actions after attending fatherhood programs, awareness about their fatherhood role, personal motivation to be involved, and the lack of motivation to be involved. This study found that certain behaviors reported by the participants and their children's mother were varied amongst their respective situations. What was consistent amongst the participants was the decision to remove themselves from their situations or decrease their level of engagement due to their focus on external circumstances.

When asked how the programs could make improvements in order to enhance their experience, seven of the nine participants suggested a component that included involving the mother. Based on the participants' responses to this question, they believed that their engagement remains lower than desired because fatherhood programs do not appear to focus on educating mothers. This account further purported the idea that these fathers lack the awareness to view themselves as an essential part of the issue of their lack of involvement. The fathers believed that the mothers must realize the impact their behaviors even though they do not recognize their own actions and willingness to be more involved. The participants proved that African American fathers express a desire to be involved with their children and have an amicable relationship with their children's mother; however, their actions do not coincide. Essentially, this finding confirmed the suggestion that fathers become educated and equipped to help reduce the parental conflict

(Holmes et al., 2013). The participants also consistently identified a failure of the fatherhood programs to focus on the parenting relationship and less on how to be engaged with the children. This thought also indicates their removal of personal responsibility and the separation of their admitted intent and personal behavior.

My conclusions also validated Bowen's (1968) affirmation of the interdependence between nonresidential fathers and the family system and the need for fatherhood programs to measure the quality of coparenting relationships and offer social support for the coparenting relationship (Fagan & Kaufman, 2014; Helm, 2018). Nine themes were uncovered based upon responses to the interview questions. However, I discussed four as they tied directly to the research question and the most meaningful feedback on the fathers' views of their level involvement based on their experiences. The chosen themes were identified as the most relevant because the participants repeatedly provided narratives with evidence that supported the themes. They also have not been previously studied in relation to poor father involvement after attending fatherhood programs.

Limitations of the Study

The study included a sample of nine African American men aged 18 to 44 from the Philadelphia area who offered their stories and experiences of fatherhood and as participants in fatherhood programs. The principal limitation was relying on the participants' disclosure based on their own self-reports. These reports were contingent upon each participant's recall of his experiences and his willingness to be honest in response to the interview questions and be honest with himself. In order to protect the study against this limitation, due diligence was done throughout the interview process as

participants were probed to determine consistency and how their responses aligned with previous statements they presented. Member checking also occurred, with the intent of corroborating stories from the participants, validating their experiences, and clarifying the information they provided. The consent form was reviewed in detail prior to the start of the session. Participants were asked if they understood the importance of the study, assured of confidentiality, and informed that their transparency throughout would be greatly appreciated, as it would enlighten the findings. This process offered the participants encouragement to provide clear and accurate narratives about their experiences to the best of their ability.

The second limitation of this study was the controlled sample size. This indicates that the findings from this study cannot be generalized across a larger population. Furthermore, the study did not incorporate the insights and experiences of individuals who were not selected as a part of this group. A third limitation of the study pertains to its scope. The fathers were selected from one geographical location with similar demographics. This eliminates the narratives of men from other areas. The study was also narrowed to one particular research design. The final limitation was the reliance solely on interview data. No other data was reviewed as part of the research conducted in this study.

Program Suggestions

The participants' thoughts and attitudes toward their respective programs encouraged their suggestions as to where they felt the programs could change and make improvements. The descriptions that connected to this area were *mentoring/peer*

relationships, mother involvement, support, accountability and ongoing relationships, and *resources*. While the participants struggled accepting personal accountability, they suggested mentoring as a means of being accountable in their roles.

Participants also expressed wanting assistance with the practical application of fathering as well as the ability to forge relationships with other men. The last need that was addressed by the men was pertained to resources. Some of the resources that were suggested were web-based information, court documents, and employment assistance. Several fathers articulated the need for access to physical resources to read on their own such as a list of local websites and agencies that assist fathers and provide economic resources.

Recommendations for Future Research

Considering the findings of the study, future investigations on fatherhood and engagement can add to and build on this study and preceding studies. With this understanding, I propose several key recommendations for future exploration. The foremost suggestion concerns the target population. Researchers could expand their focus on nonresidential fathers from other urban areas that were mandated to attend fatherhood programs. In order to gain more in-depth information, a quantitative or mixed study could be conducted to consider distinctive variables such stated intent, actual behavior, blame, and personal accountability and the influence on involvement. Moreover, implementing a non-participant observation would provide a direct representation of father's behaviors in fatherhood programs or give more meaning to narratives and experiences.

Another consideration is choosing an alternate methodology such as a case study. Implementing a case study would allow the researcher to focus on a smaller sample of fathers prior to and after his participation in a fatherhood program. A case study would also allow the researcher to make field observations of the participant in his natural environment while also observing his interactions with the fatherhood program, his children, and the mother of his children. The case study approach could highlight the father's experiences by giving an inclusive representation of his experiences based on observation as opposed to relying on his recall. Additionally, implementation of a case study approach could lead to enlightening conversations with the participant as opposed to recollections in response to interview questions.

Implications for Social Change

The fathers who participated in the study were afforded the opportunity to revisit their fatherhood experiences and participation in fatherhood programs. As they shared their testaments, they seemed to be appreciative of the opportunity to have someone listen to their story as delivered directly from their mouths and recollections. Their willingness and enthusiasm to convey their stories will offer insight on improving their ongoing experience but also other men who find themselves in similar situations. A key piece that was missing from their recollections is willingness to be accountable for their choices to remove themselves from their children's lives when the situations became stressful. The outcomes of this study offer insight into understanding the thought processes of this group African American fathers who are willing to report to fatherhood programs for assistance.

The results of this study showed that fathers have a perspective that do not directly align with the behaviors they exhibit outwardly. Despite their current and past levels of involvement, all of the participants expressed their desire to have a consistent and functional relationship with their children but did not demonstrate the effort to make that a reality. The study also offered insight into the participants' thoughts about fatherhood programs. The collective idea about these programs is that while they offer a range of helpful services for fathers, men believe they neglect to offer assistance in the areas of coparenting, mental and emotional welfare, economic and legal support. This study presents a need for ongoing exploration of the perceptions of fatherhood programs maintained by nonresidential fathers.

Future researchers, community stakeholders, clergy, and other national organizations can incorporate the discoveries of this study pertaining to father engagement and fatherhood programs and utilize it with continued discussions on improving this issue. The findings highlighted through this study will assist in improving and creating new interventions for fathers who rely on public agencies for help with raising children as a nonresidential parent. One consideration that should be made when offering future program models and interventions is taking into account the coparenting relationship but also challenging the thoughts and behaviors of fathers. Likewise, they should also explore the behaviors presented by fathers, their motivations, and educate them on the repercussions of their actions. As indicated by this study, fathers reported adverse relations between co-parents having an impact on their willingness to be involved and how much they are able to be involved. However, fathers should also be made aware

of their own internal factors that impact their involvement. This understanding should motivate service professionals to learn more about the underlying negative forces that exist within this population and address these issues in their respective programs.

Based on the findings of this study, lack of accountability and blaming behavior are at the core of low engagement for this population. Incorporating a mentoring sponsorship module for peer support, which holds fathers accountable to another father who has found success in their role, can enhance outcomes. Such a component would provide fathers with a resource and personal connection to build their skillset beyond the program sessions. Decreasing lectures and increasing the dialogue between programs and participants would allow the programs to learn more about the specific needs of fathers. Fatherhood programs can also implement a segment that incorporates mothers to bridge the relationship between parents. These programs would also better serve fathers by offering legal support and therapeutic services as a resource for fathers who struggle emotionally and require legal services. Support groups for nonresidential fathers could continue focus on the direct relationship between the father and child, but also provide education on the legal system, personal economics, and the coparenting relationship.

Summary and Conclusion

Father engagement and involvement has been the focus of many studies in recent decades. This topic has been researched from various perspectives: many, which have not included fathers. This study focused on the insight of nonresidential African American fathers to gather understanding of their experiences while also filling a gap that was missing from previous research. This study was effective in highlighting how fathers

report their experiences versus how they actually happen. This study is also operative in providing this population with a voice by recognizing their experiences, perceptions, frustrations, and needs. The greatest insight from the study pertained to fathers acknowledging their lack of engagement but not acknowledging their conscious decisions to step away from their children. Other formidable perceptions were that fatherhood programs though helpful do not address other needs presented by this population. The participants collectively corroborated to feeling alone in their parenting process and misunderstood by society. Moreover, the fathers adamantly expressed their desire to have strong bonds and consistent involvement with their children. While their actions did not align with this, it would be practical to implement programs to address these behaviors and other researchers to explore this aspect of the phenomenon.

This study also helped to extract the understanding that fatherhood programs should offer interventions more tailored to exploring how fathers view themselves rather than fostering the assumption that they have no desire to be engaged with their children. With the assistance of their experiences and insights, these very programs can now be informed about what fathers find most necessary in helping them to navigate their thoughts and behaviors. It should be noted that while the outcomes of this study are not generalizable to the greater population, the study can serve as a platform to begin offering fatherhood programs sound information on how to restructure their programs. As they begin to implement these changes, fathers who participate in the future should report enhanced experiences and improved engagement outcomes.

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[com.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edswss&AN=000376477200031&site=eds-live&scope=site](https://search-ebscohost-com.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edswss&AN=000376477200031&site=eds-live&scope=site)

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Appendix A: Participant Recruitment Flyer

**NOTICE TO AFRICAN AMERICAN FATHERS 18-45
YEARS OF AGE WANTED FOR A RESEARCH STUDY**

Your participation in this doctoral research study is greatly appreciated.

- You will receive a \$25.00 Visa Gift Card for your complete participation in an interview for the study 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.

Hello, my name is Rahsaan Turpin and I am a doctoral student at Walden University. I am conducting a study on African American males 18-45 years old that have participated in fatherhood programs to understand their perceptions and experiences and how these programs have influenced their involvement and engagement in the lives of 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 or email. Upon receiving 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 45.
- You must be the father to at least one child with whom you do not reside.
- You have attended or completed a fatherhood or parenting program.

For more information, please contact Rahsaan Turpin.

Thank you

Appendix B: Resource List for Participant Mental Health Services

Menergy, LLC

Rodin Place
2000 Hamilton St #304
Philadelphia, PA 19130
Phone: 215.242.2235

Lutheran Settlement House - Fishtown Site

1340 Frankford Avenue,
Philadelphia, PA 19125
Phone: 215.426.8610
Fax: 215.426.0581

Lutheran Settlement House - Jane Addams Place

25 S. 43rd Street,
Philadelphia, PA 19104
Phone: 215.387.2587
Fax: 215.921.6200

Healthy Families

4401 Ford Ave.
Suite 303
Alexandria, VA 22302
Phone: 571.748.2840

Healthy Families Reston

11150 Sunset Hills Rd.
Suite 250
Reston, VA 20190
Phone: 571.323.3676

Appendix C: Interview Questions

Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your experiences as a father.

(Probes: Tell me about the relationship you have with your child. How often do you see your child? When you are with your child, what do you do? If you do not, see your child, please tell me why.)
2. Tell me about your fathering experience when you were a child.

(Probes: Tell me about the adult men who have filled fathering roles for you.)
3. Tell me about the services and resources that help you with fathering responsibilities.

(Probes: What resources [television shows, websites, classes, books] do you use to help with fathering?)
4. Describe what prompted you to attend a fatherhood program. Tell me how you learned about the fatherhood program you attended.

(Probes: Tell me about any challenges, hardships, or difficulties you faced while attending this program. What parts of the program did you find helpful? How did it enhance your parenting? What aspects were not helpful?)
5. How would you explain the purpose of fatherhood programs?
6. Tell me something you would like to have seen changed about this program.

(Probe: How do you think this change would benefit you? What do you need to help you fulfill your father roles and responsibilities? If you could attend the ideal fatherhood program, what might that look like? What relationships if any did you

form as a result of the program?)

7. Tell me what changes you saw in yourself after attending this program.

(Probes: How did these changes impact your relationship with your child? What barriers do you believe keep your relationship with your child from growing?

How would you describe your personal motivation for fatherhood? How did you implement the information you obtained?)

Appendix D: Letters of Request

Letter of Request #1

Quintessential Cuts Barbershop

March 31, 2018

Dear Mr. Quincy Salam,

Hello, my name is Rahsaan Turpin and I am a doctoral student at Walden University. I am conducting a study on African American males 18-45 years old who have participated in fatherhood programs to understand their perceptions and experiences and how these programs have influenced their involvement and engagement in the lives of 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 or email.

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

Respectfully,

Rahsaan R. Turpin, M.Ed.

Letter of Request #2

Mark Lightfoot
Philadelphia Hair Company

March 31, 2018

Dear Mr. Lightfoot,

Hello, my name is Rahsaan Turpin and I am a doctoral student at Walden University. I am conducting a study on African American males 18-45 years old who have participated in fatherhood programs to understand their perceptions and experiences and how these programs have influenced their involvement and engagement in the lives of 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 or email.

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

Respectfully,

Rahsaan R. Turpin, M.Ed.

Letter of Request #3

Project D.A.D.

April 3, 2018

Dear Mr. Berry,

Hello, my name is Rahsaan Turpin and I am a doctoral student at Walden University. I am conducting a study on African American males 18-45 years old who have participated in fatherhood programs to understand their perceptions and experiences and how these programs have influenced their involvement and engagement in the lives of their children. I am writing to request permission to recruit participants for my study from your facility. Upon your approval, I would like to attend at least one meeting to explain my study to potential participants and post the flyer within your site. 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 attend at least one meeting and post a flyer to 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 or email.

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

Respectfully,

Rahsaan R. Turpin, M.Ed.

Letter of Request #4

Fathers in Action

April 3, 2018

Dear Mr. Threatt,

Hello, my name is Rahsaan Turpin and I am a doctoral student at Walden University. I am conducting a study on African American males 18-45 years old who have participated in fatherhood programs to understand their perceptions and experiences and how these programs have influenced their involvement and engagement in the lives of their children. I am writing to request permission to recruit participants for my study from your facility. Upon your approval, I would like to attend at least one meeting to explain my study to potential participants and post the flyer within your site. 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 attend at least one meeting and post a flyer to 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 or email.

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

Respectfully,

Rahsaan R. Turpin, M.Ed.

Letter of Request #5

Fathers in Touch

Alexandria, VA 22306

April 3, 2018

Dear Mr. Mitchell,

Hello, my name is Rahsaan Turpin and I am a doctoral student at Walden University. I am conducting a study on African American males 18-45 years old who have participated in fatherhood programs to understand their perceptions and experiences and how these programs have influenced their involvement and engagement in the lives of their children. I am writing to request permission to recruit participants for my study from your facility. Upon your approval, I would like to attend at least one meeting to explain my study to potential participants and post the flyer within your site. 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 attend at least one meeting and post a flyer to 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 or email.

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

Respectfully,

Rahsaan R. Turpin, M.Ed.

Letter of Request #6

Prince William Father Initiative

April 3, 2018

Dear Ms. Jennings-Holt,

Hello, my name is Rahsaan Turpin and I am a doctoral student at Walden University. I am conducting a study on African American males 18-45 years old who have participated in fatherhood programs to understand their perceptions and experiences and how these programs have influenced their involvement and engagement in the lives of their children. I am writing to request permission to recruit participants for my study from your facility. Upon your approval, I would like to attend at least one meeting to explain my study to potential participants and post the flyer within your site. 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 attend at least one meeting and post a flyer to 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 or email.

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

Respectfully,

Rahsaan R. Turpin, M.Ed.

Appendix E: Acceptance Letters

Letter of Cooperation #1

Quintessential Cuts Barbershop

April 1, 2018

Dear Rahsaan Turpin,

Based on my review of your research proposal, I give permission for you to recruit for the study entitled 'Perceptions of Fatherhood Programs from the Experiences of Uninvolved Fathers' within Quintessential Cuts. As part of this study, I authorize you to post flyers at the barbershop 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,

Quincy Salam

Letter of Cooperation #2

Project D.A.D.

April 3, 2018

Dear Rahsaan Turpin,

Based on my review of your research proposal, I give permission for you to recruit for the study entitled 'Perceptions of Fatherhood Programs from the Experiences of Uninvolved Fathers' within Project D.A.D. As part of this study, I authorize you to attend a meeting and post flyers at our site 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,

Kirk Berry

Letter of Cooperation #3

Fathers in Action

May 23, 2018

Dear Rahsaan Turpin,

Based on my review of your research proposal, I give permission for you to recruit for the study entitled 'Perceptions of Fatherhood Programs from the Experiences of Uninvolved Fathers' at Fathers in Action. As part of this study, I authorize you to attend a meeting and post flyers at our site 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,

Jeffery Threatt

Appendix F: Questionnaire

Screening Questionnaire

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

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

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 African American males who have participated in fatherhood programs in order to understand their perceptions and experiences and how these programs have influenced their lack of involvement and engagement 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 45? What is your age?

Do you have at least one child with whom you do not reside?

Have you ever attended or completed a fatherhood or parenting program?

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.

Are you okay with meeting for the interview in a private room at the local library?

What is the closest library to you?

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