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Young African American Men's Conception of Fatherhood Among Survivors of Childhood Abuse

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2019

Abstract

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MSW, New York University, 1994

BS, Siena College, 1984

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

Male survivors of abuse who become fathers themselves face challenges different from female survivors, such as conceptualizing their roles as providers and heads of households after the traumatic and often belittling experiences of abuse. However, very few researchers have studied the connection between child abuse and fatherhood, and none specific to young African American fathers. An interpretative phenomenological approach enabled exploration of how African American fathers who were abused as children, conceptualized and perceived their own experiences with fatherhood. The theoretical framework for this study was identity theory, which indicates that how people conceptualize a social role influences their actions in that role. Research questions centered on how young African American fathers, who were abused as children, conceptualized fatherhood and carried out their roles as fathers. Data collected from 11 young African American fathers came through in-depth, semistructured interviews. Key findings showed participants conceptualized fatherhood as being present for, providing for, and protecting their children. These fathers worked to break the cycle of abuse they had experienced and to show support for their children. Implications to promote social change include use of study findings to develop parenting programs that address childhood trauma. Other benefits may come from developing groups for father with children in the foster care system, helping these men to understand why they parent the way they do and to break the destructive cycle of parenting they had experienced. Findings may also contribute to the establishment of fatherhood programs that match fathers with supportive role models who help in navigating the father role.

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Dedication

To you, Black fathers: Thank you for being the silent heroes, for not allowing society to blemish your vision of fatherhood. Thank you for caring more about your children than "showing that you're a good daddy." Thank you for showing your children the power of unconditional love. Thank you for making a difference, leading by example and showing that true leaders lead with love. Thank you for breaking the cycle of abuse, leaving a legacy of love for generations to come.

Thank you.

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To my sons, Denzel and Kevin, two bright stars in my life: You're the wind beneath my wings. A special gratitude to my mother, the former Beryl Brown, whose loving words and push for persistence ring in my ears. A special thank you to my brother, Chester: You were always there whenever I needed a listening ear, always reassuring me that all will be well and to hold on. My sisters, Carol and Kathy: You have never left my side with words of encouragement and love. To my baby sister, Nicole: Your memory lives on. I miss you; you taught me how to love a little smarter and take nothing for granted. To my nieces, thank you for your unconditional love and faith in me.

Finally, to my mentor, pastor, and friend, Dr. Steven David Cassimy: Thank you for your unfailing confidence in me and your constant encouragement.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

According to data from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Children's Bureau report *Child Maltreatment 2014*, child protective agencies received 3.4 million reports of alleged child maltreatment in 2014 involving 6.3 million children. In all, 78.3% of the victims suffered neglect, 18.3% underwent physical abuse, and 9.3% experienced sexual abuse (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2013). The report also showed almost 900,000 children as abused by parents and other caretakers (Moylan et al., 2010). These high numbers indicate child abuse remains a serious social problem in the United States (Vu, Jouriles, McDonald, & Rosenfield, 2016). Vu et al. (2016) studied the effects of child abuse on the social, emotional, and cognitive development of children. Savage, Palmer, and Martin (2014) investigated the intergenerational transmission of abuse by examining the ways in which victims of childhood abuse may perpetuate cycles or patterns by becoming abusers themselves. However, few researchers have focused on how fathers who are child abuse survivors perceive child abuse and experience fatherhood (Price-Robertson, 2012).

Over the past 25 years, the frequency of studies about men, masculinity, and fatherhood has increased in sociology and psychology disciplines (Ferguson, 2012). Adamsons and Johnson (2013) claimed a new era of fatherhood has emerged, signaling a shift from viewing fathers as providers or breadwinners to full-fledged partners in the development of their children. This shift facilitated a better understanding of fathers' roles in the lives and outcomes of their children beyond financial provision (Adamsons &

Johnson, 2013; Cartwright & Henriksen, 2012; Castillo, Welch, & Sarver, 2011; Pleck, 2012). Consequently, research on fatherhood has become multivalent, with increased focus on diverse factors and expanded roles in relation to fathering and father–child relationships.

An increase in research on paternal parenting and fathers' changed roles shows that "mothering is no longer assumed to be synonymous with parenting" (Pleck, 2012, p. 252); therefore, improved insight into parenting must involve a gender-inclusive perspective. Researchers have shown fathers' perceptions as more than just providers that, when coupled with their increased involvement in their children's lives, positively links to an array of behavioral, psychological, educational, and social outcomes for children (Adamsons & Johnson, 2013; Jethwani, Mincy, & Klempin, 2014). In fact, parental involvement has become one of the major constructs researchers use to study interactions of fathers with their children (Pleck, 2012).

Another significant finding in the research is that the quality of a father's involvement with children matters more than the quantity of contact (Adamsons & Johnson, 2013). In other words, what fathers do with their children and the degree in which the male parent interacts is more important than the amount of time men spend with their offspring. Also increasing over the past 2 decades are studies into how sociocultural and socioeconomic factors connect to fathering, with researchers giving attention to the challenges associated with disadvantaged and minority fathers (Cartwright & Henriksen, 2012).

Although literature on the sociocultural and socioeconomic contexts of fatherhood has increased in the current millennium, work is still needed on how contextual factors influence fathers' involvement with their children in the framework of changing demographics and social trends (Cartwright & Henriksen, 2012). Despite recent scholarly work on men and fathering, a significant gap exists concerning how young African American fathers who have survived child abuse conceptualize and fulfill the role of fatherhood. I addressed this deficiency by gathering the real-life experiences of young African American fathers parenting their children. As such, this study gave a voice to a group remaining underrepresented in the research, namely young African American fathers who were abused as children.

The remainder of this chapter includes the background of the study, problem statement, purpose, research questions, theoretical framework, and nature of the study. Also, I define the terms used in the study and highlight assumptions, limitations, and delimitations. Finally, the chapter concludes with the implications for practice and research in the area of clinical psychology.

Background

Child abuse is a longstanding, serious, and rising social problem in the United States. Child Protective Services (CPS) received 3.1 million reports in 2012, an increase of 8.3% since 2008 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2013). In addition, according to data from the National Data Archive on Child Abuse (2014), there are more than three million reports of alleged child maltreatment in a single year, involving almost six million children. Three quarters of these children suffered neglect, 15% endured

physical abuse, and 10% suffered sexual abuse. Researchers universally accept that child abuse is an extremely destructive and disruptive experience (DeGregorio, 2012) having significant negative effects on the social, emotional, and cognitive development of children (Vu et al., 2016). Reducing these statistics will require members of society to understand and eliminate the causes of child abuse, as well as to intervene in the cycles of child abuse perpetuated from one generation to the next. In addition, practitioners and policymakers must develop a better understanding of how gender influences individuals and their experience of childhood abuse.

Male survivors who plan to be fathers face distinct challenges compared to female survivors, such as conceptualizing the father's role as provider and head of household after the traumatic and often belittling experiences of abuse (Price-Robertson, 2012). However, few studies exist on the connection between child abuse and fatherhood, with no research specific to young African American fathers. Over the last decade, researchers have studied African American fathers in a number of areas, including parental involvement (Hernandez, 2012; Walker, Reid, & Logan, 2010), a father's role in reducing aggressive and risky behavior in sons (Caldwell et al., 2014), and issues related to decisions about attending college (Cartwright & Henriksen, 2012).

Although research on fatherhood is growing—specifically with regard to how sociocultural and socioeconomic factors are connected to fathering—very few studies focus on the connection of abuse and fathering (Price-Robertson, 2012) and no data are available on how child abuse relates to the way young African American men perceive themselves and perform in their roles as fathers. Because abuse is one of the most

destructive developmental experiences (DeGregorio, 2012), more work is needed on male survivors' perceptions of how abuse influenced their insights and performance as fathers. In addition, because the causes of abuse remain unclear (DeGregorio, 2012), researchers should utilize information from various sources, including the lived experiences of survivors, to facilitate a better understanding of the effects of child abuse on later parenting skills among males.

As young fathers, men must navigate the issues of transitioning to adulthood as well as becoming a new parent; a history of childhood abuse compounds these challenges. Child abuse affects survivors' overall physical, mental, and emotional functioning (Moylan et al., 2010). It stands to reason, then, that a history of abusive experiences affects young men's development as parents and their conceptions of fatherhood. As such, child abuse often has a significant impact on how survivors raise their children (DeGregorio, 2012).

Researchers have studied how women perceive and perform their roles as mothers (Price-Robertson, 2012); however, none have investigated how young African American men think of themselves as fathers and perform in their parental roles after surviving childhood abuse. In this study, I explored the perceptions of young African American men as fathers and their real-life experiences of being abused as children. Participants were African American fathers between the ages of 19 and 41 years who lived in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Staten Island, or Manhattan boroughs of New York City.

Problem Statement

Parental performance is complicated by age and gender and whether a history of abuse exists. No researchers to date had studied how young African American men who are survivors of child abuse conceptualize and perceive their performance as fathers. Consequently, two research questions guided this study:

Research Question 1 (RQ1): What is the lived experience of young, noncustodial African American fathers who were abused as children and how they conceptualize fatherhood?

Research Question 2 (RQ2): What is the lived experience of young, noncustodial African American fathers who were abused as children in carrying out their roles as fathers?

In a study of parenting, Adamsons and Johnson (2013) found an increased interest in the significance of paternal contributions to family stability and healthy child development. Parenting by young adults influences family dynamics, the functionality of which is further affected by the presence of young fathers. Hence, young fathers who assist young mothers in parenting remain an overlooked demographic population (Adamsons & Johnson, 2013).

Several gaps exist in the literature about the areas of planning and services for young fathers (Lemay, Cashman, Elfenbein, & Felice, 2010). When human services agencies develop programs and literature for social services professionals, the primary focus is on delivering services to young women. However, little information exists on young, noncustodial African American fathers. The available literature often incorporates

older, negative stereotypes, such as the self-centered, irresponsible male or the teenager exploring his sexual identity without considering the consequences (Stengel, 2005).

The objective of this research study was to provide useful, timely information based on real experiences of young, noncustodial African American fathers. Consequently, these findings will help fill gaps in the research about the experiences of young African American fathers who have survived childhood abuse. Social services agencies and policymakers at local and community levels may draw upon this research in developing programs to address the needs and concerns of other young men in this demographic.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this interpretative phenomenological study was to explore the parenting lived experiences of young, noncustodial African American fathers who have survived childhood abuse. Interpretation of the data helps fill a gap in the literature regarding this population. Through in-depth, semistructured interviews, participants had the opportunity to voice their experiences of fatherhood in relation to their childhood abuse.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

RQ1: What is the lived experience of young, noncustodial African American fathers who were abused as children and how they conceptualize fatherhood?

RQ2: What is the lived experience of young, noncustodial African American fathers who were abused as children in carrying out their roles as fathers?

Theoretical Framework for the Study

Identity theory as conceptualized by Habib (2012) served as the theoretical framework helping to support and contextualize this study. The central idea of identity theory is that individuals' identities guide their behavior (Adamsons, 2013). In other words, how people conceptualize a specific social role (e.g., a father) and the expectations attached to it influences how they perform in that role. In relation to fatherhood, identity theory indicates the way men perceive themselves as fathers could influence their performance as fathers. As such, identity theory in the context of fatherhood involves parental cognitions or thoughts about what a father should do and be.

Kohn (2013) observed social norms and community expectations inform young men's ideas of fatherhood; however, the same standards and expectations often promote unrealistic and inaccurate notions of fathers as mere financial providers. In a qualitative study, Jones (2010) used identity theory to examine how low-income African American fathers perceived their roles as parents. Using data collected from the Healthy Attachment Promotion for Parents and Infants study, Jones found identity theory worked well as a theoretical foundation for understanding how low-income African American males viewed their parental responsibilities. Identity theory supports the notion of individuals identifying with the roles they occupy and acting in accordance with those perceptions (Adamsons, 2013).

Jones's (2010) findings supported the belief that African American men who identified with their fathering role felt more committed to parenting their children. Most of the participants associated positive feelings (e.g., love, happiness) with being fathers,

and all reported fatherhood to be a positive influence in their lives. The research findings were opposite the widely held public narratives of African American men, which indicates they are neither interested in nor committed to being fathers for their children. Jones set a precedent in using identity theory as a foundation for understanding how young African American men conceptualize fatherhood and their ability to perform as fathers after surviving childhood abuse, particularly since such experiences affect the development of a well-adapted identity. A more detailed explanation of identity theory appears in Chapter 2.

Habib (2012) argued that prior childhood experiences of being parented also influence the future parent's identity, which he referred to as the "intergenerational transmission of parenting identity" (p. 109). The source of young men's ideas of fatherhood and how they use these ideas to form their identities in transitioning to fatherhood may provide useful insight into how childhood abuse influences the ways young African American fathers think of themselves and, consequently, may affect how they perform as parents. As one of the most destructive developmental experiences, child abuse can have a significant impact on how survivors of abuse raise their own children (DeGregorio, 2012); as such, more work is needed to determine the impact of previous abuse on how young African American men perform as fathers. The intergenerational transmission of parenting identity construct and identity theory was appropriate for framing and understanding the parenting dynamics of these young men. Chapter 2 includes a detailed explanation of the intergenerational transmission of parenting identity construct in the context of identity theory.

Nature of the Study

This interpretative phenomenological analysis study involved in-depth semistructured interviews with African American men ages 19 to 41 years who had survived childhood abuse in an attempt to understand these men's perceptions of their ability to parent their children. I conducted in-depth interviews with young, noncustodial African American fathers recruited from the Bronx, Brooklyn, Staten Island, and Manhattan boroughs of New York City. This method of interpretative phenomenological analysis allowed me to gather rich data and understand participants' experiences and interpretations of their ability to parent their children. Researchers use the interpretative phenomenological approach to describe a phenomenon rather than to explain or confirm a hypothesis (Rose, 2013; Smith, Flower, & Larkin, 2009); as such, the research design was appropriate to describe and understand an experience through the lens of young fathers who had experienced childhood abuse. My goal was to understand the parenting experiences of young African American fathers with a history of being abused as children.

Definitions

The following definitions apply to terms used in this study:

Child maltreatment: Child maltreatment is any act or series of acts of commission or omission by the child's parent or caregiver that result in any form of harm or potential for harm. Child maltreatment occurs when a parent or other person legally responsible for the care of a child harms that youth or places the child in imminent danger by failing to

exercise the minimum degree of care in providing for the child (New York State Office of Children and Family Services, 2012).

Fatherhood/fathering: Fatherhood involves a male taking a parental role in the life of a child. In contemporary scholarly discourse, fatherhood is an emergent identity continuously reshaped as men encounter new circumstances, obstacles, or challenges associated with their children, partners, and communities (Gordon et al., 2012). This identity depends upon men's commitment to the development and maintenance of the father–child relationship.

Neglect: Neglect is a form of child maltreatment severe enough to be disruptive to a child's development (Children's Bureau, 2013). Neglect involves failure on the part of a parent, guardian, or caregiver to provide for a child's basic psychological/emotional, medical, or physical needs. Psychological/emotional neglect is inattention to a child's psychological care and emotional needs. Educational neglect involves failure to enroll a child and support him or her in appropriate educational opportunities, including special education (Children's Bureau, 2013). Medical neglect is the failure to provide regular medical health care and treatment. Physical neglect occurs when caregivers fail to provide a child with the basic necessities of food and shelter (Children's Bureau, 2013).

Transition to fatherhood: The transition to fatherhood is a recent construct used by researchers in studying the issues associated with men becoming fathers. The timeframe of the transition to fatherhood includes men's experiences with their partner's pregnancy, the baby's delivery, and several years after the birth of the child (Chin, Hall, & Daiches, 2011). Researchers have focused primarily on three areas associated with the

transition to fatherhood: the men's emotional reactions and adjustments to fatherhood, how they identify their roles as fathers, and how they redefine themselves and their relationship with their child's mother (Chin et al., 2011).

Assumptions

Because of the personal and delicate nature of the information, participants may have been reluctant to answer in an honest, forthright fashion. Consequently, I took special care to assure participants of the confidentiality of their answers and the nature and significance of this study. I assumed participants understood the study's importance and answered questions in an honest, forthright manner. Another assumption was that asking participants about their conceptualization of fatherhood and their role as a father would produce informative results regarding their experiences of childhood abuse.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this study involved 11 young African American fathers recruited from fatherhood programs in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Staten Island, and Manhattan boroughs of New York City. The selection of this particular population was important because little is known about how young, noncustodial African American men think of themselves as fathers and how they perform in their roles as parents. Participants were young, noncustodial African American men between the ages of 19 and 41 years. Men younger than 19 and older than 41 years and those who were not African American were ineligible to participate in this study. Although the situation and factors may apply to young fathers of any race, these delimitations meant the results may not be generalizable to other populations because of the uniqueness of each participant's experiences and the

socioeconomic context. My aim with this interpretative phenomenological study was to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon rather than to obtain generalizable information.

Identity theory (Adamsons, 2013) was more appropriate than other theories, such as Erikson's (1963) theory of psychosocial development. Identity theory provided an appropriate theoretical foundation because it holds that individuals identify with the roles they occupy and act in accordance with those roles; in comparison, developmental theories are more useful in the context of understanding the individuals' development. Although only a small amount of research currently exists on young, noncustodial African American fathers in relation to identity theory, Jones (2010) found this theory worked well for understanding how this population perceived their roles as fathers. Therefore, identity theory is a more appropriate foundation than developmental theories for understanding how young African American men perceive and describe their role as fathers.

Limitations

All participants in the study were male and the researcher was female; consequently, gender may be a limitation to the study. Male participants could be less likely to discuss childhood issues and current concerns of fatherhood with a female researcher than with a male researcher, perhaps thinking she cannot relate to or understand their experiences. If these participants experienced abuse, including the sensitive topic of sexual abuse, they could be reluctant to provide honest and forthright answers, especially to a female researcher. To mitigate these limitations, I took the time

to establish a rapport with participants and put them at ease. In addition, I reassured participants of the serious and scholarly nature of the study and my obligation to treat all data with complete confidentiality.

Researcher bias is another potential limitation of qualitative studies. To limit researcher bias, I used epoché and bracketing before beginning the interviews. Epoché involves identifying any personal biases or preconceived notions before engaging in research, acknowledging them, and then putting them aside to focus on participants with a clear and open mind (Groenewald, 2004). Bracketing involves researchers being honest and vigilant about their perspectives, preexisting thoughts, and beliefs (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). Consequently, researchers must recognize and set aside (but not abandon) their prior knowledge and assumptions with the analytic goal of attending to participants' accounts without preconception. To address these potential biases, I generated written analytic memos throughout the data collection process containing personal thoughts, reactions, and biases; further, these memos helped me to recognized and understand any presuppositions and preconceived hunches and ideas. Such a technique is often useful and effective in uncovering and raising awareness of hidden biases or notions that may otherwise go unnoticed.

Dependability serves as another potential limitation of qualitative studies. The researcher must account for dependability in the ever-changing context of the research (Trochim, 2006). Maintaining dependability of inquiry requires the researcher to accurately describe the research procedures and data interpretation, as well as any changes that may occur throughout the process as more knowledge and insight become

available. To account for this ever-changing context, researchers must record any modifications occurring in the setting and how these may alter the applied approach or results. By encouraging the participants to describe personal events to help convey their lived experiences and perceptions regarding fatherhood, researchers can create a rich context with temporal qualities, which may help relate changing contexts to participant experiences and researcher interpretations.

In line with other qualitative studies, the aim of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the impact of childhood experiences of young African American men on raising their children rather than attempting to achieve generalizability. In other words, the goal of a phenomenological study is to describe and understand the lived experience of the participants, not to achieve transferability to other settings (Tracy, 2013). Instead, the reader can decide the extent to which the results of this study are transferable based on a description of the sample's characteristics. Because of the uniqueness of every participants' experiences, their socioeconomic context, and the small sample size typical of qualitative studies (Shenton, 2004), I did not intend generalization of the findings of this study to other populations. However, findings may help identify the dynamics and mechanisms that might be common to other parents.

Significance

This study has significant implications for both research and practice. Findings help fill a gap in the literature on the lived experiences of young, noncustodial African American fathers who survived childhood abuse, and their perceptions of how they see themselves as parents. In addition, this study gives a voice to young fathers who have

been abused and presents experiences from their perspectives. Although research is available on various aspects of child abuse (DeGregorio, 2012), few studies exist on how young, noncustodial African American men identify themselves as fathers. In addition, the study provides information that may be useful to local and state policymakers in efforts to prevent the perpetuation of child abuse on future generations. The findings of this research can also be useful for programs to educate young African American men on how to be responsible, nurturing fathers. Information from this study on the issues young African American fathers faced as children and their ability to parent their children may add to the literature on understanding and preventing patterns of child abuse.

Summary

Child abuse remains a serious problem in the United States, with deleterious effects on the social, emotional, and cognitive development of children (Moylan et al., 2010). Researchers have explored the intergenerational transmission of abuse, examining ways in which those who were abused as children may go on to become abusers themselves (DeGregorio, 2012; Savage et al., 2014). Although the amount of scholarly work on men and fathering has increased in recent years, a gap exists concerning how a history of abuse influences young, noncustodial African American men in their perception and performance as fathers. With few researchers focused on how previous child abuse can impact men's perceptions and experiences of fatherhood (Price-Robertson, 2012), no one has studied how young, noncustodial African American fathers who have survived childhood abuse conceptualize and carry out their roles as fathers.

Furthermore, few researchers have used identity theory as a theoretical foundation for studying young, noncustodial African American fathers. Although Jones (2010) drew upon identity theory for understanding African American fathers' feelings toward fatherhood, no researchers had applied it in understanding how young childhood experiences affect African American men, and how these men identify themselves as fathers. The results from this interpretative phenomenological qualitative study with an identity theory perspective may indicate meaningful ways to intervene in or stop the cycle of child abuse.

Chapter 2 includes an outline of the literature search strategy for this study, as well as a detailed discussion of the theoretical framework of identity theory (Habib, 2012) and how it relates to this study. It also contains a review of the current literature related to childhood abuse and men's perceptions of fatherhood.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

A far-reaching social problem in the United States, child abuse remains one of the most developmentally disruptive childhood experiences affecting children socially, emotionally, and cognitively (Moylan et al., 2010). Furthermore, an estimated 30% of child abuse survivors go on to abuse their children (DeGregorio, 2012). Although researchers have conducted many studies on the pattern and cycle of child abuse, few provided an opportunity for young male parents to state how they think of themselves as fathers and how they perform in their roles as parents. Exploring how young, noncustodial African American fathers who experienced child abuse think of themselves as fathers builds on existing research.

Individuals abused as children have a higher likelihood of exhibiting later parental abusive behavior toward their children (DeGregorio, 2012). Parents with a history of abuse in their childhood are at twice the risk of having a child on the Child Protection Register as are parents without a history of abuse. Discovering where young men get their ideas of fatherhood and how they use these concepts to form their own identities as they transition to fatherhood may prove useful in illuminating how previous abuse influences young men's ideas of and performance in fatherhood. The purpose of this study was to explore the parenting lived experiences of young, noncustodial African American fathers who have survived childhood abuse.

The remainder of the chapter includes a description of the literature search strategy, theoretical framework, and a survey of recent peer-reviewed literature on the

transition to fatherhood, the link between fatherhood and abuse, and the intergenerational transmission of abuse for African American fathers. The chapter concludes with a summary.

Literature Search Strategy

The literature that I used to inform this review emerged through comprehensive online searches that I conducted in several stages with the assistance of a Walden University librarian. Although the focus was on current, peer-reviewed scholarly articles, I initially referred to books, older articles, and government documents for obtaining contextual and background information to produce leads for search terms and topics relating to abuse and young African American fathers. After collecting background and contextual material, I determined the best search methodology and, with the assistance of a Walden University librarian, generated ideas regarding search keywords. Various combinations of the following key terms and phrases proved useful: *fathers, fatherhood, noncustodial fathers and abuse, African American fathers, child abuse, child abuse* and *African American intergenerational transmission of abuse,* and *transition to fatherhood* and *identity theory*. I utilized PsycARTICLES, PsycINFO, and Academic Search Complete to search for relevant, current peer-reviewed journal articles published within the past 5 years. Before generating the search results, I selected the "Peer Review" feature, ensuring all resources returned fit this requirement. I also relied upon Google Scholar, with a preference for peer-reviewed journal articles, to obtain additional full-text articles. The bibliographies of key studies on fatherhood and child abuse yielded several additional studies of interest. Finally, I searched international journals to ensure I

reviewed all relevant, peer-reviewed studies on child abuse and young African American fathers.

Theoretical Foundation

Identity theory served to contextualize and undergird this study on examining the effects of childhood abuse on how young African American men conceptualize and carry out fatherhood. Identity theory generally allows a researcher to analyze how people's perceptions of their roles and identities guide their behavior in those roles (Habib, 2012). Jones (2010) showed identity theory worked well to understand African American fathers' feelings toward fatherhood.

Jones (2010) conducted one of the few explorations of fatherhood in the context of identity theory. Findings showed African American men who identified with being fathers held positive feelings toward fatherhood, including those of satisfaction, happiness, and love. However, Jones did not investigate the influence of an adverse childhood on the conceptions of parenthood according to identity theory. No other recent researcher has explored this topic either. As such, this study help fills the gap in this important and underrepresented area by using identity theory to explore how young African American men identify themselves as fathers, and how his process of identification influences how, after surviving childhood abuse, they carry out their roles as fathers.

According to identity theory, individuals are reflexive and identify themselves in particular ways in relation to other social categories and identities (Habib, 2012). This process of identification involves two important processes: self-categorization and social

comparison (Habib, 2012). Self-categorization incorporates an emphasis on the perceived similarities and differences between the individuals and other in-group members. The idea of social comparison is related to self-categorization and addresses how individuals come to view themselves as members of a group against other groups or out-groups (Habib, 2012). Identity, then, is the meaning individuals hold about themselves acting in a particular social role stemming from interactions with and social cues from others (Habib, 2012).

How individuals come to identify themselves becomes a powerful guide for their behavior (Adamsons, 2013). Their perceptions and experiences of belonging to a specific social group or inhabiting a role (e.g., father, adult) influence how they perform in that role (Adamsons, 2013). Consequently, identity theory is appropriate as a foundation for exploring and understanding how young African American fathers think of themselves as fathers and how, after surviving childhood abuse, they perform in their roles as parents.

In relation to fatherhood, identity theory is useful to denote the ways men perceive themselves as fathers and how that role influences their paternal performance in terms of how and in what capacity they interact with their children (Habib, 2012). Researchers have used identity theory in other areas related to fatherhood and child abuse. For example, Ferguson (2012) showed the act of men explicitly adopting identities as fathers serves as a source of motivation to be a better father. As it pertains to fatherhood, identity theory involves parental cognitions such as thoughts about what a father should do and be (Adamsons, 2013). Kohn (2013) observed that social norms and community expectations often form young men's ideas of fatherhood. Still, these norms

and expectations sometimes cultivate unrealistic and unhelpful notions of fathers as being merely providers or breadwinners.

Another important source of education about fatherhood as related to identity theory comes from the initial experience of having a parent, an experience Habib (2012) referred to as the intergenerational transmission of parenting identity. Where young men get their ideas of fatherhood and how they use these concepts to form their own identities as they transition to fatherhood provided useful information to this study of how child abuse experiences influence young fathers' ideas and performances of fatherhood.

One of the central questions of the present study pertained to how young, noncustodial African American men who became fathers conceptualized fatherhood. Little current researchers had connected identity theory to African American fathers specifically; however, Adamsons (2013) and Habib (2012) conducted important work on how young men's perceptions of themselves as fathers influence how they parent. Findings from the current study add to the literature with an exploration of how identity theory helps researchers understand how young African American men identify as fathers and how this identification influences their paternal performance. Further, I explored the effects suffering abuse as children had on these fathers' identities. Because Adamsons and Habib suggested promising directions for linking identity theory to young African American fathers in particular, it was worthwhile to examine their findings.

Adamsons (2013) investigated mothers' and fathers' ideas of fathering relationships at the child's birth and 9 years later. The researcher found that, although neither the mothers' nor fathers' role identity correlated with the father–child relationship

quality at the child's birth, overall centrality of the father status was related. In addition, whether parents were romantically involved 9 years later mediated the connection between relationship quality and prior abortion consideration (Adamsons, 2013). The findings showed the significant long-term influence of the father's initial investment in paternal identity, as fathers who valued becoming a father at the time of the child's birth and who had not considered abortion reported high-quality father–child relationships 9 years later. Although the longitudinal design of the study was appropriate for examining the dynamic nature of parental identities over time, more frequent measures could have yielded additional information and been helpful in understanding the mechanisms of fathering identities at the intermediate stages between the child's birth and 9 years of age.

In a literature review, Habib (2012) explored paternal involvement and identity theory with regard to how new fathers might effectively conceptualize their transition to fatherhood and come to think of themselves as first-time fathers. Habib noted broad conceptual models used in past literature, including individual father characteristics (skill, confidence), aspects of the father–mother relationship (divorce, separation, access), characteristics of the child (gender, temperament), and socioeconomic contexts and factors (income, ethnicity). Although these conceptual models have proven useful, Habib noted the models have remained largely descriptive and lacked an underlying theoretical structure. As a result, Habib proposed identity theory might complement these broad conceptual models by focusing on the father's sense of self as a parent, especially during the transition to fatherhood. The application of identity theory would allow for a more testable and purposeful approach to understanding paternal involvement in the early

stages. As such, both Adamsons (2013) and Habib showed the importance of identity theory in understanding the development and adaptive character of fatherhood identity.

Other researchers have looked at identity theory in relation to fathers' involvement with their children. Interested in the variance of father involvement over time, Degarmo (2009) used identity theory to examine father involvement for 230 divorced fathers of children ages 4 to 12 years over an 18-month period. The researcher associated identity with the notion that, the more men were able to identify with the father role, the more involved they were with their children. Because paternal involvement tends to decline after divorce, Degarmo also tested if father involvement predicted father identity over time and if father custody was a moderating factor. The researcher found identity significantly predictive of involvement, with the level of participation broadly differing by custody status. The study underscored the importance of identity theory to fathering research and highlighted how conceptualizing identity can significantly influence behavior (Degarmo, 2009). However, Degarmo did not specifically distinguish between differences in the amount of time spent during father–child visits and the kind of contact that constituted involvement. Increased specificity in these areas might yield richer information on the connection between father involvement and identity theory.

Goldberg, Tan, Davis, and Easterbrooks (2013) examined the role of parental cognition in relation to father involvement, according to identity theory. Parental cognitions, which are based on tenets similar to those of identity theory, also facilitated the study of paternal involvement; in this realm, longitudinal study is especially notable.

Parental cognitions involve the influence of self-perception of behavior. Generally, cognitions can be descriptive (the way things are) or evaluative-prescriptive (the way things should be; Goldberg et al., 2013). The researchers posed questions to a sample of 91 young fathers categorized as variably at risk to explore various aspects of paternal cognition, including what makes a good father, what makes it hard to be a good father, what are the good things about being a father, what are the challenges in being a good father, and what is important to be a good father (Goldberg et al., 2013). The degree of paternal cognition is the strongest and most significant predictor of father involvement, highlighting the significance of the construct of paternal cognition for a better understanding of paternal involvement, especially for young, at-risk fathers. Findings also showed children's mothers appear as gatekeepers, with the fathers' own mothers considered facilitators of child involvement (Goldberg et al., 2013). These findings show the importance of young fathers forging strong coparenting and support relationships during Erikson's (1950) young adult stage of psychosocial development.

In their findings, these researchers showed identity theory offers an appropriate theoretical understanding of how young men conceptualize themselves as fathers. Although researchers have mainly used identity theory in the study of at-risk fathers and paternal involvement, few have applied identity theory to perceptions of fatherhood among young African American men. The present study contributes to the research in the area of how young African American men think of themselves as fathers and how such perceptions influence their parenting behavior. In addition, it was not known how experiences of child abuse impact the formation of men's paternal identities. Information

from this study contributes to a better understanding of identity theory, particularly with regard to how a history of child abuse influences African American men's perceptions of their father identities.

Literature Review Related to Key Variables and/or Concepts

As I searched the literature for relevant research, I found a number of topics that served as background for this study. Among the concepts were transition to fatherhood, fatherhood and child abuse, and intergenerational transmission of abuse. Another variable that pertained directly to this study was African American fathers. Summaries of these topics follow.

Transition to Fatherhood

Fatherhood is a multifaceted and challenging journey that provides different experiences for different fathers. Typical characterizations of young African American fathers often include negative stereotypes, including being a remote, missing, or faceless parent (Habib, 2012; Jones, 2010). In comparison to teen mothers, young fathers, especially African American men, remain an overlooked demographic underrepresented in research (Adamsons, 2013). Although fatherhood can be a frightening prospect for young men, it can also be a time of transformation and growth for those who want to engage and participate in the lives of their children (Ferguson, 2012).

The transition to parenthood is a construct researchers have used to study how individuals evolve into their roles as new parents in a potentially unsettling period of change. In the past 20 years, researches have increasingly focused on the roles fathers play in the lives of their children, specifically during the transition to fatherhood (Habib,

2012). Ngu and Florsheim (2011) focused on the transition to fatherhood as connected to the development of relational competence, with Habib (2012) studying fathers' involvement in the lives of their children.

Habib (2012) defined five general role types to which fathers may transition: remote, provider, assistant or secondary parent, shared caregiver, and primary caregiver. Characterizing the remote role is the father showing little interest in the life of the child (Habib, 2012). The provider role is a traditional father role wherein the man's primary function is that of breadwinner (Habib, 2012). In the assistant role, the father is largely in a secondary capacity or helping the mother (Habib, 2012). The shared caregiver role is one of co-parenting with the mother, a relationship that entails shared responsibilities and tasks (Habib, 2012). Acting as primary caregivers, fathers take the lead in the crucial responsibilities for the care of their children (Habib, 2012). More specific characteristics of fathering roles may include fathers acting as nurturers, disciplinarians, playmates, or protectors (Habib, 2012). However, it was not known how a history of child abuse may affect the way young men conceptualize their roles as fathers as they transition to fatherhood.

Chin et al. (2011) conducted a meta-analysis of qualitative research on the transition to fatherhood construct. Chin et al. looked at six recent qualitative studies (three from the United Kingdom, two from Sweden, and one from Australia) on the transition to fatherhood for men becoming first-time fathers. The reviewed studies covered a range of fatherhood stages, from the woman's pregnancy to 14 months after childbirth. The researchers employed a seven-step, meta-ethnographic approach to

synthesize the findings of the studies, using reciprocal translation (i.e., translating studies into one another) to uncover the three overarching themes of men's emotional reactions to the transition to fatherhood, men defining their role as fathers, and men redefining themselves and their relationship with their partner (Chin et al., 2011).

The first theme involved men's emotional reactions to evolving to fatherhood at various stages of the transition process. For example, many new fathers described feeling distant or detached during the mother's pregnancy because of their inability to experience the event directly (Chin et al., 2011). In addition, the interaction of men between pregnant mothers and health care professionals during prenatal classes and doctor visits reinforced new fathers' feelings of being outsiders to the experience (Chin et al., 2011). Immediately after childbirth, new fathers' emotional responses included amazement, love, responsibility, confusion, and surprise; many also felt overwhelmed by positive emotions and the pressure of needing to adjust to new circumstances and responsibilities (Chin et al., 2011).

In the second theme, Chin et al. (2011) found new fathers often identified their role as a father by constructing their sense of fatherhood in relation to experiences with their own fathers. New fathers wanted to emulate the positive aspects of their own experiences of being fathered and to disavow negatives ones. Many men, mostly Caucasian with ages ranging from 19 to 50 years, revealed that they wanted to act as providers while being approachable and nurturing. They also had a desire to learn about and be involved in the practical aspects of childcare (e.g., diapering, clothing, bathing, and routines).

The third theme pertained to new fathers redefining their relationships with the child's mother in positive terms, with the connection becoming deeper and stronger (Chin et al., 2011). This redefining also accompanied feelings of increased sensitivity and maturity (Chin et al., 2011). Because they assimilated previous disparate studies on how men conceptualize and define their roles as fathers as they transition to parenthood, Chin et al. (2011) made a significant contribution to the literature on fatherhood. A weakness identified by the researchers was that their literature review lacked examinations of fathers from varying sociodemographic samples. This study helped to fill this gap by exploring how young African American men think of themselves as fathers and how, after surviving childhood abuse, they perform in their roles as parents.

Ives (2014) also studied men's experiences of their transition to fatherhood as first-time fathers during the perinatal period (i.e., the time just before, during, and shortly after childbirth) by focusing on the moral demands of fatherhood and how the men negotiated these requirements in relation to their new roles as fathers. Ives used a qualitative grounded theory approach, interviewing 11 first-time fathers via face-to-face and telephone interviews. Participants represented a balanced mix of employment, education, ethnicity, and age (Ives, 2014). Ives conducted semistructured interviews approximately every 4 weeks ranging from 12 weeks before birth to 8 weeks after birth. Two central concepts or themes emerged after the continual coding of data: "on the outside, looking in" and "present, but not participating" (Ives, 2014, p. 1008). Based on these themes, Ives theorized that first-time fathers negotiated the moral demands associated with the transition to fatherhood in one of two ways, deference or support.

The theme of on the outside, looking in involved men believing they had a major role to play during the perinatal period, while simultaneously feeling separated and apart (Ives, 2014). This distance occurred mainly because the fathers did not directly experience pregnancy, birth, and close, daily child interaction shortly after birth (Ives, 2014). These dynamics aligned with Chin et al.'s (2011) findings of men feeling distant or detached during pregnancy and childbirth because they were not personally involved in the pregnancy. Effectively, the men were waiting to experience similar physical connections to their children that would help turn them into fathers (Ives, 2014).

The second theme of present, but not participating referred to the men's frustration of being present at medical checkups and other activities but not able to participate (Ives, 2014). According to Ives, the themes combined to generate the moral response of deference and support, an attitude Ives (2014) likened to that of a stoical protector. Men wanted to support and protect their partner and child to the extent that they often denied or negated their own decisions and needs. Ives further characterized these feelings and thoughts in terms of the moral risk men take when they express their own interests and concerns, instinctively believing that complaining about their own situation, which is uncomparable to their partners', is undesirable. The study represented important work on the transition to fatherhood, with the qualitative methodology and small sample size allowing for collection of in-depth data. However, the sample consisted only of self-selected volunteers who wished to talk about their experiences, which put limits on the transferability of the study's findings.

The transition to and obligations of fatherhood are not only complicated by age, developmental stages, identity, and gender (i.e., issues of which parent fills what role), but also by a young father's relational competence (Ngu & Florsheim, 2011). Ngu and Florsheim (2011) defined *relational competence* as "the ability to communicate a thoughtful and caring perspective on significant relationships, even under stressful circumstance" (p. 186), a concept considered an important aspect of a young man's transition to fatherhood. Ngu and Florsheim examined the relationship factors associated with paternal functioning among high-risk fathers, stressing the importance of the young mother's relational competence on her partner's paternal functioning. Study participants were young fathers and their co-parenting partners. The researchers followed the participants over a 2-year period beginning before their child's birth. The criteria used to identify fathers at high risk for parental failure included a history of school dropout, psychopathology, and serial fatherhood. Ngu and Florsheim hypothesized the young men who were relationally competent before their child's birth would function well as fathers, regardless of their high-risk status.

Ngu and Florsheim (2011) found that positive parenting of high-risk fathers was typically associated with positive relationships with their co-parenting partners. The researchers identified parental involvement of high-risk fathers comprised three elements: the relational competence of the father before the child's birth, the relational competence of the young father's partner, and the changes in the young father's relational competence across the transition to fatherhood. Additionally, young fathers achieved positive parental functioning in several ways. Young fathers with a high level of relational competence

were most likely to function well as parents, regardless of their partners' competencies. In addition, young fathers with relationally competent partners showed improved relational competence over time, which was associated with positive paternal functioning. However, no researchers have tested Ngu and Florsheim's measure of relational competence with other samples, suggesting further study and refinement may be necessary.

Researchers have focused more on how young men internally identify and define their roles as fathers as they transition to fatherhood. However, because child abuse is one of the most destructive development experiences, it can have a tremendous impact on a number of aspects of a person's life, including parenting (DeGregorio, 2012). In addition, no one has tested how a history of child abuse in particular may affect young men's transition to fatherhood.

Fatherhood and Child Abuse

According to DeGregorio (2012), the ability of child abuse survivors to work through and positively integrate their childhood experiences is a variable in parents' ability to effectively parent their children. If individuals have unresolved trauma, an increased likelihood exists for treating their own children according to the treatment they had received (DeGregorio, 2012). Although most individuals who have suffered abuse as children grow up to be loving, nonabusive parents, their parenting experience likely differs from that of the nonabused individual (DeGregorio, 2012).

Scant research exists on the influence of child abuse on male survivors and how they later conceptualize fatherhood and their roles as fathers (Price-Robertson, 2012).

Price-Robertson (2012) examined how child sexual abuse influenced men's perceptions and experiences of fatherhood in Australia. Between 11% and 16% of Australian males reported experiencing sexual abuse, including penetrative and nonpenetrative acts; however, little is known about the impact these experiences have on their life perceptions. Price-Robertson critically reviewed the small amount of available research on male victims of child sexual abuse addressing some aspects of fatherhood. Six dominant themes emerged from his review of six qualitative studies, namely men's fears of becoming abusers, the assertion of moral choice, problems with physical displays of affection, overprotectiveness of their own children, fatherhood as a catalyst for resurfacing trauma, and fatherhood as a healing experience (Price-Robertson, 2012).

The most dominant theme to emerge from the literature was the male victim's fear that he might sexually abuse his own children (Price-Robertson, 2012). This fear led some men to decide not to have children and affected other men's relationship with their children to the degree that one participant indicated a being afraid to be alone with his daughter (Price-Robertson, 2012). Another theme was that many survivors viewed the perpetration of sexual abuse as a moral choice and resolutely decided not to continue such a cycle of abuse (Price-Robertson, 2012).

Price-Robertson (2012) identified victims' problems with physical displays of affection as another dominant theme. Men's discomfort with displays of affection was prevalent in social environments that had some degree of uneasiness about adult males' relationship with children; examples included family roles or professions such as coaching, teaching, and caregiving (Price-Robertson, 2012). Victims' overprotectiveness

of their own children emerged as a fourth theme, with the fifth theme that, for many victims, fatherhood served as a trigger for remembering and reflecting on their own traumatic and emotional experiences as victims (Price-Robertson, 2012). However, in the sixth and most positive theme, fatherhood is a healing experience, enabling and facilitating the victims' recovery from the trauma of childhood sexual abuse. Although Price-Robertson focused on men in Australia and included only a small number of studies in the review, this research is nonetheless important in light of the few studies available on the impact of childhood abuse on fatherhood. Furthermore, findings showed the different mechanisms typically employed by a new father to assimilate previous experience of abuse with parenthood.

Intergenerational Transmission of Abuse

Although researchers have used the intergenerational transmission of abuse as a construct to study how victims of child abuse can become abusers of their own children, the mechanisms that perpetuate cycles of intergenerational child abuse are still unclear (Berlin, Appleyard, & Dodge, 2011; Robboy & Anderson, 2011). Investigations on the intergenerational transmission of child abuse remains important because of the number of survivors who go on to abuse their own children, estimated to be 30% (DeGregorio, 2012). In addition to children observing aggressive and abusive behavior (Bandura, 1973, 1977), social and contextual factors such as poverty, community violence, and teen pregnancy may affect the intergenerational transmission of child abuse (Robboy & Anderson, 2011).

Researchers have studied how other outcomes associated with child abuse, such as trauma symptomatology and nonfamily violence, are transmissible across generations (Robboy & Anderson, 2011; Savage et al., 2014). In a study of how a history of sexual abuse affected early teenage girls, Robboy and Anderson (2011) found a mother's history of sexual abuse led to maladaptive coping strategies in early teenage daughters, especially as second-generation sex abuse survivors are more likely to experience multiple forms of abuse or victimization. Examining the connection between child abuse and violence, Savage et al. (2014) found a link between physical child abuse and violent criminal outcomes from a social learning and personality development perspective.

Researchers also explored the intergenerational transmission of abuse through the neuropsychological development of abuse survivors (DeGregorio, 2012) and psychological consequences (Berlin et al., 2011). As one of the most destructive developmental experiences, child abuse can have a tremendous impact on a number of areas in a person's life, including parenting (DeGregorio, 2012). DeGregorio (2012) expanded the literature on the intergenerational transmission of abuse through a perspective afforded by neuroimaging technology. With the use of neuroimaging, researchers have found incidents of emotional and psychological stress associated with child abuse linked to maladaptive and compromised neurodevelopment (DeGregorio, 2012). Due to neurochemical processes, emotional and psychological stress can significantly alter the structure and function of the social brain, the part responsible for various aspects of social interactions (DeGregorio, 2012). Consequently, child abuse may negatively affect the neurodevelopment of victims, leading to deficits in and

compromised social functioning (e.g., rejection, disappointment, lack of flexibility) that could lead victims to become abusers of their own children (DeGregorio, 2012). Although not qualitative, DeGregorio's theoretical research adds to the literature on the intergenerational transmission of abuse, underscoring the continued importance of the construct.

Berlin et al. (2011) also supported the importance of intergenerational transmission of abuse to understand the patterns and cycles of abuse. However, Berlin et al. identified the need for better insight of the mechanisms mediating the intergenerational transmission of abuse. In their study of 499 mothers and their children in a small Southeastern U.S. city, Berlin et al. found mothers' social isolation and aggressive response biases mediated the intergenerational transmission of child abuse.

African American Fathers

Although there has been an increase in studies of the sociocultural and socioeconomic contexts of fatherhood over the past few decades, more work is needed, especially on how contextual factors and race influence fathers' involvement with their children (Castillo et al., 2011). Many researchers discussed in this review have called for additional study on the contextual factors of race (Caldwell et al., 2014; Caldwell, Rafferty, Reischl, De Loney, & Brooks, 2010; Cartwright & Henriksen, 2012; Walker et al., 2010), ethnicity (Castillo, 2010; Castillo et al., 2011; Castillo & Sarver, 2012), socioeconomic background (Choi & Jackson, 2011; Gordon et al., 2012; Hernandez, 2012; Mullins, 2010), and fatherhood.

Because of changing demographics, research on nonresidential fathers and the role they play in their children's lives is becoming increasingly important. Caldwell, Rafferty et al. (2010) and Caldwell, Antonakos et al. (2014) focused specifically on enhancing the parenting skills of nonresidential African American fathers through intervention programs to reduce sons' aggression and prevent children's risky behavior. With a propensity for living in depressed socioeconomic environments, African American male youth are exposed to and engage in risky behavior (e.g., early sexual initiation, substance use, violence, poor self-regulation) at higher rates than adolescents of other racial backgrounds (Caldwell et al., 2010; Hernandez, 2012). In addition, intervention programs specifically targeted at nonresidential fathers of preadolescents and adolescents have received infrequent study (Caldwell et al., 2010). Caldwell et al. evaluated 158 intervention group and 129 comparison group families and noted aggressive behavior decreased when nonresidential fathers monitored their sons' behavior. The researchers also found increased intention to avoid violence and improved communication about sex.

In addition, Caldwell et al. (2014) tested the effectiveness of a father-and-son intervention program for enhancing the parenting skills satisfaction of nonresidential African American fathers. The intervention was effective in improving the parenting skills of fathers, which, in turn, was positively associated with the sons' satisfaction with parental engagement. Greater satisfaction also correlated positively with sons' intentions to avoid violence. Father-and-son program attendance indirectly decreased the sons' aggressive behaviors by enhancing nonresidential fathers' parenting behaviors (Caldwell

et al., 2014). Caldwell, Antonakos et al. and Caldwell, Rafferty et al. (2010) made important contributions regarding the involvement of African American fathers in the lives of their children, showing parental involvement can have a significant, positive impact.

Cartwright and Henriken's (2012) study of African American collegiate males is another significant inquiry on the effects of nonresident African American fathers' involvement in their children's lives. From interviews with 15 African American male college students, Cartwright and Henriksen identified five components necessary for these young men to persevere, succeed, and move on to college; these were having a male role model or mentor, a supportive mother, the desire to receive an education, respect for their fathers, and resilience. Cartwright and Henriksen noted participants were reluctant to speak negatively about their fathers, expressing mostly regret that their fathers had missed out on much of their lives. In this study, interviews were important and helpful in capturing the lived experiences of young African American men who had succeeded in the face of depressed socioeconomic circumstances. In addition, the men had turned stereotypical images of themselves as "trifling," "promiscuous," "thugs," "uneducated," "deadbeat," "broke," and "ignorant" into socially and individually positive realities (Cartwright & Henriksen, 2012, p. 35).

Walker et al. (2010) identified only a small amount of literature on fatherhood focused on racial differences among low-income, noncustodial fathers who do not pay child support, the end result of which was often incarceration. Walker et al. stressed the importance of better understanding who these fathers were and how they were involved

in their children's lives to develop parenting programs and social policy geared toward increasing father involvement beyond financial support. In assessing 386 noncustodial fathers, Walker et al. found no significant differences between African American and Anglo-American fathers' perceptions of fathering and the types of involvement with their children. However, the researchers noted that low-income, noncustodial African American fathers faced various challenges in staying involved in the lives of their children, reinforcing the importance of studying the contextual factors of fatherhood (Walker et al., 2010). One limitation was the sample comprising noncustodial fathers who had pled guilty to charges of nonpayment of child support; consequently, findings are not generalizable to other low-income noncustodial fathers.

A review of the literature shows that although research exists on how young men transition to fatherhood and the intergenerational transmission of abuse, less work is available on child abuse in relation to fatherhood. Furthermore, no literature is available regarding how young, noncustodial African American men think of themselves as fathers and how they perceive their roles as parents after surviving childhood abuse. The influence of abuse requires more research, particularly with regard to the experiences of African American fathers as an at-risk group. Specifically, the lack of scholarship on how young African American men think of themselves as fathers and how they perform in their roles as parents after surviving childhood abuse represents a serious gap in the literature, which this study helps fill.

Summary and Conclusions

As evident from the literature, a new era of fatherhood has emerged in public discourse and research, signaling a shift from viewing fathers largely as providers or breadwinners to having of greater participation in their children's development (Adamsons & Johnson, 2013). This perspective shift has already facilitated a better understanding of fathers' roles in the lives and outcomes of their children beyond financial provision (Cartwright & Henriksen, 2012; Castillo et al., 2011; Gregory & Milner, 2011; Lamb, 2010; Pleck, 2012). However, gaps remain in certain areas and groups, particularly with regard to the parenting views of young African American fathers who were abused as children.

In this chapter, I reviewed available theoretical and applied literature on young men's transition to fatherhood, fatherhood and child abuse, and the intergenerational transmission of abuse. The focus of this study was how young African American men think of themselves as fathers and how they perform in their roles as parents after surviving childhood abuse. As Habib (2012) showed, one of the most influential sources from which young men receive cues about being fathers is from their fathers. Identity theory is relevant to this study, because the method and degree to which individuals identify their social roles greatly influences how they perform in those roles (Adamsons, 2013; Habib, 2012). Because Jones (2010) found identity theory appropriate for framing and understanding how African American fathers felt toward fatherhood, I chose identity theory as a suitable theoretical framework for exploring how young African American men perceive themselves and perform as fathers after surviving childhood abuse.

Current research on fatherhood and child abuse shows Australian men abused as children are aware of the risk and fear becoming abusers themselves such that they have a keen awareness of their physical displays of affection with their children and are often overprotective (Price-Robertson, 2012). In addition, the experience of fatherhood can act as a catalyst for remembering trauma as well as a healing experience for male victims of child abuse (Price-Robertson, 2012). The literature on the intergenerational transmission of abuse showed a significant number of abuse victims growing up to be abusers themselves (DeGregorio, 2012). In addition, the experience of child abuse in the home can lead to abusive behavior outside the home, including violent criminal outcomes (Savage et al., 2014) and maladaptive coping strategies (Robboy & Anderson, 2011). In relation to the transition to fatherhood, important research themes include men's emotional reactions to the transition to fatherhood, men identifying their roles as fathers, and men redefining themselves and their relationship with their partner (Chin et al., 2011). Little research exists in this context with identity theory as a foundation. Consequently, gaps emerged regarding the development of parenting skills and intervention programs to improve effective parenting perspectives and practices of young African American men.

The phenomenological nature of this study allowed me to explore the lived experiences of parenting among young, noncustodial African American fathers who survived childhood abuse. An interpretative design involved bridging the subjective and objective through the interpretative phenomenological approach (Polkinghorne, 1983). Because it is not possible to negate the researcher's experience (Bontekoe, 1996), I

utilized an interpretative phenomenological approach to interpret data through the theoretical lens of identity theory (Habib, 2012). Consequently, with the use of semistructured, in-depth interviews and an interpretative phenomenological design, findings from this study build on existing research and lead to an understanding the lived experiences of fatherhood among young, noncustodial African American fathers who survived childhood abuse.

In Chapter 3, I describe the methodology and design of this qualitative interpretative phenomenological study, including the role of the researcher and the recruitment and participant selection procedures. The research design, methodology rationale, population sample, and data collection and analysis procedures appear in more detail. Chapter 3 also includes issues of trustworthiness, including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

Chapters 1 and 2 provided a foundation of what is currently known about the experiences of young male fathers and the potential implications of childhood abuse on parenting. From a review of the literature, I identified several gaps in the areas of perceptions of childhood abuse among young African American fathers and the resulting ideas and experiences of their fatherhood experience. Often, when human services agencies develop teen programs, the primary focus is on services for adolescent girls (Parra□Cardona, Wampler, & Sharp, 2006). To fill some of these gaps, this interpretative phenomenological study entailed exploration of the lived experiences of young, noncustodial African American fathers who survived childhood abuse and to understand these experiences through the lens of how they parent their children. Findings showed how young, noncustodial African American men think of themselves as fathers and how they perform in their parental roles after surviving abuse. This study also gives a voice to young, noncustodial African American fathers, a group that remains underrepresented in research, helping to fill the gap in understanding the parenting needs of this population.

In this chapter, I address the design of the research study and the rationale behind the selection of qualitative methodology. Also explained are the population, participant selection method, and procedures for gathering informed consent and conducting the interviews. The chapter concludes with information about data collection and analysis procedures.

Research Design and Rationale

This qualitative study featured 11 young African American men between the ages of 19 and 41 years who were noncustodial fathers and lived in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Staten Island, or Manhattan boroughs of New York City. Qualitative methodology is appropriate when the research is exploratory with little known about the subject (Creswell, 2009). Qualitative research is a way to compile a depth of information not typically conveyed via quantitative analysis. Researchers can examine data such as beliefs, values, and underlying emotions and motivations without the need to constrain analysis to the acceptance or rejection of a null hypothesis.

Research Questions

The research questions guiding the study were:

RQ1: What is the lived experience of young, noncustodial African American fathers who were abused as children and how they conceptualize fatherhood?

RQ2*:* What is the lived experience of young, noncustodial African American fathers who were abused as children in carrying out their roles as fathers?

Characteristics of a Phenomenological Approach

I conducted this qualitative study using an interpretative phenomenological design, a method developed in the 1990s for capturing accounts of subjective lived experiences (Rose, 2013). Three major philosophical traditions underpin interpretative phenomenological analysis: phenomenology, hermeneutics, and ideography (Rose, 2013; Smith et al., 2009). Phenomenology is a design used to emphasize the significance of an experience. The design is subjective nature, with a focus on an individual's way of

knowing about the world (Moustakas, 1994). Based on interpreting meaning from the context of a text's origin (Smith et al., 2009), hermeneutics is the theory of interpretation. Ideography is a system focused on the particulars of an experience expressed through the aim of "understanding how particular experiential phenomena (an event, process, or relationship) have been understood from the perspective of a particular people, in a particular context" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 29).

An interpretative phenomenological approach enables a researcher to describe and understand the details of an individual's lived experience (Rose, 2013; Smith et al., 2009). According to Giorgi (2010), the goal of the phenomenological researcher is to describe a phenomenon with as much accuracy as possible while suspending any personal ideas or biases. The phenomenon of interest for this study was the experience of young, noncustodial African American fathers who experienced childhood abuse. The interpretative phenomenological approach helps uncover the unique perspective of the individual who has lived a particular experience (Smith et al., 2009).

Preparation Phase of the Study

With the interpretative phenomenological design, I sought to understand the specific lived experiences of young, noncustodial African American fathers who experienced child abuse and are now raising children. During the initial phase of preparation, employing Husserl's (1971) concept of epoché was indispensable. Husserl believed researchers are unable to detach from personal viewpoints and beliefs; thus, there is a need for epoché, a method in which researchers acknowledge and then set aside their beliefs before gathering data (Patton, 2002). The act of epoché enables the

researcher to suspend judgment, keeping the focus of the study on the phenomenon of interest without distraction or interference (Husserl, 1971). To engage in epoché, I noted personal biases and expected outcomes, which helped me reflect upon these ideas during analysis so I could acknowledge them and remove their influence from the results. In utilizing an interpretative phenomenological approach and the concept of epoché, I could focus my attention on the participants and their real-life experiences of being noncustodial parents.

Design Rationale

I selected an interpretative phenomenological method to understand the specific experiences, perspectives, and viewpoints of noncustodial African American fathers between the ages of 19 and 41 years who experienced childhood abuse, and how these adverse childhood experiences impacted their parenting. I considered other approaches for this study. Quantitative or mixed-methods traditions were inappropriate for an exploratory study intended to understand a lived experience, not to utilize hypotheses and deductive logic to arrive at a conclusion (Tracy, 2013). Therefore, a qualitative tradition was more appropriate for the essence of the phenomenon in the study.

Within the framework of qualitative methodology, other possible designs included ethnography, grounded theory, and case study. Ethnography is applicable when researchers seek to understand a group or culture, often immersing themselves into the study group. The researcher typically takes on multiple roles, including those of participant and observer (Tracy, 2013), gathering data over a period to gain clarity about actions, beliefs, language usage, and other group characteristics (Creswell, 2013).

Because I did not seek to understand cultural behaviors, ethnography was not a suitable research approach.

Grounded theory is appropriate when the researcher seeks to create a theory to explain how some part of the social world works (Corbin & Strauss, 2007). Two of the hallmarks of grounded theory are theoretical sampling and constant comparison as a data analysis method (Corbin & Strauss, 2007), with data gathered and analyzed inductively. Accompanying grounded theory is theoretical sampling, defined as selecting participants who have information that enables a researcher to collect data necessary to build the theory (Patton, 2003). The theory emerges from the data using the constant comparison method, with data gathering and analysis followed by the collection, analysis, and comparison of more data, as the inquiry continues until a solid construct emerges. However, as the objective of this study was not to build a theory, the grounded theory design was not appropriate.

Case studies are useful when the researcher has a bounded sample and seeks to answer *how* and *why* questions unique to the specific situations (Yin, 2009). When conducting a case study, the researcher gathers data from a variety of sources, which may include interviews, records, and observations about one or multiple situations (Yin, 2009). Because the case study allows for understanding the lived experience of participants, this design would not have been effective for the current study, in which I conducted interviews to produce a description of the essence of an experience. Therefore, an interpretative phenomenological design was the most appropriate.

Role of the Researcher

In a qualitative interpretative phenomenological study, the function of the researcher is to be the instrument through which the data flow (Xu & Storr, 2012). Achieving such an objective requires a specific set of skills. The individual must conduct an effective interview to elicit rich description, be a skilled observer, and learn to analyze and bring together data to arrive at accurate results (Xu & Storr, 2012). A skilled interviewer also creates and formulates appropriate interview questions. Therefore, I utilized essential techniques such as probes, prompts, silence, and follow-up questions to obtain valuable data from the participants (Moustakas, 1994). I noted and recorded the details related during the interviews, and recollected enough information to write down descriptions of what occurred and impressions after the completion of each interview. I first asked participants if they were comfortable with my taking notes during the interview; if individuals indicated otherwise, I used postinterview mental observations rather than note-taking.

Abuse, which may include sexual abuse, is a sensitive topic and could promote additional reluctance among male participants to answer honestly and forthrightly to a female researcher. In these situations, I reminded the participants of the study's importance to encourage them to answer questions in an honest, forthright manner. The rapport established at the beginning of the interview helped put participants at ease. In addition, I took special care to assure participants of the serious and scholarly nature of the study and the confidentiality of the information. Moustakas (1994) emphasized the need for creating a comfortable environment and making sure participants feel at ease

before beginning the interview. In establishing a rapport with participants, I considered any indication that they were not at ease depending on signs of discomfort, such as a reluctance to answer questions, excessive fidgeting, or avoiding eye contact.

Epoché occurred before beginning interviews and during the analysis of the transcript data. Groenewald (2004) identified epoché as understanding any personal biases, preconceived notions, or ideas before engaging in research; acknowledging such ideas; and putting them to the side to focus on the participant with a clear and open mind. Personal biases in this study included my experience as a clinical social worker and present work with abused and neglected children. With this background, I tend to sympathize with clients and to know their fears, anxieties, and emotional vulnerability. I expected many of the participants to have feelings of abandonment and not being wanted. To record my biases, I documented reflections before interviewing and data analysis. Epoché served to increase awareness of potential issues in this regard and the need to initiate measures to eliminate such issues.

The job of phenomenological researchers is to provide an interpretation of what they see, hear, and feel to allow the core of the phenomenon to emerge. The center of a phenomenological study is what people experience and how they experience it (Patton, 2002). To accurately interpret and present newly uncovered information, the researcher must recognize and eliminate any preconceptions about the phenomenon under investigation (Katz, 1987). Bracketing is another technique used by many scientists who employ a phenomenological design. Starks and Trinidad (2007) argued that researchers must be honest and vigilant about their perspectives, preexisting thoughts, and beliefs by

developing hypotheses and engaging in the self-reflective process of bracketing, recognizing and setting aside (but not abandoning) prior knowledge and assumptions. The analytic goal is to attend to participants' accounts with an open mind.

Although bracketing is useful in the interpretative phenomenological method, its use extends beyond the analytic realm. Moustakas (1994) receives credit for developing the concept of bracketing, with his suggestions used among phenomenological approaches. A specific method of bracketing suggested in the literature is analytic memos (Husserl, 1971). As a result, I used memoing throughout the data collection process to record personal thoughts, reactions, and biases. Noted observations helped me to gain clarity and understanding of any presuppositions, hunches, and ideas that may have been present.

As no previous working relationship existed with the selected sample, no issues of power differentials occurred. However, because I am a city agency employee and due to the sensitive nature of the interview questions and research topic, the risk of triggering painful memories was a real possibility. To remedy such risk, all participants received contact information for a counselor should they have become distressed as a result of the interview. If a participant had grown upset during the interview, the questioning would have stopped, with a counselor subsequently called to assist the participant. In addition, all participants received a list of free and low-cost counseling services for use after the discussion. Participants were also aware they could terminate the interview and their participation at any time.

The use of systematic procedures, including the collection of data from multiple perspectives, facilitated an accurate depiction of the findings. Accomplishing such a methodical process required the development and implementation of a semistructured interview protocol (see Appendix A) for building rapport and guiding participants to provide a complete account of their life experiences. I respectfully asked participants to provide more detail when necessary, and I gathered observational notes during the interview unless a participant objected. In this manner, I detailed any emotion or gestural nuances as they related to the textual data from the interview transcript.

The use of the tools described above resulted in my obtaining rich descriptions of the phenomenon under study. Rich or thick description in qualitative research is a portrayal of an experience laden with words, observations, and thoughts (Holloway, 1997). The collected data included my field journal, in which I recorded any observations, thoughts, or feelings I had during the study. I encouraged participants to speak openly about their experiences and elaborate on responses when necessary as they provided honest answers to all interview questions. I had no personal relationship with any of the participants and offered no financial compensation for taking part in the study; thus, there were no conflicts of interest.

Audio recording of interviews occurred with the consent of participants, with a professional transcriptionist subsequently hired to transcribe the recordings for further examination. The transcriptionist completed a confidentiality form (see Appendix B) prior to listening to the files. Upon receipt of the transcriptions, I reviewed each response to ensure the documents were accurate and captured the true essence of participant

replies. After examining these responses, I identified the thematic commonalities emerging from the data. I noted any discrepancies within the responses and any irregularities in the report of findings to confirm accurate reporting of all perspectives.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

The population for this study was 11 African American male parents ages 19 to 41 years who lived in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Staten Island, or Manhattan boroughs of New York City. All men in the study had involvement with the child welfare system and had experienced abuse as children. Area fatherhood programs provided a means to disseminate recruitment flyers (see Appendix C), with the requirement that all participants had completed the fatherhood program. The men who received a flyer had the option to contact the researcher directly by telephone to see if they met the study criteria.

During the screening process, participants agreed to later telephone contact for further clarification or elaboration on their responses upon interview completion. There was a guarantee of full confidentiality for participants. The initial contact had no questions about the men's status as child abuse survivors, only those regarding their parental status.

Using a convenience sampling method, I was able to locate11 participants. Convenience sampling is a type of sampling used to recruit members of the target population who meet the prescribed criteria and are easily accessible at a given time (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). If this technique had proved insufficient to achieve

saturation, snowball sampling would have been appropriate to gather additional participants. The snowball technique entails asking participants to suggest individuals they knew who met the inclusion criteria whom the researcher could contact to gauge their interest in participating.

In this research study, 11 was an appropriate sample size. In qualitative research, many factors can affect the sample size, included allotted time, available resources, and study objectives. The concept of data saturation is highly relevant when determining optimal sample size in a qualitative study (Patton, 2002). Saturation is the point at which including additional participants does not substantively improve the depth, variety, or quality of gathered data (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006).

The sample used for a qualitative study should be large enough to obtain feedback that reflects a spectrum of perspectives. Corbin and Strauss (2007) explained when researchers indicate they have saturated their categories, they often mean the data collection process is no longer providing novel information; as such, the researchers may have exhausted their time, money, or energy. Guest et al. (2006) noted that saturation, although conceptually sound, often offers little direct instruction on estimating sample size. Morse (2000) provided more information to this end, suggesting a sample size of 10 to12 participants is sufficient to satisfy a phenomenological research approach. Following a review of six studies, Nielsen and Landauer (1993) created a mathematical model for sampling in qualitative research based on several methods of analysis, thus providing a general guideline for adequate sample sizes in these designs. The researchers indicated that six participants could reveal at least 80% of all relevant information and increasing

the number to 12 raises the percentage to 90%; thus, this benchmark is within the appropriate limits for a qualitative study. As such, a sample of 11 participants was appropriate for the present study.

Francis et al. (2010) found saturation achieved when a researcher has conducted three consecutive interviews with no new themes emerging. If saturation had not occurred using data from the first 11 participants, snowball sampling would have facilitated finding additional participants. Using this method, any eligible participants could have provided the researcher with names of fathers they knew who meet the inclusion criteria.

Instrumentation

I used an interview protocol (see Appendix A) as a guide for asking questions and maintaining a topical discussion with an emphasis on the phenomena of parenting, including the concept of fatherhood and the perceived role as a father. I had interviews audio-recorded and professionally transcribed to check for accuracy and enable reevaluation if or when necessary. The transcriptionist signed a confidentiality agreement and followed all Walden University confidentiality guidelines (see Appendix B). Interviews were in-depth and followed a specific set of questions, yet allowed flexibility to probe for further details or deviate from the protocol to maintain a more natural and conversational feel. Participants may have responded to prompts such as, “Tell me what it was like for you growing up” and “Tell me about how you perceive your role as a father.” I kept personal notes of the data necessary for the study. I probed for more information both to guide participants in providing pertinent information and to ensure a

sufficient depth of data was available. This process involved a significant level of engagement with the interviewee to obtain noteworthy anecdotes, which they otherwise might not have sufficiently clarified or expanded.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

To begin the data collection process, I posted flyers at fatherhood programs located in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Staten Island, or Manhattan boroughs of New York City. Fathers who indicated their interest and met the screening criteria took part in an initial interview lasting approximately 30 minutes to discuss the informed consent and confidentiality agreement. This initial meeting was important due to the sensitive nature of the subject under study and the need to build rapport quickly as a part of the screening process. Meeting face-to-face ensured prospective participants understood the objective and scope of the study and were comfortable with participation.

The consent document comprised the purpose of the study, the procedure, an agreement to participate, the risks and benefits, the voluntary nature of the study, the participant's right to exit the study at any time, and a list of the procedures used to protect their confidentiality. The form also included the contact information for free and low-cost counseling services by the local community center and hospital mental health department should any participant became distressed as a result of the interview. Participants could contact this service to talk with a representative or schedule a counseling session. If participants had requested help in contacting this service, I was available to assist them in any reasonable way possible.

Following completion of this initial interview and the vocalized indication to participate in the study, the individual signed a confidentiality agreement and informed consent form. Scheduling interviews with the participants occurred only after the signing of these agreements. At this time, I also asked participants if I could contact them via telephone for further clarification or elaboration on their responses, if needed.

In this study, data came from conducting semistructured interviews with 11 young, noncustodial African American fathers ranging from ages 19 to 41 years who had child welfare involvement. Upon receipt of signed permission forms, I took the first step in data collection by conducting interviews with participants. The semistructured interview consisted of open-ended questions intended to elicit the participants' interpretation and perception of parenthood and their roles as fathers. Moustakas (1994) emphasized the importance of creating a climate where interviewees feel comfortable and relaxed, which increases their likelihood of responding honestly and comprehensively.

Each interview, recorded via audio recorder upon participant permission, lasted approximately 1 to 2 hours. Interviews took place in a private meeting room or a quiet area at the public library, local park, or participant location to ensure participants were comfortable and ready to engage in conversation. If participants objected to my taking notes during the session, I wrote down my observations after the interview ended and the participant left the setting. In addition to the content of responses, the observation notes detailed any expressions or intonation that helped better clarify a participant's experiences. I reviewed my observational notes alongside recordings and transcripts,

allowing participants' thoughts and feelings associated with their spoken responses to contribute to the interpretation of the coded data.

Participants were able to leave the study at any time and for any reason. They could also terminate the interview at any point they wished or take any breaks they felt necessary. Also, participants could contact me by telephone or e-mail to redact their responses from the data set before data analysis. Participants received a list of therapists in the area should they need an objective listener or other assistance following the interview. At the close of the interview, I reminded participants about their rights to confidentiality. If I required additional information or clarification of the participant responses, I contacted the participant by telephone. Participants received a $20 gift card as an incentive for completing the interview.

Data Analysis Plan

According to the guidelines provided by Smith et al. (2009), an interpretative phenomenological analysis includes (a) movement from what is unique to an individual to what is a shared experience among participants, (b) description and interpretation of participants' lived experiences, and (c) commitment to understanding the participant's perspective. The steps of condensing, categorizing, and structuring narrative and data interpretation are vital to the analysis process and necessary to extract the elements of a participant's phenomenological experience (Creswell, 2013). The use of a methodical process allows for a detailed and standardized account of study steps when interpreting data (Smith et al., 2009).

During the analysis process, the focus remained on the participants. I read and reread interview transcripts to obtain familiarity with the content and ensure the representation of all participants' voices. In addition to familiarization, such review also allowed for common themes to emerge. Achieving an understanding of what the participant specifically communicated is central to the interpretative phenomenological analysis.

Interpretative phenomenological analysis requires the researcher to interact with the data multiple times during the process of coding and developing themes. Smith et al. (2009) suggested exploratory commenting, which provides the reviewer with a way to reach the deep level of understanding and clarity necessary for proper coding regarding description, linguistics, and concepts. In the first level of analysis, descriptive comments and common themes undergo review, including emotional responses, important phrases, explanations, and descriptions (Smith et al., 2009). The second level of review involved assessing linguistic comments to understand the context in which these responses emerged. In the third level of review, engagement in conceptual commenting and interpretation meaning from the transcripts occurred. Although I followed the protocols of phenomenological analysis, I did not adhere to a predetermined procedure. I followed the steps as needed to complete the analysis of all study data. After the complete analysis of each interview transcript, I clustered themes by chronology and through common connections. Finally, I completed the analysis by aligning the data to theoretical perspectives to identify theory-based patterns across cases.

During analysis, note-taking facilitated keeping track of discrepant responses, which were part of the presentation of the findings, if applicable. Discrepant cases were those providing contrasting conclusions to the results; if well represented in the data, they were likely sufficient to create a new theme. If one or more participants provided discrepant information to a formulated theme, I noted their responses in a separate subsection, indicating their variance and elaborating on the specific nature of these responses and their possible meanings. I presented these subsections in the same manner as main themes, with explanations and interpretations of verbal responses and supporting excerpts to ensure these participants also had a voice.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Credibility

In any scholarly inquiry, the researcher must ensure both validity and reliability so that others can replicate the study. The researcher has a responsibility to conduct the study in a manner such that the results are an accurate representation of the population of study; results should be easily understandable and present information about social change. Qualitative reliability, as defined by Söderhamn (2001), refers to the researcher confirming accuracy of findings by the use of certain procedures, two of which are member checking and saturation. In member checking, the researcher has participants examine a summary of their responses and offer comments to either clarify or confirm. Participants indicate if they find the results accurate or if changes are needed. Data saturation occurs at the point when interviewing additional participants produces no new

themes or relationships between the themes (Corbin & Strauss, 2007). Accordingly, I examined each theme on various levels and in great depth to confirm saturation.

To ensure the credibility of this study, I recorded participant interviews with consent for accurate capture and comprehension. Upon completing the interviews, I appointed a professional transcriptionist to sign Walden University's confidentiality form and transcribe the recordings. Upon receipt of the files, I utilized member checking to ensure the accuracy of transcribed responses, asking participants to elaborate on or clarify their responses, when needed. An interview protocol (see Appendix A) served as a guide for asking questions and maintaining a topical discussion with an emphasis on the phenomena of interest. To preserve confidentiality, each participant received a unique identifying number.

Transferability

Although qualitative researchers do not usually attempt to generalize their results, findings are sometimes transferable to other contexts or settings. Because of the relatively small sample employed in qualitative studies, Shenton (2004) argued that transferability to other groups or circumstances was impossible, something that likely applies to the current study, as well. Although high-quality contextual descriptions of the data (means to establish transferability of findings) enhance the reader's ability to make comparisons and draw parallels, such an endeavor is not necessarily achievable (Trochim, 2006). The goal of a phenomenological study is describing and understanding the lived experience of the sample under study, rather than striving for generalizability (Tracy, 2013). Thick descriptions are an essential part of creating transferability, as evidenced by rich details

regarding observations, emotions, thoughts, and ideas (Creswell, 2013). Describing a phenomenon in detail enables evaluation and transferability of conclusions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As such, readers have the responsibility of determining how transferable the findings are to other settings, something they should do with care.

Dependability

The concept of dependability in qualitative studies highlights the importance of accounting for the always-changing context within which research occurs (Trochim, 2006). Achieving dependability requires the researcher to succinctly describe the ongoing changes taking place in the procedures and data interpretation. Perceptions within the environment are also continuously changing. Dependability increased as the participants described personal experiences, which helped convey details regarding fatherhood.

Triangulation, which also helps to ensure dependability, entails a comparison of the interviews with each other and with the researcher's observational notes (Creswell, 2013), which I did following data collection and preceding data analysis. Cross-checking these streams of information enables a researcher to triangulate and see the data from different angles (Tracy, 2013). Such a procedure ensures the generation of rich, layered ideas, subsequently applied and analyzed to create a construct supported by various forms of data.

Confirmability

In qualitative research, confirmability is the ability of others to achieve similar results (Trochim, 2006). Each researcher provides a distinct perspective, thus necessitating the application of several strategies to enhance confirmability. I

implemented procedures for checking and rechecking the data throughout the study. I actively developed unique statements to convey various perspectives of the phenomenon. The well-defined research methodology, interview protocol, and data analysis process make it possible for other researchers to examine and verify the results by replication.

Ethical Procedures

Responses to all questions and data collection procedures used in this research study are confidential. I removed participants' identifying information from the transcripts and assigned unique identifying numbers. I will store participants' files and transcripts in a locked file in my home office for 5 years following completion of the study, after which time I will permanently destroy all study data.

Participants underwent random selection from a fatherhood parenting group to ensure comprehensive socioeconomic, ethnic, and religious representation. Prospective participants knew joining the study was completely voluntarily. They did not have to participate, and if they felt in any way uncomfortable or indecisive, I recommended they not to take part in the study. Individuals had the power to choose to participate and were welcome to seek further information about joining the study. As an incentive for participating in the study, I provided participants with a $20 gift card upon completing the interview, a low enough amount that did not qualify as coercion.

A list of resources was available for participants to utilize if they felt at all upset or uncomfortable about the conversation or process. Each participant received an explanation of the process of informed consent and confidentiality considerations. The consent form included contact information for free and low-cost counseling services. I

explained the purpose of the research to enable each participant to make an informed decision of whether or not they wished to participate. I told the participants that even if they agreed to participate, they were free to withdraw from the study at any time.

Participants were aware that their names and any identifying information would not appear in any publication or presentation alongside the information collected or the findings from this study; identifying numbers would be the only identifier. The only reasons for sharing identifiable information would be if required by law or if the participant gave written permission. I informed participants of my legal obligation to report knowledge of current, ongoing, or future planned criminal activity, including any instance of child abuse or specific risk of harm to another person, even for information shared in a setting otherwise covered by confidentiality.

The subject of abuse is sensitive and poses a risk of discomfort for participants. Because of concerns about the revictimization of participants through discussions of their childhood experiences, the selected age range of 19 to 41 years provided some temporal distance from childhood events. Interview questions (see Appendix A) did not directly address the abuse but focused on childhood experiences participants believed to be affecting their parenting, leaving them free to share information about their past. Interviews ceased at the slightest hint of distress, with the participant provided a list of free resources for assistance. At the close of each interview, all participants received the contact information for a free counseling service with an explanation of how to communicate with any of the providers on the sheet.

Summary

In Chapter 3, I presented the method and data analysis procedures administered in the study. I explained in detail the role of the researcher, informed consent process, and sample selection. The chapter also covered ethical procedures, instrument creation, and research design and rationale. In addition, sample size, selection, and issues of trustworthiness appeared.

A qualitative interpretative phenomenological approach facilitated exploration of the experiences of young, noncustodial African American male parents with a history of childhood abuse to obtain a description of their concept of fatherhood. Also examined were how young, noncustodial African American men who were abused as children carried out their roles as fathers.

This study has implications for future assessment and services to young African American fathers who have experienced childhood abuse. For the development and implementation of effective services, providers must first understand how these fathers view their parenting and what effects their abusive pasts have on their parenting style. The results and analysis of the data for the study appear in Chapter 4, followed by a discussion of the results in Chapter 5.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this interpretative phenomenological study was to generate data on the parenting experiences of young, noncustodial African American fathers who have survived childhood abuse. The research questions were:

RQ1: What is the lived experience of young, noncustodial African American fathers who were abused as children and how they conceptualize fatherhood?

RQ2: What is the lived experience of young, noncustodial African American fathers who were abused as children in carrying out their roles as fathers?

This chapter contains details of the data collection and analysis phases, evidence of trustworthiness, results of the study, and a summary addressing the research questions.

Setting

At the time of the study, no personal or organizational connections existed that influenced participants or their experiences. Data collection took place within the Bronx, Brooklyn, Staten Island, and Manhattan boroughs of New York City. Participant recruitment occurred via flyers posted in fatherhood programs.

Demographics

Table 1 presents an overview of participant demographics. Participants had between one and six children ranging in age from toddler to late 20s. All but one participant had contact with his children.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant	Number of children	Gender and age of children	Lives with children	Contact with children
1	4	F: 26 years F: 8 years F: 8 years M: 3 years	No	Yes
2	1	F: 2 years	No; daughter is in ACS custody	Yes; weekly visitation with daughter for 4 hours
3	1	M: 16 years	No	Yes
4	2	M: toddler F: toddler	No; he is homeless and lives between family members' houses	Yes
5	1	F: 3 years	No	No
6	6	M: 17 years M: 12 years M: 8 years M: 7 years M: 5 years M: 4 years	No	Yes; phone contact
7	4	F: 20 years F: 19 years F: 15 years M: 5 years	No	Yes
8	3	F: 6 years M: 5 years M: 2 years	No	Yes; unclear to what extent
9	3	F: 10 years M: 5 years M: <1 year	No	Yes
10	1	F: 2 years	No	Yes
11	1	M: 9 years	No	Yes; every other weekend with no overnights

Data Collection

Data collected were from a convenience sample of 11 noncustodial African American fathers over 12 weeks in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Staten Island, and Manhattan boroughs of New York City. The participants in this research study all attended a local agency–sponsored and state-funded fatherhood program. Data collection occurred from June 1, 2018, to August 28, 2018. At participants' requests, two interviews took place at the public library, eight in a park, and one at a local restaurant. I allotted 60 to 90 minutes per interview, with each ultimately lasting 45 minutes to 1 hour. I audio recorded all interviews with participants' permission, with subsequent transcription by a professional transcriptionist. Printed transcripts were one component of data analysis. One participant began the interview but left before it was complete, stating he no longer wished to participate; I deleted his information and did not include it in data analysis.

Data Analysis

I used an interpretative phenomenological approach to provide a description and account of the essence of how noncustodial African American fathers with a history of child abuse define fatherhood and carry out their role as fathers. Following data collection, I began the process of data analysis. I followed the guidelines outlined by Smith et al. (2009), which included three levels of interpretative phenomenological analysis. This iterative process of data reduction starts with reducing and condensing data and then organizing it into a narrative of participants' experiences (Smith et al., 2009). In this process, I first moved from the disparate experiences of individuals to common incidents, and then described and interpreted those shared experiences while focusing on

the participants' perspectives at each stage of analysis. Using this process ensured standardization of data analysis and interpretation and provided transparency.

The interpretative phenomenological analysis process that Smith et al. (2009) advocated is a three-level process, although these levels are not linear. This iterative and complex process involves moving backward and forward at different levels of engagement with the interview data, codes, and themes. The first step of data analysis involved reading and rereading all participants' interview transcripts to become familiar with the men's voices and narratives and understand what they were communicating in their interviews. Through multiple readings, the data became more familiar and common themes emerged. In this first-level coding through notes made about emerging concepts, I circled, underlined, and highlighted significant passages within the transcripts. I did not use a predetermined codebook or set of codes but instead generated codes from significant statements the participants shared. For example, Participant 11 spoke about being a father as showing his children right from wrong, stating, "Some people are, like, they know to do the right thing, but when nobody's looking, they can opt to do the different things." I created the code "being good when others are not looking" and applied it to this statement.

In the second stage of coding, I listed all the codes generated from the first level, as Smith et al. (2009) suggested, subsequently examining them from all transcripts and the data set. I grouped similar codes of significant words and passages. For example, Participant 10 said his role as a father was "teaching her the rights and the wrongs. If I don't teach her right or wrong, who will?" In Level 1 coding, I attributed the code

"fathers show right from wrong" to this statement. In Level 2 coding, I noted this code was similar to "being good when others are not looking." I placed these together in a group based on their similarity, in that both conveyed the sentiment of fatherhood is about teaching children the difference between right and wrong.

I next created categories containing all codes and continued in this way until sorting all codes from the first level into a category (see Table 2). I returned to these data and thematic groupings multiple times, adjusting codes and collapsing related categories into fewer categories as necessary, revisiting the codes for proper placement. In the third and final stage of analysis, the data underwent review several more times as I looked at the relationships between the thematic groupings generated in the second level of coding. After collapsing the groupings into larger categories, I shifted the codes from the first level into the corresponding categories. I properly placed all data across the transcripts, including all codes and weaker categories that were sortable into larger conceptual themes. The use of descriptive titles captured the essence of the contents of each conceptual theme.

I analyzed all interview data, part of which entailed searching for discrepant cases or those not fitting within the hierarchy of overarching conceptual themes and supporting themes. Discrepant cases are those appearing to challenge the findings from the data. These discrepant cases may point to the diversity of experiences and alternative explanations for a phenomenon. One discrepant case emerged in the data analysis, which I described in the results.

Table 2

Thematic Hierarchy With Conceptual Themes, Supporting Themes, and Codes

Conceptual themes	Supporting themes	Codes
1. Being there	1A: Being there for my kids	• Fathers are always there • Building relationships with kids • Being there in spirit • Being the go-to person • Fatherhood is showing up • Being there is not showing up • If I'm not there, who will be? • Being dependable • Kids shouldn't feel abandoned
	1B: Spending quality time with my kids	• Fathers spend lots of quality time with kids • Fatherhood is quality time, not money • Keeping my kids engaged • Creating memories of fun times
2. Teaching and guiding	2A: Teaching right from wrong	• Fathers show right from wrong • Responsibility to provide reasoning • Doing the right thing • Being looked up to • Working through steps of problems • Guiding kids in right direction • Being good when others are not looking • Setting kids down right path • Setting boundaries • Prepare kids for the world • Teaching self-respect • Provide a foundation
3. Responsibility	3A: Protecting my children	• Keeps child alive • Fatherhood is protecting • First line of defense • Fighting for my kids • Someone to turn to when daughter is scared • Stability
	3B: Providing for my children	• Want to provide for my kids • Providing means working a lot • Fatherhood is providing • Memories of father providing every want • I want to provide like my parents did for me

(table continued)

Conceptual themes	Supporting themes	Codes
4. Breaking the cycle	4 Won't put my kids through what I went through	• Better communication • Will not have sons verbally abuse their girlfriends • Felt like failure when son was arrested • Breaking abuse cycle • Learned from going to prison • Will not repeat relationship with father • Father did not teach right from wrong
5. Lack of contact with children	5A: Blaming others	• Blames child's mother • Mother interferes • Was arrested when tried to see child • Lack of contact is unfair • Mother took kids away • Blames court system
	5B: The hardest part of parenting is not seeing kids	• Barrier • Feeling powerless • Pain • Cannot parent because child is not with him • Lack of daily contact with child • Fighting for custody • Acknowledging fault and role in situation
6. Supporting my children	6A. Legacy	• Balance of love and caring • Good heart • Respectful and caring • Memories of being a good human
	6B: Exhibiting patience	• Patience • Making sacrifices • Learned from bad temper • Prison taught patience

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

Semistructured interviews were useful to gather participants' responses and improve the credibility of this study. In addition to recording all participants' interviews, I used reflective note-taking before and during data collection and analysis. Upon

completion of the interviews, a professional transcriptionist transcribed the audio recordings. Following receipt of the files, I implemented member checking, which involved participants reviewing the transcripts of their interviews and either confirming the accuracy of their statements or amending their responses (see Creswell, 2009).

Transferability

Qualitative researchers do not usually attempt to generalize their results or transfer them to other contexts. According to Tracy (2013), the goal of phenomenological research is to understand participants' lived experiences rather than generalize those experiences to other populations. To establish transferability, I used thick descriptions in the presentation of the findings, allowing readers to determine how transferable those findings are. I also provided a detailed description of the context and the participants for the reader, as Connelly (2016) suggested.

Dependability

Data triangulated from field notes and participant interviews helped me to understand and analyze the data from different angles (Creswell, 2013; Tracy, 2013). To promote dependability in qualitative research, it is important to succinctly describe the continuous changes taking place in the research procedures and data interpretation. I explained the systematic coding process used and the conceptual components of the themes.

Confirmability

Confirmability in qualitative research refers to the ability of others to generate similar results (Connelly, 2016). Confirmability may be achievable when researchers

document the steps they took throughout the research process, as I detailed in Chapter 3. Researchers must also acknowledge their own biases related to their research. In qualitative research, reflexivity helps researchers establish the trustworthiness of the data by reporting their biases and how these biases have shaped their thinking about the topic (Darawsheh & Stanley, 2014). Reflexivity may also help researchers minimize their personal biases (Darawsheh & Stanley, 2014). Throughout data collection and analysis, I practiced reflexivity by documenting in a research journal my thoughts and ideas as they arose to reflect my viewpoints. I remained open to analyzing the data without any predetermined codes or themes, so the data remained a true reflection of each participant's testimony. I examined and rechecked the data throughout the study to reveal any potential bias in my interpretation.

Results

In this interpretative phenomenological study, I sought to understand the lived experiences of young, noncustodial African American men with a history of child abuse and how they conceptualize fatherhood. This study was an exploration of how these men learned to be fathers, what fatherhood meant to them, and how they carried out their roles as fathers as a result of these lived experiences. To avoid triggering traumatic memories, I did not ask participants directly about their childhood abuse. Any statements or discussions made about childhood abuse, neglect, or abandonment were those volunteered by participants.

The descriptions of participants' lived experiences provided insight into the following questions that guided this research:

RQ1: What is the lived experience of young, noncustodial African American fathers who were abused as children and how they conceptualize fatherhood?

RQ2: What is the lived experience of young, noncustodial African American fathers who were abused as children in carrying out their roles as fathers?

Six conceptual themes supported the research questions: (a) being there, (b) teaching and guiding, (c) responsibility, (d) breaking the cycle, (e) lack of contact, and (f) supporting children. These conceptual themes contained supporting themes, which comprised the codes. This hierarchy appears in Table 2. Conceptual Themes 1 through 3 addressed RQ1 and Conceptual Themes 4 through 6 addressed RQ2.

Conceptual Theme 1: Being There – RQ1

As a result of the abandonment, neglect, abuse, and other challenges many participants faced in their childhood and as young adults, many strongly felt they would do what they could to learn from these challenges and break the abuse cycle with their children. Noncustodial African American fathers believed being there for their children was of primary importance. In addition, participants found "being there" for their children essential, which included spending quality time with their children and more. Participants felt they did not simply go through the motions of being there for their children; the fathers wanted to be actively engaged in their kids' lives. The men wanted to provide emotional support and stability for their children so their sons and daughters always had someone to turn to when needed.

Supporting Theme 1A: Being there for my kids. In this supporting theme, participants shared their belief that the father's role was to be there for his children. Some

participants wanted to ensure their children knew where to turn if they got into trouble and others worried about their children seeking inappropriate attention elsewhere if their fathers were not available. Others were concerned that, without a strong father in their lives, their children would become victims or easily taken advantage of by others.

Growing up in New York City in the 1980s, Participant 1 was acutely aware of child abandonment resulting from crack addiction in his neighborhood. Although he did not personally experience this, he knew children who had, and this impacted his desire to be there for his own children. Participant 4 said the importance of being a father began for him when his girlfriend got pregnant, and he had to take responsibility. He stated, "You gotta be there for that kid. Believe it or not, the kid is going to look to you for comfort." Participant 4 said he had to be present for his child because the child was going to look up to him and see the examples he set; in other words, he was "showing [his children] how to better their lives instead of ruining it."

Participant 2 was raised by his mother, who abandoned him from time to time. He shared, "I moved to Chicago because of my mother on drugs and stuff, so I try not to repeat the same mistakes my parents made with my child now." Participant 2 said:

> I know one thing: I'm never gonna hit my child. I witnessed, when I was growing up, my mother hitting my sisters . . . . There's been times where she put her hand up at me and I wouldn't allow that. I would leave the house and be on the streets for a whole weekend, two weeks, and not want to come home because my mother was trying to attack me . . . . You got to make that choice to actually be there and not just be there in person, not just giving your child this, not this about telling

> your child you love them, not just about buying them stuff, taking them out to eat every day. You got to actually be there in person, in spirit. You got to actually be there, tell them that you love them, that you're not going nowhere and that you're going to be there for them.

Participant 2 was working to regain custody of his daughter. He said, "By the time I get her back, I'll be most likely graduating and getting my high school equivalency and stuff." As he reflected on his life, he said, "I'm just trying to repay my life. I'm trying to break the chains. Break the chain." He wants to prevent his daughter from enduring the experiences he endured when he watched his parents arguing and then reconciling, which he found confusing as a child. He did not want his daughter to have the feeling of abandonment and neglect as he did when his mother left him for periods of time due to her drug use and addiction. He recalled feeling alone and dejected because his father was never really there for him. He wanted to be stable and for his daughter to be aware of what was going on in her life. Participant 9 said something similar:

> Just being there. Showing up. Being there and showing up is important. If you're there, you're being there, and showing up in here, it's like you're capable of doing everything right now. . . . Because being there is like, it's not really like showing up. You're there 24/7.

Participant 6 stated being there for his children was a way of supporting them, and this was important to him because, "You can show the kids that you're a better role model, for them to have something forward to look up to." He felt having a father who

was there for his children was better for the children than the kids emulating what they saw on television or from other, perhaps less-stable fathers in the community.

For Participant 7, being there for his children included showing them he was actively involved in their lives. He became involved in the parent–teacher association at his children's school. He began taking training the school offered in areas like nutrition and brought his children to parent–child activities at the school on Friday evenings. He stated, "Everything they could name, I started doing to be more involved in the school, for the school, for the kids to see me there."

In the absence of a present father, Participants 10 and 2 worried their daughters might turn to other men for attention, even if that attention was inappropriate. Participant 10 was motivated to be there for his daughter because his own father was not around for him and he knew firsthand what it felt like to be abandoned. He believed if he was not around for his daughter, she might go looking for a father role model in the wrong ways. He said:

> It's extremely important for me to be a father, or just to be in my daughter's life. Once again, I don't want her to be a victim of the world, of the streets, of somebody taking advantage of her. I don't want that for her. I don't want her to not trust people. I want her to always know I will be here for her.

Participant 2 was concerned that if he was not there for his daughter, "[She's] going to be looking for a man to take care of her, to be there for her." He stated further, "I don't want my daughter looking for a man to please her in the wrong way just because she missed that love that her father never gave." He described seeing young women on

the streets who were scantily clad and trying to present themselves as older than they were. He shared his worry that this could be his daughter if he was not there for her. He said, for some of these young women, "The very simple point of them wanting attention . . . wanting to be looked at [is] because their father was never there to look at them. Their father was never there to be there for them." Participant 2 was trying to prevent his own daughter from attention-getting based on sexuality by being present for her and remaining someone to whom she can turn when she is in need.

Supporting Theme 1B: Spending quality time with my kids. Participants described the lack of a relationship they had with their fathers and the ways in which this impacted their own parenting. Participants believed that not spending time with their fathers left them with a void and a feeling of abandonment. Some of the men shared that their fathers did not take the time to get to know who their sons were or what they liked to do. "Yeah, I wish he was around more," said Participant 10. He felt his father "was a real strong guy; he's a strong man," and was therefore a strong influence when he was around. Participant 2 also had an absent father. He said, "My father wasn't really there like that, and he was around, but he was incarcerated a lot. He's locked up a lot. So, I never really had that privilege of my father being around like that." Because of his father's absence, he felt neglected and abandoned. Participant 2 said he noticed many fathers "don't take care of their child, and my father didn't take care of me." Accordingly, he said, "I'm trying to not to be that man that don't care, love their child," he said. He described being there as a choice men can make; he was making the choice to break the cycle he learned from his father's abandonment and the lack of a relationship

with him. The impact of ~~this~~ this neglect and disconnect from their fathers was that participants believed in the importance of spending quality time with their children.

These fathers strove for active parenting of their children. Participant 11 tried to emulate his father, saying, "When I was younger, my father was very active. He's still very active in me and my sister's life." Said Participant 8, "Quality time is what I value and what I exude." He continued:

> I make it my business to spend a lot of quality time with them. A lot of the problem with society today, in my opinion, is a lot of parents aren't involved with their children . . . what's going on in the streets ends up raising the child.

Participant 7 wanted his children to remember his active engagement with them. He wanted them to remember he would take them to the park, even if it was snowing. "It's not about the money; it's more about parent[ing]," he shared. He recalled the fun he had with his children taking them to the movies, the park, and the library. He shared how, years before, he had arranged for his children to be with him on Fridays when he would take them for ice cream. He did not find difficulty in spending quality time with his children, but instead said "it was all about time management."

Participant 4 expressed similar sentiments. He said being a father meant "finding stuff for [my kids] to do." He would rather his kids were "going to the park, going to the movies and museums and stuff, instead of just sitting in this house." Participant 3 shared that when he sees his son "sittin' around playin' video games," he encourages the boy to go out and be productive. Participant 3 remembered caring for his son 5 days each week when his son was in junior high school, which provided them with bonding time. The

father used this time with his son to get outside and have fun together rather than staying in the house and playing video games.

Conceptual Theme 2: Teaching and Guiding – RQ1

Participants believed their parental role was to teach their children right from wrong and guide their children through life. This perceived obligation came in part because these participants were abandoned and neglected as children and did not have such role models when they were growing up. More than being there for their children, all participants said it was important that they were the ones teaching their children about life and the lessons they had learned. They drew from their own experiences to guide their children, modeling the behavior the kids would need to be successful adults and community members. The participants felt fatherhood was about being the one to provide these lessons for their children—lessons that should not come from someone or somewhere else.

Supporting Theme 2: Teaching right from wrong. According to participants, part of the role of guiding their children through life was the responsibility to teach right from wrong. This meant their children understood right from wrong not only in their own behavior, but in the behavior of others. Participant 4 described his own relationship with his father, which reinforced that he must teach his children the importance of communication. Participant 4 had a complicated relationship with his father that included verbal abuse. When thinking back on their relationship, he said, “I would change it, like, not bumping heads with him a lot.” He explained:

> Me and him is exactly alike. I don't know if you get what that's saying, but we got the same exact attitude. So I don't know if you ever noticed, if you got the same exact attitude as somebody, y'all might crash heads a lot, especially if it's a crazy attitude at that . . . . Instead of just being on something where . . . I can't really talk to him anyway. All you're going to do is start yelling and stuff. [Now] I would try to get him to do something different. I would probably come talking instead of just yelling.

Participant 1 said when he sees his young son doing something wrong, "I give him a definition and then I'll break it down for him" to explain and show what is right. "I'm going to show him what's right to do and what's not right to do," Participant 1 said. This teaching was part of the legacy Participant 7 wanted to leave for his children. He felt this was important because "if I can influence my kids in my household, who knows what they can do when they go out into the world?" As Participant 11 explained, doing the right thing meant doing it not only when others were watching, but when people were not watching, as well. He said, "Some people are, like, they know to do the right thing, but when nobody's looking, they can opt to do the different thing." It was important for him to teach his children that right was right, no matter if someone was watching.

Participant 10 stated, "If I don't teach [my daughter] right from wrong, who will?" He recalled someone telling him once he would be his daughter's first love. He said, "What she sees me do for her, that's what she's going to want for herself"; accordingly, fatherhood for Participant 10 was "teaching her the rights and the wrongs."

Participant 2 also wanted to ensure his daughter knew right from wrong, but that she learned the difference in positive ways. “I just don’t want my daughter having to be scared of me,” he said. “I don’t want to discipline her and have her be like, ‘Oh, if I do this, Daddy gon’ beat my butt when I get home.’” Instead, he wanted to teach her about the opportunities she would miss and the consequences of her actions. For example, he said, “If you don’t do your homework, you’re not gonna have a house, you’re not gonna be happy, because you’re not gonna have no money.” He tried showing his daughter there were consequences for doing the wrong thing and to lead her in the right direction.

Participant 4 guided his children by showing them step by step where they might have gone wrong in a given situation. He said, “I gotta teach them right from wrong, stuff like that.” If one of his children did not do well in school, for example, he would ask where they felt they went wrong, or where their teacher went wrong. He used this approach to teach them “how to identify situations; that way, they know exactly what’s going on.” Similarly, Participant 9 shared that guiding and correcting his children’s behavior was about more than saying no. He said, “Sometimes you have to know why I’m letting you know no” so they could really understand the overall situation and context. Participant 9 recalled as a child being told what to do or being thrust into situations over which he had no control, which made him believe his parents did not consider his feelings. He had felt powerless then; therefore, now it was important for to explain the reasons for the refusal so that his child could understand.

Participant 2 wanted his daughter to know how to choose the right people to include in her life. He wanted her to learn from his mistakes. He said, “It’s not about who

really makes you happy; it's about everyone in this world's going to hurt you. Everybody in this world is gonna have—cause you problems." He wanted his daughter to know "some people are not worth being hurt for. Some people are not worth loving. I just want to tell my daughter to forgive more and give more. Stuff that I didn't do, because I was stingy."

Conceptual Theme 3: Responsibility – RQ1

Participants agreed fatherhood meant responsibility and indicated their willingness to take this responsibility for their children. Being responsible meant protecting and providing for their children and family. Two participants described fatherhood as being the king of the family or a hero. Participant 4 said a father was "just a hero, a hero all around the board, and then reinforced, "all around the board." Whereas Participant 4 described fatherhood as being a hero, Participant 9 wanted to leave a legacy of being a king to his children. He shared, "I wanna see more kings and queens. We're married. We setting the kingdom of our kids to be kings and queens. That's what I believe in. That's my influence." Participant 9 shared that, in acting in his role as father, he must be a king and be responsible for his family. He wanted to ensure his children have a firm foundation, stability, and enough food and clothing because these were things he never had as a child. Responsibility was twofold, however; participants believed they had a responsibility to protect their children as well as a responsibility to provide for their children.

Supporting Theme 3A: Protecting my children. Some fathers believed they were responsible for protecting their children from intrinsic factors, whereas others

wanted to protect them from external dangers. Participant 1 said his father provided shelter, protecting him from outside elements; as such, he learned from his father to do this for his children. Participant 9 stated responsibility was "caring, loving, support, emotion, providing, and protecting" his children. Participant 2 described feeling "kind of paranoid" when his daughter was young, because when she would fall asleep, he would "be up all types of hours, making sure she's OK before I actually pass out and go to sleep." He felt responsible for keeping his daughter "breathing and making sure she's okay." He felt this aspect of his responsibility for his daughter was "stuff that mothers do," so in doing this, he was acting as both mother and father for his child.

Other participants discussed the responsibility of protecting their children despite having little contact. For these men, part of protecting their children involved gaining custody so they had the opportunity to protect them. Participant 10 was fighting with the court system for his daughter so he could have the opportunity to provide this protection. "I just want to be in my daughter's life," he said. Participant 5 continued:

> Understand, it's not even just about seeing your kid. Again, you created something in this world and, come on, man, it's not even just about seeing her. You need to know what's going on [in her] life. When I do even get the chance to see my daughter, my daughter be like, "Daddy, I'm scared." I need to be there every time she say that; I need to be the first person she should call. I gave my daughter a phone, a cell phone, and I still can't even have no communication with my daughter. Why not?

Participant 5 saw his responsibility as "to be her first line of defense, her first line of offense, her first line of everything," a responsibility he felt did not belong to anyone else. He said, "If it's not me, it's God," although he expressed concern that in his absence, perhaps a less-suitable role model would provide this protection for her. Participant 7 also wanted to protect his children. He wanted to be "somebody they always knew they could always call and talk to when they was going through something," a father who could protect and support them.

Supporting Theme 3B: Providing for my children. Participants equated fatherhood with the responsibility of providing for their children. For some, this was tied to ideas of masculinity and juxtaposed against a mother's responsibilities. Participant 6 made this connection when he said:

> Support system for the mother. The father pays the bills, there's a roof over their head, they can eat or whatever, and the mother—she either take care of the kids and also have a little job, too, on the side. It's being a supportive person for the mother. Make sure that the mother sees she's got everything that she needs, and he be there to support her and the kids. Make sure they got a roof over their heads, some clean clothes and some food. That's what I look at as the father. Their main job is to make sure they take care of the household, and the mother, she takes care of the children.

Participant 6 discussed this in a nonpersonal way and not in relation to himself. He did not attribute being the family provider as his role or responsibility, but the role and responsibility of fathers in general.

Participant 4 described providing for his children in the way a king would, which is how he described wanting to be remembered by his children. “They’re going to remember me exactly what I’m doing . . . my king. Every way and need, he was there for me. Through right and wrong, he was there for me. . . . I know I can always count on him.” Participant 5 wished to leave a similar legacy of providing for his daughter. He wanted her to remember “she can’t be alone, you know. At least something . . . where she can have either a good education to start with, education first and foremost, you know?”

Participant 3 learned a father’s responsibility of providing for his family while growing up because his father was not around. He said everything in his house at that time was about money. He heard his mother say things like, “Oh, we can’t do this ’cause I don’t have the money” and decided, “When I become a father, my whole big thing was making sure that I’m able to provide.” He did not want to be forced to tell his children they could not do something they wanted to do because of limiting financial factors. Further, he stated:

> I took everything from what I had, what I didn’t have, and I wanted to provide [my son] with what I wasn’t able to have. Like I said, my biggest thing was that I would always see my mother strugglin’ and break down because we didn’t have the financial means all the time, so that was the one thing that I always wanted to do was just to make sure [my] family was taken care of.

Participant 11 recalled growing up in a working-class family in which his parents taught him the value of a stable job. He used this early education to teach his son the value of earning money. He also used what he learned growing up to provide a similarly

financially stable environment for his son. His son's mother's family was unable to provide financial security for their son, which Participant 11 was glad to provide.

Conceptual Theme 4: Breaking the Cycle – RQ2

Participants recognized the need to break the cycle of neglect and abandonment they had learned from their own parents. For some men, this meant protecting their children from exposure to harmful situations the fathers had faced in childhood, such as abusive relationships. Participant 4 said, "I would change it, bumping heads with [my dad] a lot. Me and him is exactly alike. I can't really talk to him anyway. All you're going to do is start yelling and stuff." For other participants, the lack of a relationship with their own father meant doing everything they could now to have a relationship with their children. Participant 6 shared, "My father died when I was 11 years old. They didn't even mention me at his funeral, me and my other brothers, but it just made me want to be more there for my kids because I know how it is being without a parent." Participant 6 continued, "My childhood was rough. I didn't receive the love that I was supposed to receive when I was with my biological mother—like I said, she was addicted to drugs." Participant 6 wants to create a new cycle of stability for his own children. Above all, participants were determined to break the cycle of abuse and dysfunction they experienced in their young lives.

Supporting Theme 4: Will not put my kids through what I went through.

Participant 3 began to see parallels between his life and his son's life when his son was first arrested at a young age. "It's not a good cycle," he said, and continued:

> I have a good feeling that he's not gonna make the same mistakes that me and my father made. That's one thing I can say. On one side, I think that he's weaker than I am, but then on another side, I think he's stronger than I am. I think his strength is that he's able to let the world see his vulnerability. Where on the other side, with me, it's like, I can't let you see it, so I'm gonna keep makin' the same mistakes just so that you can see that I'm strong.

Although Participant 4's children were still young, he felt as they got older, he would see them exhibiting negative behaviors like he did when he was a teenager. He described the feeling, saying, "I'll be able to identify that stuff already and put a stop to it." If his children began acting out, he said:

> I know how to go about it instead of just flipping out. "Oh, what are you all doing, smoking weed and stuff?" Knowing that I did the same thing when I was young. It's ways to go about it. Telling them what bad effects it got on you. Let you know that you can't get a job and stuff because it's in your system. Being able to do that. When you go through stuff, you're able to talk it out when you come across that issue instead of just thinking of the worst. "You cutting school, you having sex now, you doing this." I can identify that, so I'll be able to move different.

Participant 4 believed communication was key if he saw his children exhibiting any of these behaviors or otherwise acting out. He clarified, "When I say communication, I'm not talking about yelling back and forth. I'm talking about actually getting a point across, having a civilized conversation, allowing you to speak and then me answering."

Discussing the mistakes he made in his previous treatment of women, Participant 6 said of his son, “I wouldn’t want him to do that to any other female. From those mistakes, I don’t want them to go through the same thing that I went through.” This father wanted his son to learn the lessons from him and not make similar mistakes, something he stressed as important to him because he did not want “a third party trying to tell you what you need to do,” perhaps referring to the legal system.

Participant 8 said he was neglected and in foster care as a child. He shared, “I didn’t have the luxury of having both parents on my own or living with just one for a majority of my life.” As such, he promised himself that if he ever had children, he would never put them in “any type of situation that I experienced.” Participant 8 expressed similar feelings about growing up after his father died of cancer when he was a child. He said, “It just influenced me to try to be a better father for my kids, to try to always be there even if I’m not living with them or they just know that I’m around.” Participant 8 instructed his children not to follow the path he did in fighting with the children’s mother. He told them, “Just try different means to resolve the issue in a minimum way, so you won’t have a third party trying to tell you what you need to do or how you need to do it.”

Conceptual Theme 5: Lack of Contact With Children – RQ2

The inability to see or have contact with their children was something many participants discussed as the most challenging part of the parenting experience. Because of the situation in which many participants found themselves, contact with their children ranged from no contact in any way to some level of visitation each week. Whereas some participants recognized their role in this situation, some men took the opportunity to

blame others and failed to accept personal responsibility. No matter the cause of the separation, participants felt powerless and in pain because they were not in contact with their children, which impacted their daily lives in a myriad of ways.

Supporting Theme 5A: Blaming others. One concept that emerged in several interviews was the lack of responsibility participants took for having no contact with their children. Rather, they placed blame elsewhere: their children's mothers, their in-laws, and the court system. According to these men, they were not at fault in being unable to see their children. Participant 5 wanted to share how he came to lose his daughter. However, his story did not contain all the details of his arrest and losing custody, perhaps because he felt some distress as he told it. He said:

> I'm here because I went for visitation. I went to the court for visitation because it's very complicated, me and the mother. And it's very . . . I don't know how to say; it's just hard for me and her to get along. It's just hard for me and her to be on the same page. We agree to disagree on almost everything and anything, you know, and it caused a problem in me. That's why I'm here.

He continued:

> When I got arrested, I petitioned my baby mother in family court and I got arrested then from the court. Because I went to the 12th floor to ask questions in family court, I got arrested. I petition for visitation and I got arrested. That's why I am here right now, in this class, in this program. To keep me out of jail.

Participant 5 was eager to blame the court for his arrest at the time of his hearing.

He likely would not have been arrested had he not broken a law, and yet he was unable to recognize his role. Instead, he believed he had done everything right and was arrested anyway. Participant 3 placed the blame on his son's mother for the ability to see his child. He said, "There was a time when I realized, I dunno, I guess his mother wasn't as comfortable that [my son and I] were getting that close," so she began to take time off of work to interrupt their visits. Other times, he said he noticed that "whenever I would go pick him up or whatever, she'd always say out some other man's name—'Didn't so-and-so tell you not to do this?'—so it was always kind like that." Participant 3 felt his son's mother would listen to other men and would influence their son to do the same at his expense.

Supporting Theme 5B: The hardest part of parenting is not seeing kids.

Participant 2 described the feeling of powerlessness that comes from not being able to see his daughter. He had custody for a while because his daughter's mother left them, but while trying to support his daughter, "I got myself mixed up with the wrong crowd and had my daughter taken away, and it messed up me trying to take care of my daughter, trying to feed my child, and care for my child." He said his father was never around to teach him how to be a father or how to choose better friends, because his father was always incarcerated. Although his mother was around, she would disappear and use drugs. When Participant 2 was incarcerated, his daughter stayed with her mother, but her mother left for a prolonged period and the mother's family called ACS. "Right now, at the moment, I'm the only one she has," he said of his daughter, "and I'm kind of powerless." He did have regularly weekly visitations, but he recognized this time was not

enough to satisfy him or his daughter. “ACS took my daughter,” he said. “It wasn’t about my daughter being safe or who my daughter’s with; it was just me not knowing that I could wake up to see my daughter. I can’t change her stink Pampers.” He recalled waking up every morning stressed out. Although he acted like everything was OK, he was clearly in distress over the situation.

Participant 5 shared a similar story about his daughter. “She’s not in my daily life, so I can’t tell you about school and I don’t know how she eats.” He likened the situation to being in a different country from his daughter, even though she lived only a few blocks away. Each night he felt pain about not having contact with her to the extent he that he could not sleep. His inability to be a father to his child challenged his very manhood and parenthood. He said:

> I am not going to live in a situation where they feel like I am less of a man. I came in this world with two balls; I didn’t come in this world a split between my legs, no offense. I came in this world to be dominant. I didn’t come in this world to be dominated.

Further, he stated:

> If I’m not a part of the child’s life, how can I be a parent? If I don’t know the child daily activity, me not with the child open her eyes, when the child close her eyes and to school, if I don’t know the child’s daily activity, how can I be a parent? That’s not a parent; that’s your definition of a parent? That’s not a definition of a parent to me . . . . So if I’m not doing that, I’m not a parent, because that’s what a parent does.

With his manhood and parenthood status challenged, Participant 5 felt there was no place for him. “If I out of my child’s life, is not enough every 2 weeks for me. I need 5 hour every day. Me need more time . . . . Me she can look up to.” This sentiment led to him not wanting any more children. “I mean, our society where I feel I belong—I don’t think I belong in this society,” he said. Without his daughter, he said, society made him feel like he was a nobody. He asked, “If I don’t have my daughter on me, how can I be strong?”

Participant 8 took responsibility for the inability to see his children. When asked about the hardest part of being a parent, he said, “I would say not seeing my children . . . that’s one of the hardest moments I had to really go through.” He said “a day or two of not seeing the children of my behavior” was a very difficult time for him, particularly because he knew the situation was his own fault. Participant 6 also took the blame for no longer seeing his children, who had moved out of state with their mother. “I was in jail, so I was in jail for 2 and a half months, but I wasn’t there [for my children] for almost 7 months because I couldn’t be there because of domestic violence for my babies’ mom.” This time in jail meant Participant 8 did not have the chance to communicate with his children, and since they have now moved, he said, “the real hard part for me” was missing a lot of his children’s birthdays.

Conceptual Theme 6: Supporting My Children – RQ2

Participants wanted more contact with their children, both in frequency and amount of time. Despite their inability to have either, participants wanted their kids to know they were supported, even if only financially. Having his father die when he was 11

years of age significantly influenced Participant 6, making him want to be in his children's lives in a positive way, even if just by supporting them monetarily. "They know that I care about them. I didn't have that," he said. "I had just a mother. It was very hard for her taking care of five boys and then a whole bunch of cousins and stuff. That was . . . it was crazy." For Participant 8, the experience with a childhood that was "rough" influenced him because "I didn't receive the love that I was supposed to receive" from his parents. He felt not having a father affected him, as "it made me a very sensitive man. It affected my relationships with other people, especially women." He thought this sensitivity was both a gift and a curse.

Participants wanted to their children to know their fathers were caring individuals who supported their children. The men spoke about learning to be patient with their children, something they believed signaled care and support to their children. Leaving behind this legacy of remembrance for their children was important to participants and tied into larger ideas about how they carried out their roles as fathers.

Supporting Theme 6A: Legacy. Participants overwhelmingly wanted their children to remember them as caring and loving. The men used the word "caring" often when asked what kind of legacy they wanted to leave for their children, and they described the ways in which they would ensure their children knew they were caring fathers. Participant 1 reported wanting to be remembered "as a respectful, loving father, caring father." He said his legacy would be as a father "that loved and cared for them. Would be there for them since the day they was born," and in being there for his children, they would know he cared. Participant 3 believed that in showing his children the

sacrifices he made for them, they would know he cared. Participant 3 wanted to be remembered accordingly: “He sacrificed as much as he could, he lived the best life that he can, and through everything, he just was a decent human being.”

To Participant 2, being remembered as caring meant his daughter knew “that the father has a good heart. I just want her to have the same good heart, and touch people, and not judge people.” Being remembered as a caring father was important to Participant 2, but he also wanted his daughter to apply what she learned from him about being a caring person to her own life. Participant 10 used the word “love” repeatedly. Being a good man meant he cared and loved his children and loved everything they did. “The legacy I would just like to leave is just like, ‘I love you so much. I just loved you unconditionally.’” He continued, “Like, ‘Your daddy was a good man. I just loved you. I just love you; that’s it. I love every breath you take. I love every step you take. I just love you.’”

Participant 8 wanted “to be remembered as somebody who just had the perfect balance of love and structure.” He described feelings of neglect when talking about the unstable home life he experienced as a child after being placed in foster care and subsequently moving from city to city. Participant 9 said his legacy would be “caring, sharing, loving. I’m supportive.” To him, this meant his children knew he was “happy, happy, happy,” an indication that he loved, cared, and supported them.

Supporting Theme 6B: Exhibiting patience. Participants spoke of the patience they showed their children in two ways. First, the men described how and where they learned their patience, both early in life and during the parenting process. Second, they

described the ways in which they demonstrated patience with their children, connecting this to how they showed their children their fathers cared about them. Participant 3 included patience as a skill contained within his definition of fatherhood and what it means to be a father. He stated, "I define as a father is basically you just have to sacrifice, and you have to be patient, and you have to just be able to give your all."

Participant 1 learned patience while in prison. Although he grew up in a two-parent household, outside influences affected the family, such as the crack epidemic and Civil Rights Movement. This participant was in prison at the age of 19 years and was determined never to go back. He used the opportunity to learn patience, perhaps believing his ability to demonstrate patience would keep him from making the same mistakes that led to his sentence. He shared how his definition of fatherhood influenced his parenting by teaching him to "act patient. Like, some more patience. Because I did 15 years in prison." He continued, "The whole thing here is from prison, so I studied patience. I ain't never go back. I've been home." He applied what he learned about being patient in prison to his own life and to the patience he exhibits with his children.

Participant 9 learned patience from his aunts because his parents were always working. He believed patience was an important parenting skill he learned from the women in his life as he was growing up. "I would say leading a way to me. I would say me, but to learn from somebody else? I have a lot of females out there. My aunts. My aunts' mama," said Participant 9. From these women he learned "skills. Main one: patience. That's the skills. Also, just had patience. That's more like an inner thing, but that also comes from within, having the patience with the family."

Participant 10's daughter taught him to be patient. He said, "I guess I'm patient. I don't get angry. I'm patient. I don't get angry when she do kid things, like draw on the wall or she breaks something." Similarly, Participant 11 felt the lessons he has learned as a father had given him "a lot of patience." Participant 2 shared an example of how his daughter taught him patience and how he had applied those skills in his parenting. He stated:

> Learning a lesson of how to deal with kids, and how to not be angry around kids because of all of that stuff—it wears on them, and they pick that up. You angry all the time, and your child wound up developing anger issues. [You] might not be aware of it, but in time it develops because it's like, you cry all the time, your child's gonna cry all the time. You angry all the time, you child's gonna be angry, but your child's gonna have outbursts. That's all the stuff that you deal with being a parent.

Participant 2 knew that if he did not exhibit patience with his daughter, she would pick up it. Therefore, it was important to him that he was patient so he did not affect his daughter or her behavior in a negative way.

Participant 4 spoke of exhibiting patience relative to specific tasks in which his children might be engaged. He stated:

> All kids is kids. They're not fully going to know right from wrong until they obviously age, but I'm talking about getting in trouble in school or not being able to . . . Do they answer the math question right? Stuff that you feel you're smart enough to do, like patience. Having patience. Knowing that everybody's not on

the same level and actually trying to help them better themselves instead of talking down to them or something.

Discrepant Cases

This study was about how men who were abused as children conceptualized fatherhood; as such, one assumption was that they had experienced a challenging and perhaps unhappy childhood. Participant 1, however, spoke at length about his wonderful upbringing. He reported, "I had a good childhood . . . . I had a close-knit family growing up." When he was young, he lived with his sisters and parents, and looked to his father and grandfather, who were both in the household, for guidance. They taught him about responsibility primarily through his involvement in the Boy Scouts, where his grandfather was the group leader. Participant 1 did not experience the same abandonment the other participants had as youth, although he saw it in the neighborhood around him. Despite this strong, family-oriented upbringing, Participant 1 had spent time in prison and lost touch with his daughter during that time. Now the father of other, younger children, he worked on his parenting skills to provide them with the support and love they needed.

Summary

The findings from this research study indicated a range of experiences related to fatherhood among men who were neglected and abandoned as children. The first research question was, "What is the lived experience of young, noncustodial African American fathers who were abused as children and how they conceptualize fatherhood?" First, participants conceptualized fatherhood as always being there for their children, something they demonstrated by providing support and spending time with their children.

Participants clearly identified the time spent with their children as quality time, which they believed showed the kids their fathers were present. Second, they conceptualized fatherhood as providing guidance for their children. This guidance came in the form of teaching their children right from wrong, setting a good example, and instilling respect for others and themselves. Self-respect was particularly important for participants with daughters, as the fathers were concerned that if their daughters did not respect themselves or have a strong father figure, the girls would look for self-worth in the wrong places. Finally, participants believed being a father meant taking care of the family, a responsibility that included both protecting and providing for the family.

The second research question was a means to uncover how men who were abused as children carried out their roles as fathers. Interviews showed the men fulfilling these roles by applying the lessons they learned in childhood to their parenting behaviors. They showed support for their children. Some men, however, were unable to carry out these roles because they could not see their children. The lack of a father figure in their own lives taught participants to ensure they had contact with their children. They showed support for their kids by demonstrating caring, loving behaviors and exhibiting patience. Participants who lacked contact with their children spoke of the ways in which they still tried to fulfill these roles, or how they had in the past before losing contact. Participants who did not see their children often blamed others, such as former partners or the legal system, for their situation. They described this lack of contact as the hardest part of being a father.

In Chapter 5, I provide my interpretation of the findings in the context of the conceptual framework and literature as outlined in Chapter 2. I describe the limitations that arose when executing this study. Finally, I offer recommendations for further research on this topic and discuss the implications this study has for social change, research methods, and theory.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this interpretative phenomenological study was to explore the parenting lived experiences of young African American fathers who have survived childhood abuse. The study was an attempt to help fill the gap in the literature concerning the perceptions of young African American men regarding their own experiences after surviving childhood abuse, how they learned to be fathers, what fatherhood meant to them, and how they carried out their role as fathers because of these lived experiences.

I designed this study in line with the interpretative phenomenological analysis approach to understand the in-depth accounts of participants' experiences, providing future researchers an opportunity to build on this work. Little research is available regarding how abuse plays into men's perceptions of fatherhood (Savage et al., 2014) and how young male African American survivors of child abuse conceptualize their performance as fathers (Adamsons, 2013). The findings from this interpretative phenomenological study came from the responses participants gave regarding their lived experiences of how they conceptualized fatherhood and how carry out their roles as fathers. Findings included taking responsibility, breaking the cycle of abuse, and leaving a legacy of support.

Interpretation of the Findings

In this section, I discuss the findings of this interpretative phenomenological study in relation to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, noting where the findings of the present study confirm, do not confirm, or expand upon the findings of previous studies.

Finding 1: Taking Responsibility

This first finding includes the four themes of (a) being there, (b) teaching and guiding, (c) supporting the children, and (d) frustration with lack of contact. The consensus among these 11 noncustodial African American fathers was that being there for their children was of primary importance. They stressed it was necessary to be there for their children and for their children to know the fathers were there for them. Noncustodial African American fathers defined "being there for their children" as spending quality time with their kids, among other things. These fathers felt it was important they were actively engaged in their children's lives. They wanted to provide emotional support and stability for their children so their kids knew they always had someone to turn to when needed. According to Jones (2010), African American fathers who identified with being fathers had positive feelings toward fatherhood, including feelings of satisfaction, happiness, and love. The majority of fathers in the present study reported being neglected and abandoned as children by parents who were neither emotionally available nor present for them because of incarceration or drug addiction. Participant 9 stressed, "Just be there. Showing up. Being there and showing up is important. I show up at that baseball game, that basketball; I was there. I showed up." To him, being a father was about dedication and emotional support. Unlike their own fathers, participants wanted to be available for and support their children.

Participants wanted to ensure their children knew they could turn to their fathers if they got into trouble; some men worried if their offspring could not turn to them, the children would seek inappropriate attention elsewhere. Other fathers were concerned that,

without a strong father in their lives, their children would become victims or easily taken advantage of. Degarmo (2009) suggested the more fathers identified with their role as a father, the more involved they were with their children. I found this to be true for the men I interviewed, as well. Because these fathers knew what it meant to be abandoned and unloved, they strived to be a positive presence in their children's lives. They were adamant about the importance of doing things differently than their fathers had, and they wanted to be an active presence in their children's lives. Participant 7 said being a father "is the greatest thing in the world for me. It's like an adrenaline rush." Participant 8 reported, "Fatherhood—it's definitely a beautiful thing in my eyes." According to Participant 5, being a father "means everything; that's your whole existence."

The young African American men in the present study believed it was important to spend quality time with their children and attempted to actively parent their kids. For these men, quality time was valuable, and they often attempted to spend time with their children, which included going to the park, the movies, or the library. Spend time with their children was important, because these men were neglected and abandoned by their fathers who were often incarcerated, addicted to drugs, or constantly working, living from paycheck to paycheck. This finding supports the research of Adamsons and Johnson (2013), who found the quality of a father's involvement with his children matters more than the frequency of contact. What fathers do with their children and the degree to which they interact is more important than the amount of time they spend.

Teaching and guiding their children. The participants believed their roles were to teach their children right from wrong and to guide their children through life. More

than being there for their children, the fathers felt it was important to be the ones teaching their offspring about life and the lessons the men had learned. Through their personal experiences as children, the fathers wanted to guide their kids, modeling the behavior their children would need to be successful adults and community members. They felt fatherhood was partly about providing lessons for their children, lessons that should not come from someone else. According to Adamsons (2013), how individuals identify themselves becomes a powerful guide for their behavior, and perceptions of inhabiting a specific role (e.g., being a father) can influence how they perform in that role.

In this study, the fathers perceived and identified themselves as teachers and guides to help their children navigate life, part of which included teaching them right from wrong. This meant the children understood right from wrong in their own behavior and had the ability to identify these behaviors in others. In teaching their children, these fathers defined right or wrong behavior to their children and illustrated such behavior with examples. For one father, doing the right thing meant doing so not only when other people were watching, but also when no one was around. Participant 11 stated, "Some people are, like, they know to do the right thing, but when nobody's looking, they can opt to do the different thing." These fathers believed in teaching by example the importance of making the right choices and the consequences of the wrong decisions. In relation to identity theory, Habib (2012) stated the ways men perceive themselves as fathers are likely to influence their performance as fathers and in what capacity they interact with their children.

All participants interviewed agreed fatherhood meant responsibility and indicated their willingness to take responsibility for their children. This partially supports the research of Chin et al. (2011) on the transition to fatherhood for young men. Chin et al. found that upon hearing that they would be fathers, young men felt the need to become more responsible in their new roles. To the fathers in the present study, being responsible meant protecting and providing for their children. Two participants described fatherhood as being a hero or the king of the family. Participant 9 stated he wanted to "see more kings and queens," referring to both parents, and Participant 4 said being a father involves being "a hero, a hero all around the board."

Some fathers believed they were responsible for providing internal support for their children, whereas others wanted to protect their kids from external risks. Participant 9 said, "We're setting the kingdom of our kids to be kings and queens. That's what I believe in. That's my influence." For some fathers, support meant providing shelter and protecting their child from risky elements; for others, it meant "caring, loving, and emotional support, as well as financial provision for their children." Participant 2 described feeling "kind of paranoid" because he believed himself responsible for keeping his daughter "breathing and making sure she's OK." He thought this aspect of his responsibility was "stuff that mothers do," so in doing this, he was acting as both the mother and the father for his child.

Other fathers discussed the responsibility of protecting their children despite having little contact. For these men, part of protecting their children was gaining custody so they had the opportunity to do so. The men equated fatherhood with the responsibility

to provide for their children both financially and emotionally. For some, this responsibility was tied to ideas of masculinity and complemented a mother's roles. This finding supports the co-parenting research of Habib (2012), who found that young men perceived of themselves as having a shared caregiver role, one of co-parenting with the mother, a relationship in which responsibilities and tasks are shared.

In the present study, for example, one father saw his role as supporting the mother in her role. He noted that the father pays the bills and provides shelter and food. The mother's primary responsibility was to care for the children and work outside of the home if possible; the man's main job was to take care of the household and the mother, who took care of the children. According to Habib (2012), there are five general roles to which men may transition when they become fathers: remote, provider, assistant or secondary parent, shared caregiver, and primary caregiver. Characterizing the remote role is the father showing little interest in the life of the child (Habib, 2012). The provider role is a traditional father role, wherein the man's primary responsibility is being the breadwinner (Habib, 2012). In the assistant role, the father is largely playing a secondary role or helping the mother (Habib, 2012). The shared caregiver role is one of co-parenting with the mother, a relationship that entails shared responsibilities and tasks (Habib, 2012). Acting as primary caregivers, fathers take the lead in the crucial responsibilities when caring for their children (Habib, 2012). More specific characteristics of fathering roles may include acting as nurturers, disciplinarians, playmates, or protectors (Habib, 2012).

Frustration with lack of contact with their children. The inability of the fathers to see or have contact with their children was something several fathers discussed as the most challenging part of the parenting experience. Because of the men's situations, visits with their children ranged from nonexistent to some level of visitation each week. Although some fathers recognized their role in this situation, some men blamed others for the lack of contact and failed to accept personal responsibility. No matter the cause, the fathers felt powerless and hurt because they had no contact with their children, which impacted their daily lives in many ways.

Popular characterizations of young African American fathers in terms of negative stereotypes include being a remote, missing, or faceless parent (Habib, 2012; Jones, 2010). Perceptions of young African American fathers often include negative stereotypes of absent parents and self-centered, irresponsible young men (Stengel, 2005). The results of my study regarding young African American men taking responsibility for and supporting their children challenge negative stereotypes of absent fathers and self-centered, irresponsible men. Findings show African American fathers want to have contact with their children and play an integral part in their lives. This study showed fathers who had no contact with their children felt powerless and hurt

In this study, one concept that came up several times with the fathers was the lack of responsibility they took for the scarcity of contact with their children. They placed blame for this elsewhere, largely on their children's mothers, their in-laws, and the court system. These fathers' views could be the results of their own experiences as children in which they did not have a positive father figure or role model in their lives to teach them

how to be a responsible father and to be accountable for their actions. The instability of their own lives did not prepare them to communicate with the mothers of their children or navigate the legal court system. Possibly, these men were not able to fully forgive their parents for neglect and believe that although they were abused, they are now adults and responsible for the decisions they make. Ngu and Florsheim (2011) offered that the transition to and obligations of fatherhood are complicated by a young father's relational competence, including "the ability to communicate a thoughtful and caring perspective on significant relationships, even under stressful circumstance" (p. 186).

Some of the fathers described the feeling of powerlessness that comes from not being able to see their children because they had been involved with the wrong crowd or were incarcerated, resulting in the removal of their children from their care. One father described this feeling of powerlessness as challenges against his manhood and parenthood status.

Finding 2: Breaking the Cycle of Abuse

Because of the neglect and abandonment many fathers faced in childhood and young adulthood, many strongly felt they would do what they could to learn from these challenges and break the cycle of abuse with their own children. For some men, breaking the cycle meant protecting their children from exposure to harmful situations the men had faced in childhood, such as abusive relationships. For others, the lack of a connection with their own father meant now doing everything they could to have a relationship with their children. Above all, they were determined to break the cycle of abuse and dysfunction they had experienced in their own lives. Habib (2012) stated young men's

ideas of fatherhood stem from the initial experience of being parented. In other words, the paternal relationship is what provides young men with their ideas of fatherhood, leading them to form their own identities as they transition to fatherhood (Habib, 2012).

According to social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), observing and experiencing aggressive and abusive behavior can serve as a model for individuals to imitate. Additionally, trauma symptomatology can pass down through generations (Savage et al., 2014). However, participants of the present study did not want to repeat the cycle of intergenerational neglect and abandonment in parenting their children. As evidenced by the personal experiences they shared, some fathers were also acutely aware of other childhood challenges, such as abandonment and harsh discipline. Participants vowed not to let their children live the life they had lived and were determined not to repeat abusive behavior. Participant 3 described his relationship with his father as one of disrespect, a behavior he would never repeat with his children, relating "me and my pops never got along. He had no respect for us."

Although the mechanisms perpetuating cycles of intergenerational child abuse are still not clear, research on the intergenerational transmission of child abuse remains a priority because the percentage of survivors who then abuse their own children is high at an estimated 30% (DeGregorio, 2012). Furthermore, environmental factors such as poverty and community violence can also influence the intergenerational transmission of child abuse (Robboy & Anderson, 2011). Therefore, these findings are promising in that the young, noncustodial African American fathers in this study were determined to not

repeat the abusive behavior of their own fathers and to break the cycle of dysfunction they experienced in their own lives.

Finding 3: Leaving a Legacy of Support

Fathers also indicated they wanted more contact with their children, both in terms of frequency of visits and amount of time. Despite the inability to do either, the fathers wanted their children to know their dads were caring individuals who supported them. Additionally, participants spoke about learning to be patient with their children, something they believed signaled caring and support.

Overwhelmingly, participants wanted to leave a legacy of support and for their children to remember them as caring and loving. These fathers often used the word "caring" when asked what kind of legacy they wanted to leave, describing the ways through which they would ensure their children knew they were caring fathers. Because these men endured neglect and abandonment and felt the pain and anger for years, they did not want their children to experience the brokenness and loneliness they had or to live without the knowledge of having a father who loved and cared for them. These young fathers' legacies would be that they loved and cared for their children and were there for them. Several participants believed that by showing their children the sacrifices the men made for them, the kids would know their fathers cared. Fathers identifying themselves as loving and supportive is in alignment with identity theory. According to Adamsons (2013), how individuals identify themselves becomes a powerful guide for their behavior.

Participants also spoke of the patience they showed their children in two ways. First, the fathers described how and where they learned their patience, both early in life

and in the parenting process. Second, they related the ways in which they demonstrated this patience, further illustrating the degree to which they cared for their children. This finding is also in line with identity theory, which holds that individuals identify themselves in relation to other social categories and personalities, a process that involves two important processes: self-categorization and social comparison (Habib, 2012). Self-categorization involves an emphasis of the similarities and differences between the individuals and other in-group members. The idea of social comparison entails how individuals come to view themselves as members of a group as compared to other groups, or *out groups* (Habib, 2012). Identity then emerges in relation to the meaning individuals hold about themselves in a particular social role as derived from interactions with others (Habib, 2012). How individuals come to identify themselves then becomes a guide for their behavior (Adamsons, 2013). According to Habib (2012), the ways men perceive themselves as fathers likely influence their performances as fathers and how and in what capacity they interact with their children.

Limitations of the Study

Despite the many strengths of this study, there were a few limitations. The first was the small sample size due to the study design. In interpretative phenomenological analysis, the sample size is usually small to provide the opportunity to obtain detailed phenomenological accounts of participants' experiences and perceptions. According to Kornbluh (2015), this design requires a small sample to elicit detailed phenomenological information. Gender could also have been a limitation because male participants could have been reluctant to open up about childhood issues and current issues of fatherhood

with a female researcher (O'Brien, 2018). O'Brien (2018) posited gender differences between researchers and participants can influence results when investigating gender-sensitive topics, making participants reluctant to share the information they might if the researcher was the same sex. All participants involved in the present study were African American males. Because of the uniqueness of participants' experiences, their socioeconomic contexts, and the small sample size typical of qualitative studies (Kornbluh, 2015), findings of this study are not generalizable to other populations. Results could help identify dynamics and mechanisms of abuse and fatherhood that might be common to other parents. Another limitation of this study was the use of research now considered older literature since this study took longer than expected to complete.

Recommendations

The purpose of this research study was to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of young African American fathers with a history of child abuse when they were young, and how these men conceptualized fatherhood. The study involved a sample of 11 young African American fathers in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Staten Island and Manhattan.

Research is recommended on developing educational programs to teach young fathers how to communicate with mothers and navigate the family court system about matters of custody, parent advocacy, child support, and visitation. Research is also recommended on developing parenting programs that address childhood trauma and developing groups for fathers whose children are in the foster care system to help them understand how to break the destructive cycle of parenting they were taught.

Additionally, research is recommended on fatherhood programs that match young fathers with mentors to provide positive support and help young men navigate their roles as fathers.

Future researchers may wish to address the limitations of the present study by using updated literature, as well as examine men from diverse racial and cultural populations to gain insight into their concepts of fatherhood after experiencing childhood abuse. Additionally, future longitudinal studies of noncustodial fathers would be useful to track the progress of how these fathers perform after the return of their children and to explore the changing dynamics of fatherhood. Further researchers might also focus on co-parenting relationships between noncustodial fathers and children's mothers to explore co-parenting dynamics.

Goodman (2018) defined nonresidential African American fatherhood for the 21st century. The researcher identified the key factor in African American fathering as showing purpose in how they behaved and interacted with their children in their roles as moral guides, teachers, financial providers, protectors, and disciplinarians. Goodman concluded it was important that nonresidential African American fathers be accessible to their children. Based on this recent research, studies on fatherhood and the construct of purpose among young, nonresidential African American fathers are recommended.

Implications

Findings from this study help fill the gap in the literature on the lived experiences of young African American fathers who have survived childhood abuse, and their perceptions of how they see themselves as parents. This study has implications for

positive social change by providing useful information to local and state policymakers in efforts to prevent the cycle of child abuse on future generations. Further implications for positive social changes include providing useful information to community practitioners to educate young African American males on how to be responsible, nurturing fathers. Findings regarding the issues young African American fathers faced as children and their ability to parent their own children may also add to the literature on understanding and preventing patterns of child abuse.

Conclusion

This interpretative phenomenological study provided a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of young African American fathers as survivors of child abuse, and how these men conceptualized fatherhood. In recent years, researchers have increased interest in studying men, masculinity, and fatherhood (Holt, 2015). Studies have shown fathers are not only providers, but their involvement in their children's lives positively links to a range of behavioral, psychological, educational, and social outcomes (Brown, Mangelsdorf, Shigeto, & Wong, 2018; Goodman, 2018). However, little information existed on young African American fathers, the perceptions of whom often include negative stereotypes of absent fathers and self-centered, irresponsible young men exploring their sexual prowess without thinking of the consequences (Stengel, 2005).

In the present study, valuable insight emerged to help combat these negative stereotypes. Part of this powerful counternarrative included fathers identifying being there for their children as of primary importance. To these men, it was important their children to know their fathers were there for them. Participants noted their obligations as

fathers were to take responsibility for their children, both emotionally and financially. This study showed these fathers wanted to play an active role in their children's lives, teaching them right from wrong and helping to guide their children through life. Findings also showed African American fathers wanted to break the intergenerational cycle of abuse they had experienced as children. Because of the challenges many of these fathers faced as children or young adults, many asserted they would do what they could to learn from these challenges and break the cycle of abuse when parenting their children. The findings of the study are promising, overall revealing that young African American fathers want to leave a legacy of being caring, loving, respectful, and supportive to their children.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

1. Please tell me a little about yourself.
2. Where do you live now and with whom?
3. Please tell me what your primary activity is during the day (for example, caring for your child, work, or school).
4. Please tell me about your child(ren).

Now I would like to know more about you as a father.

5. How would you define fatherhood?
6. Where did you learn how to be a father?
7. What is the importance of fatherhood to you?
8. How does your definition of fatherhood influence your current parenting behavior?
9. How does your childhood influence how you parent your child(ren)?
10. What was one of the hardest moments you had being a father and why was it hard?
11. What mistakes taught you the most in life?
12. How do those lessons influence how you parent your child(ren)?
13. If you could change anything about your childhood, what would that be?

Finally, I would like to know what type of legacy you want to leave your child(ren).

14. How would you like to be remembered by your child(ren)?
15. What would you tell your child(ren)?
16. Is there anything else you would like to share with me?

Appendix B: Transcriber Confidentiality Agreement

Name of Signer:

During the course of my activity in collecting data for this study, **"Young African American Men's Conception of Fatherhood Among Survivors of Childhood Abuse,"** I will have access to information that is confidential and should not be disclosed. I acknowledge that the information must remain confidential, and that improper disclosure of confidential information can be damaging to the participant.

By signing this Confidentiality Agreement, I acknowledge and agree that:

1. I will not disclose or discuss any confidential information with others, including friends or family.
2. I will not in any way divulge, copy, release, sell, loan, alter, or destroy any confidential information except as properly authorized.
3. I will not discuss confidential information where others can overhear the conversation. I understand that it is not acceptable to discuss confidential information, even if the participant's name is not used.
4. I will not make any unauthorized transmissions, inquiries, modifications, or purging of confidential information.
5. I agree that my obligations under this agreement will continue after termination of the job I will perform.
6. I understand that violation of this agreement will have legal implications.

7. I will only access or use systems or devices I am officially authorized to access and I will not demonstrate the operation or function of systems or devices to unauthorized individuals.

By signing this document, I acknowledge that I have read the agreement and I agree to comply with all the terms and conditions stated above.

_____ _____

Signature: Date:

Appendix C: Recruitment Flyer

Are you a young noncustodial father age 19 and over?

If so, I want to hear from you. I am looking for young fathers to participate in a study on fatherhood.

You'll have a chance to talk about your experiences as a father and the impact of your early childhood experiences on your views as a father.

If you think you might be interested, please contact

You will be given a $20.00 gift card at the end of the study for your time.

Fatherhood study

Fatherhood study

Fatherhood study

Fatherhood study

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