

PERCEPTIONS OF FATHERHOOD AMONGST
AFRICAN AMERICAN FATHERS
RAISED FATHERLESS

A DISSERTATION

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DEDICATION

For my beloved uncle, A.P Fowler, whose love for education changed the lives of so many, including mine. You made me believe that I could achieve anything. Although, you were a man of few words, your support and presence throughout my entire academic journey made me believe in myself. This one is for you. Your legacy lives.

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ABSTRACT

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PERCEPTIONS OF FATHERHOOD AMONGST AFRICAN AMERICAN FATHERS RAISED FATHERLESS

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The purpose of this qualitative study was to take a phenomenological approach to explore the perceptions of African American fathers who were raised fatherless. Role theory and identity theory were used to guide this study. The study explored the following research question: How do African American fathers raised fatherless perceive fatherhood?

Ten semi-structured interviews were conducted with men who self-identified as being raised fatherless in the DFW area. Data obtained from this study were transcribed verbatim and analyzed through a three-step coding process that included: open, axial and selective coding. Triangulation of data analysis was used to ensure credibility. Four themes emerged from the data and included: (1) Being Present; (2) Ideal Dad; (3) Teaching; and (4) Spirituality. It also yielded three subthemes: (1) Interactive Engagement; (2), Warmth and Responsiveness; and (3) Restless journey. Results of the study were compared to existing literature and conclusions were drawn. Study implications for future research, implications for family therapists, limitations and disadvantages, and strengths of the study were all presented.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Fatherlessness is often conceptualized as the absence of a father, specifically defined as children raised in homes without residential, biological fathers because of divorce, separation from a cohabiting union, and or a non-marital birth (McLanahan, Tach, & Schneider, 2013, National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse, 2015). Further evidence suggests that the psychological harm resulting from father absence experienced during childhood persists throughout the life course, leaving lasting effects on social-emotional adjustment and adult mental health (Ermisch, Francesconi, & Pevalin, 2004; McLanahan et al., 2013; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). Fatherlessness is more than whether a father shares the same address as his child; it is the lasting negative effects associated with his absence.

African American and low-income children experience disproportionate levels of father absence compared to White and middle-class counterparts (Carlson & McLanahan, 2010). This is a problem that is considered to be the most important mitigating factor further exacerbating racial inequalities (McLanahan et al., 2013). Fatherlessness is not only an issue that has high impact and incidence within the African American community currently, but research suggests that it is an issue that has been engrained within the community for hundreds of years (Patterson, 1998, Pinderhughes, 2004; Ruggles, 1994).

History indicates that the absence of the father in the African American family dates back as far as slavery, when it was common for a male slave to be sold away from his wife and children (Frazier, 1957; Hamer, 1997; Moynihan, Rainwater, & Yancey, 1967; Stamp, 1956). The absenteeism of the African American male in the family has

since continued. The 2011 United States Census reported that 61% of African American children are living in female-headed households, and that number has remained constant since 1991 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). It also reported that one-fourth of these households are below the federal poverty level and reside in low-income neighborhoods (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). Herman-Stahl, Kan, and McKay (2008) stated that, in 2007, an estimated 744,200 prisoners in state and federal prison were fathers to some 1,599,200 children under the age of 18 and 49% of those incarcerated men were African American. These numbers are staggering and paint the picture of a family structure that has been altered by modern and primitive systems, and a Black male experience that has been categorized by oppression for generations.

Over the last three decades of father involvement research, there is consistent evidence highlighting detrimental effects African American youth face without the role of a father being fulfilled in their lives (Chiles, 2013; Dubowitz, Lane, Grief, Jensen, & Lamb, 2006; East, Jackson, & O'Brien, 2006). These negative outcomes include learning disabilities, low school performance, and exposure to drugs, sex, violence, poverty, gang activity, and incarceration, among others (Mandara & Murray, 2006). Although there is much research about how *youth* are affected by the absence of their fathers, there is little known about how the absence of a father affects *fathers'* perceptions of fatherhood. This is particularly important because research suggests that there is an intergenerational transmission of fathering attitudes and behaviors from a father's family of origin, particularly when there are close father-son relationships (Beaton & Doherty, 2007; Kerr, Capaldi, Pears, & Owen, 2009). To aid mental health providers working to prevent or

ameliorate the detrimental effects of generational father absence in the African American community, researchers should attend to providing fatherless fathers a voice to better understand what has informed their fathering. Advancement in this area thereby has the potential to inform prevention and intervention efforts targeted at assisting African American fathers to be involved and engaged with their children.

Statement of the Problem

The prevalence of African American children being born to single mothers (Population Reference Bureau, 2016), and the absence of fathers at a higher incidence, specifically in low-income families (McLanahan & Carson, 2002), makes for fragile families (Garfinkel & Zinlanawala, 2015; Mincy & Pouncy, 1997). This creates a delicate situation for African American families, and significant consequences for these fathers' children who experience worse behavioral, academic, and mental health outcomes because of limited father involvement (East, Jackson, & O'Brien, 2006; Ellis et al., 2003; Hetherington, Bridges, & Insabella, 1998; Lang & Zagorsky, 2011; Spurijt, Degoede & Vandervalk, 2001). Despite research that consistently demonstrates the negative outcomes of being raised fatherless, there is little research exploring the experiences of African-American men who were raised without their fathers and their perception of fatherhood (Pasley, Patren, & Fish, 2014). Without research highlighting these experiences, our ability to understand the identity development of African American fathers is limited, as is our ability to capitalize on their insight for future generations, or to intervene in their family processes.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the proposed study was to explore the perceptions of fatherhood amongst a group of African American fathers who were raised without their own fathers. Societal changes impact the roles of fathers, as well as fathers' perceptions of what is of importance in fathering. A major contributor to the evolution of society is the impact of popular culture. Some sociologists suggest that hip-hop culture has become an example of pseudo-masculinity within urban communities that lack the presence of fathers and positive male role models, thus creating a generation of African American men that defines manhood in terms of material things, and take guidance from these fictitious symbols (Dyson, 1996; Rose, 2008; Oliver, 2006). The present qualitative study examined how African American fathers viewed fatherhood. This study is needed to build on current research on the high incidence of the absence or under-involved father within the African American community.

A secondary aim of the proposed study is to aid helping professionals in preventing further detriments due to father absence and to aid in restoring the African-American family and the role that the African American father plays within the family system. Also, to advocate for African American men in helping to support and affirm the important role they play in fathering their children.

Research Question

To better understand the fathering perceptions of African American fathers who were raised without their fathers, the following research question will be asked:

How do African American fathers raised without their fathers perceive fatherhood?

Theoretical Framework

The researcher focused on role theory and fathering. When examining fatherlessness in role theory terms, role making is the most relevant theoretical concept. Role making is the process of a social actor actively making up their own roles without norms or criteria as they progress through life (Turner, 1990). When an actor does this, their actions and behaviors may not be interpretable or predictable because they are not harnessed by the norms of others or the society. This process may then lead to atypical behaviors that fail to meet the task of the role. Specific to fathers, they serve as role models that are key references for children because they model positive behavior and adaptive techniques that the children can aspire to (Bryant & Zimmerman, 2003). However, when a child grows up without a father (as many Black children do, given the statistics shared above), they struggle with gender identity development, problems with sex-roles psychological adjustment, issues with managing aggressions, and, most critically for the present research, difficulties parenting as an adult (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1997; Guzzo, 2011).

Definitions of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following definitions were applied:

- 1.) African American: When referencing African Americans in this research, the term Black will be used interchangeably.

- 2.) White: When referencing Caucasian Americans in this research, the term White will be used interchangeably.
- 3.) Fatherlessness: Children raised in homes without residential, biological fathers because of divorce, separation from a cohabitating union, and/or a non-marital birth, death or incarceration; or the regular inconsistent engagement of their father who lived outside the home, occurring up until the age of 18 (McLanahan, Tach, & Schneider, 2013).
- 4.) Co-residence: When a father shares a residence with their child(ren).
- 5.) Non-residential: When a father does not share a residence with their child(ren).
- 6.) Self-identify: Assessing their own father's level of engagement.

Delimitation of the Study

Delimitation of the study included the following: The participants in the study only included African American fathers between the ages of 25-45 who self-identified as being raised without the active engagement of their own fathers up until the age of 18. This definition of fatherlessness is reflective of research that highlights that, developmentally, the period of adolescence is especially critical for the impact of fathering (Blechman, 1992).

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore and gain understanding of the perceptions of fatherhood amongst a group of fathers who were raised without their fathers. The theoretical framework that guided the exploration of their perceptions, roles, and identities for this study was role theory and role identity. A phenomenological

approach was used in an attempt to set aside biases and preconceived assumptions about the perceptions, self-meanings, feelings, responses, and experiences of these fathers. The experiences of African American fathers who were raised without their fathers is underrepresented in the literature, so this study contributes to the gap in the qualitative research of this population.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter reviewed related literature of the study and several variables that have shaped the African American family experience, including Black fathering. This review highlighted how the researcher arrived at the research questions that guided this study, and substantiated the methodology chosen. This literature review addressed family structure and historical perspectives in the African American family, westernized ideals of fathering, traditional structure of the African American family, masculinity among African American men, and gaps in the fathering research.

Family Structure in African American Families

Fatherlessness is an issue that has high impact and incidence within the Black family. It is a problem that has metastasized and affected generation after generation of African-American families (Patterson, 1998; Pinderhughes, 2004; Ruggles, 1994). According to the Census Bureau (2011), more than 24.7 million American children live in homes without a biological father, 20% of those children are White, while their Black counterparts almost triple that number at 58%. The problem is only worsening: the percentage of Black children living with two parents decreased from 58% in 1920 to less than 38% in 1990. This number has remained constant since 2008, with little to no improvement (Bynam, 2013).

Residence

Fatherlessness is frequently defined as children raised in homes without residential, biological fathers (McLanahan et al., 2013; National Responsible Fatherhood

Clearinghouse, 2015). The Moynihan Report (1967) first introduced the concept of the absent Black male from the nuclear family by defining him as financially and physically absent. As the concept has evolved, it is important to stress that the Black nonresidential father is not *by default* financially or physically absent. However, Fagan and Palkowitz (2011) stated that co-residence is the strongest predictor of father involvement with their children. When fathers do not reside with their children, they are less likely to have regular access to them and are more likely to depend on their relationship with the child's mother to determine involvement. If a father's relationship with their child's mother is negative, this often impedes father involvement (Fagan & Palkowitz, 2011). Overall, studies show that nonresidential fathers represent a significant number of fathers that are removed from children's lives (Coley & Hernandez, 2006), as they have a higher likelihood of low levels of involvement (Cabrera, Tamis-Lemonda, Shannon, Lamb, 2004; Haskins, 2009). Because African-American fathers have a higher rate of being non-residential, and have often been categorized by low involvement as a result, they are at a greater risk of absence (Coley & Chase-Lansdale, 1999).

Intimate Partner Relationships

Cohabiting unions and non-marital childbearing unions are more common among minority and low-income families (Ellwood & Jenks, 2004). According to the Pew Research Center (2015), marriage has been on a steady decline since 1960. At that time, 68% of adults in their twenties were married, compared to 26% in 2008. Specific to African American family formation, more than one-third of African American women older than 25 have never married. This current statistic is four times higher than in the

1960s. Further, according to the Pew Research Center (2010), as marriage has declined, cohabitation has increased, nearly doubling since the 1990s.

These shifting patterns in African American intimate partnerships further affect family growth and parenting. For example, in 2005, 69% of Black births were non-marital births, compared to 32% of Caucasian and 48% of Hispanic births (Pew Research Center, 2010). Even more recent statistics demonstrate that this may be a growing number as 72% of African American births are non-marital, the highest among any racial group (McLanahan, 2011).

An additional concern is the stability of cohabitating relationships. Unmarried African-American couples are much more likely to break up within the first 5 years, and according to McLanahan (2011), more than two-thirds of children born to non-marital couples will be living away from their father by age five. Specific to African American families, this population is much less likely to maintain stable cohabiting unions compared to all other racial groups (Osborne, Manning, & Smock, 2007). The Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing research have highlighted the outcomes of non-marital births and the increase in cohabitation. Distinctively, despite participants' expectations of maintaining an involved intimate partnership and co-parenting their shared children, the study has highlighted frequent relationship fluctuations and instability, changes in residence, economic and health disparities, much of which are tied to marital status at the time of childbirth (McLanahan, 2011). Specifically, after age 5, only 50% of non-residential fathers see their children once monthly; more than 80% of Black children will spend a portion of their childhood in a father-absent home (Haskins, 2009).

Historical Perspective of Structure of African American Families

To fully understand the African American family structure, adaptations in family structure that occurred due to slavery are critical to explore. It is chronicled that slavery lasted in the United States from 1619 when the first 20 slaves arrived in Virginia, until its abolishment in 1865 (Blassingame, 1979; Genovese, 1976). Although historians do not agree on the degree to which slavery disorganized the structure, if at all, most acknowledge its cumulative effects both past and present. Historians agree that the Black family was recognized under enslavement, but that families experienced different kinds of rules that undermined the family's structure overall (McAdoo, 1988). For instance, dominance within the Black family did not reside with the male or female partner, but with the slave owner. The slave owner's power and control was enforced by the overseer and was enacted by force and violence. The slave system itself characterized a family that operated with the woman and mother at the center, operating as the sole force to protect the integrity of the slave family (Billingsley, 1992).

Slavery and the Black Male

Theorist Genovese (1976) stated that the average male slave did, in fact, live in the family setting and had strong ties to his nuclear family and was allowed to perform some fathering roles. Further, Blassingame (1979) stated that the enslaved family could exist as a unit, and that the father typically performed the role of hunter and affectionate father to his children. However, the tapestry of the slave family could be compromised at any time with the selling of the male slave. It was common practice to divide the Black family by selling the father and the mother separately, leaving the family structure broken

with little likelihood of being restored (Hamer, 1997). Male slaves were expected to have fruitful relationships with female slaves and father as many children as possible to provide capital for the slave owner. However, these men were not allowed legal rights or responsibilities for their children, nor were they allowed to marry (Green, 1975; Nichols, 1972). Further, male slaves were expected to be strong but could not defend their families (Green, 1975; Hamer, 1997; McAdoo, 1993; Nichols 1972). Though the Black family may have not been destroyed, family roles were reconstructed as history and slavery progressively altered the family unit.

Post-emancipation and industrialization. The Appomattox period also had significant negative effects on the Black family (Billingsley, 1992). This period followed the emancipation in 1865, when African American families made attempts to acquire land, solidify their families, and legalize marriages. Ex-slave families migrated to northern and eastern states to begin new lives, and though many family units survived the oppressions of slavery, the direct effect of political and social oppression would cause the continued disenfranchisement of Blacks (Billingsley, 1992).

The beginning of the post-emancipation era was the 1883 *Plessy vs Ferguson* Doctrine of separate but equal (Billingsley, 1992). It would be the beginning of a macro-system that would oust the Black individual from the political, economic, and education system. This ostracization would become a systematic avenue of oppression that would weaken the wellbeing of the African American community. During this period of reconstruction of an economy that would no longer be based on the labor of slaves, there was a rise in the Black working class due to the industrial era. As a result, Black men

experienced gains in opportunities in the workforce. Between the years of 1940 and 1970, the era of the steel industry, Black men were employed at record numbers in the manufacturing industry (Hamer, 1997). These jobs did not require post-secondary education and provided them with the income needed to support their families. Issues like discrimination, poor education, and desegregation were still issues that plagued the family, but the ability to earn an income established a sense of stability and defined a role for the Black man as the provider in the family system.

The evolution of street life. As the economy changed and the Great Recession hit, steel and manufacturing jobs were sent overseas, leaving a large majority of Black men unemployed (Oware, 2011). Because of their lack of education, they were unable to secure employment within the growing service industry (Anderson, 1999; Wilson, 1999). African-American fathers were grappling for ways to earn equivalent wages with little to no education, and in the face of widespread racial discrimination. In an effort to feed their families and maintain their roles as breadwinners within their homes, some Black men desperately turned to illegal means to provide for their families. In the 1970s, there was an influx of drug trafficking in Black communities. Unemployment rates were at a new high and street life presented itself as a new alternative for many Black males (Oware, 2011).

Because of their inability to provide, many Black men were often left to redefine themselves not just as fathers but also as men. The new identity that the African-American father found in the system as the provider was now being challenged because of their inability to provide. The focus of being father and provider shifted for some to a

street life mentality of hyper-masculinity, hyper-sexuality, and hyper-aggressiveness, with a focus on money and the absence of male accountability (Hunter & Davis, 1994; Hammond and Mattis, 2005). This turn created a culture of absent fathers and a shift in the family system. Further, institutional racism and the criminalization of Black men resulted in an influx of Black men in the prison system (Davis, 2007). The new legislature evolving from the war on drugs targeted Blacks disproportionately and imprisoned them with mandatory minimum sentences (Alexander, 2012).

According to the Wilson and Rodgers (2016) African-American males still have the highest rate of unemployment and underemployment among their counterparts across the country. They have the highest rates of incarceration, parole, and probation among all minority groups, are represented disproportionately in the criminal justice system, and have the highest rate of joblessness (Alexander, 2012; Oware, 2011).

Overall, historical shifts in the U.S., beginning with slavery and evolving through emancipation, industrialization, and modern structures of criminal justice, have served to shift and oppress the African-American family structure. Further, these changes over time have shaped the ability of Black males to connect, contribute to, and protect their families. Cultural and broad systemic oppressive structures that have dictated Black males' involvement in their family continue to shape their roles and responsibilities of fathering.

Westernized Ideals of Fathering

It is necessary to look at the evolution of fathering research, but also to evaluate how inclusive present-day research has sometimes overlooked the historical and

contextual experience of the African American male. Inclusivity, or exclusivity, of the historical structures that have shaped Black fathers' experiences informs how Black fathering is evaluated in the literature.

The conceptualization of father involvement is largely defined by Western ideals that emphasize that involved fathers are necessarily residential and are measured in success by financial contributions made and time spent (Coley, 2001; Palkowitz, 1997). These mainstream conceptualizations introduce several misconceptions specifically, that involvement requires proximity, is always observable, can be counted, and should be the same regardless of culture, subculture, and social class (Hawkins & Palkowitz, 1999; Palkowitz, 1997). These narrow conceptions marginalize African-American fathers because they ignore the contextual experiences that have shaped fathering within the African-American family.

Contrary to these westernized ideals, the National Longitudinal Survey indicates that a large percentage of African-American fathers are non-residential, and that 72% of children are born to unmarried African-American women (Coley & Chase, 1999). Further, Black men are known to have higher rates of unemployment, minimal education, and lower wages (Hamer, 1997; Holzer, Offner & Sorensen, 2005). For years, the lack of marriage and non-residence with the mother and inability to provide have rendered the African-American father absent or uninvolved in some cases (Coles, 2001). This makes for spurious assumptions because of the absence of inclusion and diversity in research on fathering. It is comparable to viewing the world through a Black and White lens. Basing the understanding of fathering on solely Westernized ideals sterilizes families' potpourri

of colors, textures, and complexities, and limits the degree to which fathering, broadly and diversely, can be understood (Hamer, 1997; Hawkins & Palkowitz, 1999, Marsigilo, Amato, Day & Lamb 2000; Pasley, Pentren & Fish, 2014).

Westernized Ideals and Fathering Research

The existing research paradigms for father involvement have been based largely on the two-parent, married, nuclear family system, and evaluated mostly by quantifiable, linear observations of involvement (Hawkins & Palkowitz, 1999; Marsiglio & Cohan, 2000). This is an issue when researching the involvement of the African-American father, because it depicts a misconception that African-American fathers are absent and have abandoned their fathering responsibilities when they are not residential (Palkovitz, 1997). Quantitative measures of involvement overlook the non-traditional, indirect, and multidimensional ways that African-American fathers involve themselves in the lives of their children (Hawkins & Palkowitz, 1999). These narrow constructs eliminate psychological and emotional involvement, as well as the contributions a father makes to a child's personality. These are all constructs that are hard to quantifiably measure (Lamb, 2000). In other words, the research literature exploring fathering identity and involvement is heavily informed by Westernized ideals of fathering. However, this is an operationalization of fathering that is not broadly generalizable. Therefore, as an invalid and incomplete conceptualization of fathering, research fails to adequately capture, for example, the experience of the African-American father. However, the results of fathering research are extrapolated, or at least suggest an understanding of fathering universally. This further serves to limit the African-American father as a family member

defined by broad systemic notions of his abilities and responsibilities, rather than providing a research literature reflective of diverse fathering experiences.

Traditional Structure of the African American Family

The crisis of the absence of the father in the African American family has created a hole not only in the family, but also in the Black community. The role of the wife and mother has shifted to compensate for the absence of the father. Women in the African-American family have become matriarchs, powerful women that primarily manage households. Slavery, oppression, and disenfranchisement have created a dynamic in the African American family in which the man is sometimes unsure as to where and how he fits in the family system (Hunter & Davis, 1994; Hammond & Mattis, 2005). The cycle of absent fathers is producing a population of young men who may struggle to define themselves as men and fathers (Frazier, 1957; Lareau, 2011).

As men that lacked appropriate models of manhood have children, some may carry on fragmented ideas of fatherhood. When these men are paired with women who may have been socialized to overcompensate because of the absence of fathers, it births a parental unit characterized by under and over-functioning. Weaver (2012) states that this matriarchal family organization has created a dynamic that prevents the African American father from fulfilling his role as a man and father. The father's relationship with the mother and maternal grandmother appear to be the direct predictor for levels of involvement with children (Coley & Chase, 1999; Fagan & Barnett, 2003). Researchers specifically refer to this as gatekeeping, which is defined as the mother's or maternal

grandmother's beliefs, controlling behaviors, criticisms, and high standards directly minimizing the father's involvement with his child (Fagan & Barnett, 2003).

Masculinity Among African American Men

To understand fully how masculinity has been defined by most African American men, one must fully understand the experience of what Hunter & Davis (1994) call the Black Under Class. This experience is one of intergenerational systematic oppression that has been orchestrated by the white majority, creating a victimized narrative for the African-American male (Oliver, 2006). Political, economic, educational, criminal, and mass-media macro-level systems deny African American men the opportunity of social, economic, and educational equality, while continuing the cycle of disenfranchisement and oppression. The alliance of these systems creates an American social structure of racial caste where Black men are often at a disadvantage (Hunter & Davis, 1994; Wilson, 1996).

A byproduct of oppressive macrosystems is the dysfunctional cultural adaptations that marginalized working class men make in response, in order to confront the oppression that is a daily reality (Wilson, 1996). In an effort to rewrite the victim narrative, a conception of Black manhood that emphasizes hyper-masculinity, hyper-aggression, and hyper-sexuality emerged amongst low-income Black men, particularly because these men lacked the resources to effectively cope with oppressive social ills they faced (Gibbs, 1988; Madhubuti, 1990).

For these men who lacked the access to education, jobs, or any other resources that would help with upward movement, they learn from an early age that they must find

alternative ways to gain respect and social acceptance (Anderson, 1999; Perkins as cited in Oliver, 2006). For some, this is found within their own social world, which is one that is riddled with poverty, crime, a lack of access to resources, broken family structures, and inadequate community support (as cited in Oliver, 2006, Madhubuti, 1990; Perkins, 1975; Wilson, 1996). Learning to navigate this ghetto street subculture is a coming of manhood for many of the marginalized (Anderson, 1999; Perkins, 1975). Overall, the evolved narrative of Black manhood is an attempt of the disenfranchised “Black Underclass” to champion against the pathology and despair caused by exposure to historical and present-day patterns of racial oppression (Oliver, 2006, original citation Anderson, 1999; Hannerz, 1969; White & Cones, 1999; Whitehead, Peterson & Kaljee, 1994).

Roles of African American Fathers

As highlighted above, and with limited research, there have been findings that suggest Black father involvement looks different than the typical western fathering ideals of breadwinner, disciplinarian, and protector (Coles, 2001). These differences are the direct effects of structural barriers like unemployment, incarceration, discrimination, racism, and education (Weaver, 2012). As a result, Black men have constructed their own normative realities based on lived experience (Marsiglio & Cohan, 2000). Due to the narrowed western constructs that have been used to explore fathering, their experiences have been skewed and misinterpreted within the research. This blind spot is due to the exclusion of the accounts of the diverse, or other, and the inclusion of the white middle class (Marsiglio, Amato, Day, & Lamb, 2000). The research is remiss because we know

that the ability to provide is a construct used to measure involvement for the last decade, but to fairly observe involvement, fathering itself must be contextualized in a different manner (Marsiglio & Cohan, 2000). To be inclusive, we must consider structural issues, from a sociological perspective, specifically the economic and social factors that are conditioned by race patterns that directly affect not only the circumstances of fathers, but how they think, feel, and act as fathers.

In the evolution of fathering measures, fathering has been evaluated from an ecological perspective, which allows researchers to explore the historical, political, and social influences of the African American father, allowing for them to be understood from a much less biased perspective (McAdoo, 1993; Shears, 2007). Current fathering research from the ecological systems perspective (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) takes an egg before the chicken approach at evaluating the African American father. Particularly, this theoretical approach posits that a father, a principal person, plays a significant role in the development of a child. This fathering role is then shaped and molded by the nested systems around their interactions. However, empirical research tells us a father prioritizes his involvement with his children based on his own relationship with his father (Doherty et al., 1998). Specifically, if a father had a positive relationship with his own father, he is more inclined to display positive skills with his own child; those with negative experiences will more likely display negative skills (Pleck, 1997; Floyd & Morman, 2000; Snarey, 1993). So, while an ecological systems approach to research on African American fathering is advantageous in promoting a macrosystems focus, it is less adept at considering transgenerational influences.

Role theory. Research on the intergenerational transmission of roles has found a link between social learning and the modeling of attitudes, behaviors, emotions, and values passed down from father to child (Bandura, 1977; Masciadrelli, Pleck, & Stueve, 2006). Role theory (Biddle, 1986) which has similarities to social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), conceptualizes intergenerational transmissions in terms of modeling, which may further explain the link between role modeling and behavior.

Role theory highlights one of the most important components of social life: the characteristics of patterned behavior (Biddle, 1986). Further, role theory conceptualizes life as a theatrical metaphor, stating that people are improvisational actors who create roles without scripts (Corey, 2011). People reflect on the tasks they are given and consider how to best portray the roles assigned. People can modify their roles and can break out of them whenever the role no longer serves them. The basic assumption of role theory is the idea that peoples' behaviors are different but predictable, depending on their culture and how they identify with society (Biddle, 1986).

Role theory defines the following basic concepts: roles and normative expectations. Roles are a network of patterned behaviors that are predictable and allow for a variability based on culture (Hilbert, 1981; Turner, 1990). Roles should be considered as creations of actors in social settings that are open to constant change or improvisation (Hilbert, 1981). A role is made up of behaviors and attitudes that are linked to each other (Turner, 2002). An individual is only viewed as acting appropriately when their behaviors are consistent with the cultural and social expectations of the various components of the role.

Norms are rules that are assigned to roles by society and are negotiated culturally or structurally. Normative expectations generate behaviors because they fuel conformity to the expectations of others, society, or the individual's beliefs (Biddle, 1986). Role theory states that when actors are without norms, standards, or criterion on which they can base the appropriateness of their behavior, the roles are then unharnessed by norms leading to chaos and random behavior (Hilbert, 1981).

Role theory and fathering. When addressing fatherlessness in role theory terms, role making is the most relevant theoretical concept. Role making is the process of social actors actively making up their own roles without norms or criteria as they progress through life (Turner, 1990). When an actor does this, their actions and behaviors may not be interpretable or predictable because they are not harnessed by the norms of others or the society. This process may then lead to atypical behaviors that fail to meet the task of the role. Specific to fathers, they serve as role models that are key references for children because they model positive behavior and adaptive techniques that the children can aspire to (Bryant & Zimmerman, 2003). However, when a child grows up without a father (as many Black children do, given the statistics previously), they may struggle with gender identity development, problems with sex-roles psychological adjustment, issues controlling aggressions, and, most critically for the present research, difficulties parenting as an adult (Hetherington & Stanley Hagan, 1997).

Role identity, like role theory, has increasingly become an important way of understanding and measuring father identity and involvement (Marsiglio, Amato, Day, & Lamb, 2000). Within the last 20 years, researchers have increasingly used identity theory

to inform how we look at fathering, and its application was realized as a way to further our understanding of fathering (Marsiglio, Amato, Day & Lamb, 2000). Symbolic interactionism, which is where identity theory was derived, assumes that people are understood best in relation to others and their environment (Griffin, 1997). Identity theory furthers that assumption to suggest that the individual emerges from their social interactions and their behavior is based on the meaning they give to people, positions, and the expectations attached to such positions (Stryker, 2002). Identities are self-meanings that are blended with role expectations and are associated with social norms that are negotiated culturally or structurally and are reflected in behaviors. Individuals can hold more than one identity at a time.

Theorists LaRossa and Reitzes (1993) add that behaviors are influenced by shared norms across culture. Stryker (1988) states that identities are the result of individuals locating themselves within these social categories and negotiating the associated behaviors (Burke & Reitzes, 1999). The more prominently the individual identifies with the role, the more likely they will make the attempt to adapt to the positive expectations assigned to that role; but the less prominent the role, the less likely the individual will identify with the role (Burke, 1980). LaRossa and Reitzes (1993) conceptualize this as role salience. To simplify, salience is the idea that identities are organized in levels of prominence to predict which behaviors will be enacted in different social situations. It is considered the most important mechanism that motivates behavior (Stryker & Burke, 2000).

Research suggests that the more a father perceives his role as a father to be salient, the more highly they commit to fathering behaviors (Stryker & Burke, 2000). However, because fathering is contextual, environment and relationships can deprioritize the fathering identity despite its salience (Burke & Stets, 2009). For example, if a father is incarcerated, he may lose relationships that support his fathering identity, and subsequently gain new relationships that support a new identity that aligns with the new environment, which subsequently alters his commitment to his fathering identity (Adamson, Marion & Pasley, 2007). We also know that men's childhood experiences and relationships with their own fathers are positively related to their own identity (Soule, Standley & Copans, 1979). Researchers have noted that the multigenerational role of fathering contributes to role identity, commitment, and efficacy for fathers (Cowan & Cowan, 1987; Snarley, 1993). What we do not know is how fathering identity is constructed for African-American fathers when their own fathers are absent, and their surrounding environment lacks resources and relationships that would emphasize fathering identity.

Gaps in Fathering Research

Even with the fathering research turning the corner in the last decade in the expansion of conceptualizations of paternal involvement from a sociological perspective, there are still gaps. In Pasley, Fish, and Petren's (2014) evaluation of current fathering research, the authors found that there remains a lack of inclusion of the non-white father. They highlight that the primary identity standard for a "good father" is "good breadwinner." Therefore, the authors suggest current fathering research fails to represent

the experience of fathers who do not meet the breadwinner role expectation. Pasley et al. (2014) found that the heterosexual, white, middle-class father is still widely examined in research, and the experiences of those who do not identify with breadwinning roles are excluded. They conclude by calling for more comprehensive and representative fathering research, specifically with a focus on low-income, unemployed (or underemployed), and non-white fathers who contribute to their children in ways outside the westernized ideals of a good father.

Murray and Hwang (2015) explored how married African-American men defined the role of father in their families. Although they did not control for the absence of their biological fathers, they found that 6 of the 8 fathers grew up in the home without their fathers. Four of the men described their relationships with their fathers as strained and distant, one participant did not meet his dad until adulthood, while another described his dad's involvement as infrequent and intermittent. The two that had residential fathers reported that their fathers were either emotionally unavailable, and of those eight, only one described his relationship with his father as fully engaged and active in his life. The themes that emerged in this phenomenological study that explored fathers perceived role in the family were: provider, role model/ sex model, disciplinarian, supporter, spiritual teacher, and guide/teacher. The study also rendered that these fathers placed significant importance on the role of provider and being physically and emotionally present for their children, especially those who reported fewer positive relationships with their own fathers. The fathers went on to express that their experience with father absence motivated them to make a cognizant decision to father differently.

Guzzo (2011) conducted a study to examine how a man's experience with his father affects his own fathering attitudes. This quantitative study of 3,235 new fathers from the Fragile Families and Child-Well-being Survey looked at how the father type and father involvement was associated with fathering attitudes. In this study, Guzzo (2011) tested two possible ways in which a man's experience with his father may affect his own fathering attitudes: the modeling hypothesis and the compensatory hypothesis. The modeling hypothesis is similar to role identity theory, because it is the idea that people's behavior and attitudes are modeled by significant persons in their lives, identifying fathers as key influencers. This hypothesis predicts that when a man has a "good" father, he too will be a good father, making the reverse true as well (Daly, 1993). The other is the compensatory hypothesis which suggests that if a man had a negative relationship with his father, he would be motivated to father better than his own father. This theory suggests that the men used their own fathers as negative models of fathering, and as a result they saw the importance of good fathering, and desired to model behaviors based on a positive fathering schema that is opposite of the example they had. The fathers in this study reported different levels of involvement of their father or a father figure, which included a range of involvement from not-involved to very involved. It was also stated that two thirds of the men reported that their fathers were involved, and one-fourth reported they did not have an involved biological father or a father figure. Findings in this study suggested that men tended to mimic the fathering behaviors that reflected the involvement of their own father, or that of a father figure which corroborated the modeling hypothesis. Further findings concluded that men with positive attitudes of

fathering emphasized the importance of the provider role, which in this study was strongly associated with more traditional roles like religiosity and parental involvement overall.

Although this study was large and contributed to the paucity of research that explores how men view themselves as fathers, it neglected to make a clear connection between the race of these men, the involvement of their father, and their perceived perceptions of fatherhood, which highlights the importance of the lived experiences of this population being represented in the current research.

Summary

History, culture, and context has forcefully shifted the structure of the African-American family, and masculinity and fathering within the African-American community. In evaluation of the unique experiences that African-American men face in terms of poverty, altered family structures, and the higher incidence of fatherlessness within the community, it is important to understand how they perceive their own roles as fathers, as well as what informs their role based on these unique experiences. Pasley et al., (2014) theorized that the current, common, and formulated standards of identity used in fathering research likely fails to represent the lived experiences of diverse fathers. Further, it is critical to consider, in light of role theory, the notion that fathers parenting without having had fathering modeled by their own fathers may have constructed their own standards of parenting, which may be wholly unique and undiscovered in research. Therefore, fathering research requires a focus on more diverse samples, and their specific

lived experiences, in order to better understand their roles as fathers, and how these roles are constructed, reflective of cultural, contextual, and historical factors.

Because research has explored so little about fathering among African-American fathers, it is critical to examine these fathers lived experiences in the purest form, without attempting to forcefully fit them into our own theoretical underpinnings. Therefore, the present study utilized a phenomenological qualitative approach to allow the principal investigator to study experiences in a way that broadened the conceptual constructs used in fathering research.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of the proposed study was to explore the perceptions of fatherhood amongst a group of African-American fathers who were raised without their own fathers. Therefore, a qualitative design was necessary for this research to ensure that the principal investigator captured the narratives of the lived experiences as told by fatherless African-American fathers. This chapter outlines the methodology the principal investigator used in this study.

Qualitative Methodology

Pasley, Petren, and Fish (2014) suggested that established theory and standards of fathering have likely excluded the experiences of the African American fathers. Pasley, Petren, and Fish further explain that due to a lack of understanding of fathering by African American fathers, the use of exploratory qualitative methods is recommended in order to examine the experiences of these men without forcefully fitting them into the existing fathering constructs. Therefore, the principal investigator used a phenomenological approach to examine the lived experiences of the participants and how they understood fatherhood (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). More specifically, the goal of phenomenological research is to explore, “how they perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others” (Patton, 2002, p.104). Moustakas (1994) suggested that the main purpose of the phenomenological approach is to: “determine what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it. From the individual

descriptions, general or universal meanings are derived, in other words the essences of structures of the experience” (p. 13). Groenwald (2004) suggested that the phenomenological approach is always recommended when the research requires the internal experience of being conscious of something (p.4). Particularly, this is important because phenomenology allows for a deeper understanding of not only the lived experiences of people, but the intricacies of these experiences by exposing assumptions about these ways of knowing that are often trivialized (Sokolowski, 2000).

Selection and Sampling Strategies

Data saturation was the main objective for this study, and typical sample sizes for phenomenological studies range from 1 to 10 participants (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). Therefore, the principal investigator collected data from 10 African American fathers aged 25-45 years old, and until data saturation was achieved. The age inclusion criterion is reflective of the literature that suggests that popular culture and rap music has helped shape Black youth culture more than anything else (Kitwana, 2002).

In addition, there was no exclusion criteria specific to residence. Specifically, participants were living in or outside the home of their children (i.e., residential or non-residential fathers). The purpose of this broad description of father participants was to capture a broad range of fathering experiences, not necessarily determined by whether the father is residential. Data were collected regarding the residential status of each father participant in order to highlight themes specific to this demographic characteristic.

However, key to the purpose of the present study, an inclusion criterion was that all father participants also stated that they were raised fatherless. Specifically, the

potential participants reported that their own fathers were not actively engaged in parenting up to age of 18 (i.e., while the participant was developmentally in adolescence or prior to this developmental period). This definition of fatherlessness is reflective of research that highlights that, developmentally, the period of adolescence is especially critical for the impact of fathering and fatherhood (Blechman, 1992).

Recruitment

This study sample was generated from research recruitment flyer distribution (see Appendix A) and word of mouth (i.e., a snowball recruitment approach through participant referrals). The principal investigator also posted a description of the study in groups that were specific to this population on the following social media sites: Facebook®, Instagram®, and Twitter®.

Human Participant Protection

The principal investigator complied with the Texas Woman's University Institution Review Board regulations. The principal investigator ensured that great caution was taken to ensure that the participants comprehended the full disclosure of the entirety of the study procedures including: foreseeable risks, potential benefits, and confidentiality protections for the participants and the conditions of participation. Each participant received and signed the consent form to participate in the study (see Appendix B). The principal investigator completed an oral presentation of the informed consent form with a question and answer segment to help build rapport. The human participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time. The participants

chose their own pseudonyms which were used to ensure that their anonymity and confidentiality were maintained throughout the entirety of the study. The political and ethical research issues anticipated in this study included misrepresenting the focus and outcome of the study, participants feeling obligated to finish the study as well as political issues surrounding child support issues. Participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without any explanation. Each participant was informed that the aim of this study was to accurately tell the story of the participant's experiences. The role of the researcher was explained, and the participants were provided with an email address to contact the principal investigator if they had questions after the interview was completed. The participants were presented with a \$20 gift card as a thank you and were informed that completion of the interview was not a requirement for the gift. All data were stored on password protected data management software on the researcher's computer.

Professional care was exhibited when interacting with participants and discussing their experiences. The principal investigator interacted with participants from a stance of empathic neutrality, and as an active and thoughtful listener. Participants were given a social services referral list (see Appendix E) to those needing professional counseling, employment, appropriate housing, parenting classes, or services. The study data collected are the property of only the principal investigator and will be kept behind a double locked file cabinet for seven years and will be destroyed thereafter.

Qualitative Methodology

Data Collection

Before each interview the principal investigator requested participants complete an oral demographic questionnaire (see Appendix C). The questionnaire served as a screening process to determine whether participants met inclusion criteria including income, age and relationship with father.

The principal investigator conducted face-to-face, in-depth, semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions. Seidman (2006) stated that in depth interviewing is the interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of it. Interviewing with open-ended questions is a venture to build on the participant's responses that allows the participant to reconstruct their experience. As stated by Rossman and Marshall (2011), the most important part of the interview is the interviewer's ability to exude an attitude that the participant's views are important and valuable. The principal investigator exercised active listening and gentle probing which allowed for the open-ended questioning format to build rapport and create a relaxed environment for participants. The principal investigator also used paraphrasing and reflecting during interviews to confirm that what the participant said is what the researcher received (Guion, Diehl, & McDonald, 2001). The principal investigator relied on a semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix C). Each interview was scheduled for 90 minutes. Participant interviews were audio recorded for credibility and audio equipment was tested prior to interview sessions.

Interview questions. The purpose of the present research was to explore the lived experiences of African American fathers who are fathering while themselves fatherless, one distinct research question was proposed. Interview questions were used to explore the research question in a semi-structured interview (see Appendix C).

Fieldnotes. Following each interview, the researcher authored field notes to document her own thoughts and feelings regarding the interviews in order to reflect on her own experiences and reactions throughout the research process. These field notes were utilized throughout the analytic process to limit research bias, promote reflexivity, and enhance study rigor. The principal investigator was honest about her perspective and the developing hypothesis; and she consulted with her dissertation chair throughout the analysis process to examine how her thoughts evolved throughout the data analysis process (Cutcliffe, 2003; Sokolowski, 2000).

Data Analyses

The researcher listened to 5 of the audio recordings, and transcribed each recording verbatim using Nvivo transcription software. The other 5 were transcribed by a local transcription service who provide accurate transcriptions for writers and educational projects. During transcription, the researcher made field notes in order to assess for data saturation. This process limited the researcher's own bias, such that the field notes were completed prior to beginning data analysis and therefore limited the notes' effects on future themes discovered.

To improve rigor and ensure analytic validity, the researcher involved 2 additional coders as expert members in reviewing the selected transcribed participant responses.

These coders recently and successfully completed qualitative dissertations of their own and were familiar with the coding process. The coders read the transcripts and coded them for common themes (Saldaña, 2009). The transcriptions were coded in three steps: open, axial, and selective coding. Comparisons were made between the principal investigator's themes and the coders' themes.

Open coding. Open coding is the most basic aspect of the phenomenological approach because it is the part of data analysis that deals with labeling and categorizing phenomena as indicated by the data (Pandit, 1996). It is the process of comparing data and grouping them together and giving them a comparative label, known as a category (Glaser & Strauss, 2017; Pandit, 1996; Saldaña, 2009). In the open coding step, the principal investigator read the transcripts line by line and pinpointed concepts in the data. This process was done until the point of saturation was reached, and there was no new appearance of any new codes created by the data (Creswell, 2015). Triangulation through multiple analysts was then used by the coding team to ensure that data interpretations were credible (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Triangulation through multiple analysts is a method that helped to verify data by reconciling it and strengthening the credibility of the codes generated from the data (Patton, 1999; Tanji, 1999). This was implemented by the researchers by analyzing the transcriptions independently, discussing the codes with the principal researcher, and then agreeing on the open codes. These open codes were then entered into an Excel Worksheet software, which was used to store, organize, manage, and aid the research team with analytic reflection (Saldaña, 2009).

Axial coding. The second phase was axial coding, which involved reassembling the data into groups based on the relationships and patterns that emerged within and between the categories identified within the data that may have been split during the initial coding process (Starks & Trinidad, 2007; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Using axial coding allowed the researcher to group similar coded data to reduce the number of initial codes, as well as sort out and re-label data into concept categories (Saldaña, 2009). This step of coding sharpened the data to ensure the most appropriate fit was found (Glaser, 1978).

Selective coding. The last phase, selective coding, allowed for the principal investigator to identify and describe the core categories that emerged from the data (Dey, 1999; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The researcher executed selective coding by searching for the most salient codes and collapsed similar codes to describe core categories that emerged for the data; these were then conceptualized as themes (Dey, 1999; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Role of the Researcher

The principal investigator of this study is an African-American female, daughter, sister, aunt, cousin, therapist, and doctoral candidate in the Family Therapy program at Texas Woman's University. The principal investigator serves as a therapist at a local community college.

Summary

Overall, this chapter reported the qualitative methods employed by this study, including: selection and sampling, recruitment, human participant protection, data

collection, data analysis, and the role of the researcher. Phenomenology was the most appropriate design for this study because it allowed the researcher to explore the lived experiences of these participants.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF DATA AND FINDINGS

Introduction

A qualitative methodology was used to explore how African American fathers raised without their fathers perceived fathering. Fathers who participated in this study shared their lived experiences in 90-minute semi-structured face-to-face interviews conducted by the principal investigator. The semi-structured interviews were audiotaped and transcribed by the principal investigator and a local transcription service. This chapter analyzed data collected from the ten fathers who identified as fatherless, utilizing specific coding methods in order to present the study's findings. This chapter also includes a description of the sample, data analysis, findings, and themes.

Research Question

To explore the lived experiences of the participants, this phenomenological study employed the following research question:

How do African American fathers raised fatherless perceive fatherhood?

Description of the Sample

Gentles, Charles, Ploeg and McKibbin (2015) stated that participant selection in phenomenological qualitative research is the selection of informants from which data are collected in order to explore a research question. These informants met criteria of a specific lived experience. The researcher aimed to gain new understandings of these participants' lived experiences through first person accounts given through interviews.

This study included ten fathers between the ages of 25-45, who self-identified as fathers who were raised fatherless, participated in this study. The fathers ranged in ages from 29 to 44. Each of the fathers were recruited from research flyer distribution (see Appendix A) and word of mouth (i.e. snowball recruitment approach through participant referrals). Each participant chose their own pseudonyms from a superhero name generator based on their initials. The researcher then used the initials of the participant's superhero name.

The principal investigator asked four demographic questions of each father in their interviews as presented in Table 1:(1) the year they were born, (2) if they earned more than 25K, 50K or 100K a year, (3) if they were residential or non-residential fathers, and (4) to describe their father's involvement as a child (absent, involved, deceased, etc). Of the ten participants six of them earned more than 50k and less than 100k a year, three participants earned less than 50k a year and one participant earned more than 100k a year. Of the 10 participants 5 were residential, two were non-residential, two had fifty-fifty joint custody, and one was both residential and non-residential, having fathered multiple children with different mothers. Each of the participants lived within a 30-mile radius of the researcher.

Table 1

Demographic Statistics of Participants

| Name | PB | WB | IM2 | SB | AS | GW | AF | SF | IM | Ps |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------|---------------|-----------------|----------------------------------|-----------------|-------------|---------------------|---|----------------------------------|
| Age | 46 | 44 | 38 | 30 | 30 | 39 | 30 | 32 | 29 | 31 |
| Income | <50K | <50K | >50K | >50K | <50K | >50K | >50K | >50K | <50K | <100K |
| Residential/Non-Residential | Residential & Non-Residential | Residential | 50/50 custody | Non-residential | Residential | Non-Residential | Residential | 50/50 custody | Residential | Residential |
| Father's Involvement | Limited Involvement | Absent | Absent | Absent | Regular Inconsistent Involvement | Absent | Absent | Absent (no contact) | Regular inconsistent presence (incarceration) | Regular Inconsistent Involvement |

Data Collection

All interviews were recorded on a password protected voice recording application on the ©Apple Ipad2. All recordings were double password protected and backed-up on a secure data management system. The interviews were downloaded to another data management system, which was also password protected. Prior to transcription, the researcher listened to all 10 interviews. From these 10 interviews, five of them were uploaded to Nvivo©, a qualitative software, and transcribed by the researcher. This program allowed the researcher to stop and start the audio with a key stroke while transcribing the interviews. The other 5 interviews were uploaded to a local transcription service and transcribed by a third party. The next section will contain a description of the coding procedures used in this study for data analysis.

Data Analysis

Dey (2003) stated that qualitative analysis is the process of disassembling data into smaller parts and then blending them together. The smaller parts of the data, known as codes, allows a researcher to see its constituent components that reveal its characteristics, elements and structure. These smaller codes allow for interpretation, explanation, and understanding. Qualitative analysis, allows the researcher to classify the data, find connections, and reconceptualize it. This creates something much different from the original, specifically, descriptions of the phenomena connected to the research question. The following paragraphs explain the methods employed in this study to analyze the research data.

Coding

The researcher used a qualitative methodological approach to explore the perceptions of fathers who were raised fatherless. In order to do this, the researcher relied upon the utilization of coding methods: open, axial, and selective coding (Saldaña, 2009). This allowed for the data to be surveyed for understanding and phenomena manifestations.

Open coding. The first step in the data analysis procedure was open coding. Open coding is the most basic aspect of the phenomenological approach because it is the part of data analysis that deals with labelling and categorizing phenomena as indicated by the data (Glaser & Strauss, 2017; Pandit, 1996). It is the process of comparing codes and grouping them together and giving them a comparative label, known as a category (Pandit, 1996; Saldaña, 2009).

The researcher executed the open coding method by first taking the data, in the form of interview transcriptions, and going through each transcription line by line assigning codes to chunks of discourse within them. Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2013) stated that codes are smaller parts of the data that are labels that give symbolic meaning to informational discourse compiled in a study from the study's participants. The codes the researcher assigned to the discourse were summative, salient, and essence capturing (Miles et al., 2013). These codes were used to organize and categorize the data for further analysis. This process was done until the point of saturation was reached, and there was no new appearance of any new codes created by the data (Creswell, 2015). The open codes were then entered into a Coding Chart

created in Microsoft excel, which was used to store, organize, manage, and aid the research team with analytic reflection (Saldaña, 2009). See Table 2 for an example.

Table 2

Open Coding

| Content | Notes | Codes | Themes |
|--|---|---------------------------|---------------------|
| Interview Question: How has is shaped your fathering behaviors to be raised without a father? | Commitment to be better than my father. | Compensatory father | Ideal Dad |
| IM: Umm tremendously. I made a commitment to myself to be better than my father. So many times, in what I feel like in the Black or African- American community. Umm we are taught to be tough on our boys and not display love because it is a weak emotion. I kiss on my son, I hug him. You know and I made the decision way before I decided to have kids to be a great father and I got practice being a great uncle. Umm because my sister’s kids father is in the penitentiary. So, I’ve been their stand in dad forever and a day so when I had my own kids I made sure that anything that hurt me in the past, I would not allow my son and now my daughter to face those same pains. | Show Affection to boys Affection is okay | Love/Affection/Compassion | Warm/Responsiveness |
| | Be better for my own kids | Compensatory father | Ideal Dad |
| | Be better than my father | Compensatory father | Ideal Dad |
| | Not hurt my kids like I was hurt | Compensatory father | Ideal Dad |

Axial coding. The second step was axial coding, which is the process of reassembling the codes into groups based on similarities, and connections that

emerged within and the data that may have been separated during the initial coding process. (Starks & Trinidad, 2007, Strauss & Corbin 1998). The researcher organized the open codes from Step 1 in a coding chart and grouped similar codes by color coding them. This helped to reduce the number of initial codes, and to relabel data, concepts, and categories (Saldaña, 2009).

Selective coding. Selective coding was the next and final step in the analytic procedure. Corbin and Strauss (1990) stated that selective coding is the process by which all categories are combined around a “core” category based on their similarities. These categories represent the dominant phenomena that emerged in the study. These dominant phenomena are conceptualized into themes based on their exploratory power and conceptual density (Strauss & Corbn, 1998)

The researcher conducted selective coding by searching for the most salient codes, and collapsed similar codes to describe core categories that emerged for the data; these then were conceptualized as themes (Dey, 1999; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Triangulation of data coding. The researcher elicited the help of two coders to implement triangulation through multiple analysts (Patton, 1999). Patton stated that triangulation analysis occurs when two or more researchers are employed to independently analyze the same qualitative data set, and to later compare their findings which provides an important check on selective perception and blind interpretive bias.

This was implemented by the principal researcher assigning portions of discourse to two researchers, (also known as the coding team), from the interview

transcripts for independent analysis. The codes and themes were then discussed and compared as a group to confirm the themes selected by the principal investigator. A comparison of the principal investigator’s findings and the coding team’s findings are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Triangulation of Data Coding

| Discourse | Researcher | PD1 | PD2 |
|--|---|---|---|
| In my- before I had kids, I always knew what type of father I wanted to be. And so, I think I am that father now, but I think I have a lot of room to grow too. But I actually enjoy being a father. I want to give my son everything I didn't have. | <p>Father absence shaped fathering behaviors.</p> <p>Room to grow</p> <p>Enjoy being a dad</p> | <p>Likes being a father.</p> <p>Give him what I didn't have</p> | <p>Being Involved</p> |
| When he is down, I am able to coach him through a lot of stuff he is experiencing in life. I want to always be a listening ear | <p>Encouragement</p> <p>Emotional support</p> <p>Listening ear</p> | <p>Guidance/ Teach/Coach</p> | <p>Guidance</p> <p>Time</p> |

Findings

This section identifies the most salient themes associated with the research question of this study. This section is organized in the following order: the research question, the five most salient themes and underlying subthemes, followed by verbatim discourse from the participants of the study supporting the themes.

The research question from the study was: How do African American fathers raised without their fathers perceive fathering.

Themes

The principal investigator identified four major themes and two subthemes from the research question that included: being present, ideal dad, teaching, and spirituality. The sub-themes included, warmth and responsiveness, restless journey, and interactive engagement.

Theme one: being present as a father. Study participants indicated that much about their perception of being a father was to be present. Being present was a phrase often used by the participants to describe commitment to being involved in their children's lives and what they perceived as the most basic task of fathering that they themselves did not have. The men in this study self-identified as men who were raised without their father, categorizing their own relationship with their fathers as non-existent, distant and/or negative. Much of fathering research lends itself to the idea that men are influenced mostly by their own fathering experiences as children, and that men who have positive and close relationships with their own fathers are more likely to exhibit positive parenting skills with their own children (Floyd &

Morman, 2000; Forste, Bartkowski & Jackson, 2009; Roy, 2006). Other researchers have found that men who have negative relationships with their fathers reconstruct those experiences, exercising their agency, by not replicating their experiences with their own children, also known as the “crossing over” phenomena (Floyd & Morman, 2000; Pleck 1997). Almost all of the 10 participants named being present as what they perceived positive fathering to look like.

AS stated of his perception of fathering, “I think one of my biggest perceptions of fathering would be just being present. I had a conversation with my first boss out of college and that came up, and it really stuck with me about how much about being a man, and being a father is about being present.”

PB stated, “Uh of course, the first thing is you have to be around, be involved. Um, to develop some kind of structure some kind of plan for success for your children to give them the benefit of your knowledge so that they can avoid the things you went through, the negative things, and then I feel like they can avoid the stuff that you went through and they can get a better head-start.”

PS stated, “I think it’s not only being there, because you can be around and not necessarily be present, but like actually giving your full attention to them. Try to make decisions based upon what’s going to best for them as an individual whether that’s you know discipline, but also instilling those lessons inside of them.”

IM2 stated, “Raising the children you made. Being there emotionally, physically, displaying love. Making sure your child understands that it is okay to display love.”

IM stated, “Be there for your kids, teach ‘em better than whatever you learned in life. Show them support. Be with them. Talking to them when you can. It’s kinda hard because I didn’t have that. I had to learn.”

Theme 1: subcategory 1: interactive engagement A subcategory that emerged under the *being present* theme was interactive engagement (Pleck, 2010). Quite a few participants expressed examples of being present included being accessible, teaching, reading, talking, playing, and taking interests in the child’s interests. Participants described a togetherness with their children that was an important action in their fathering.

One of the most repeated constructs of this subtheme was taking interest in the child’s interest. For example, WB stated, “A father does the activities that the children are interested in, not what we want them to do, or what we think they should do. Parenting and fathering does not control or support, so whatever the child is involved in, that’s what we do, their hobbies become ours.”

This same construct was also expressed by IM2, who stated “I think reading and allowing your child to read to you. Playing with them, simple things. I hate cartoons but my son loves cartoons, so I have to sit there and watch cartoons with him. So, finding yourself subject to things you normally wouldn’t be because it brings them joy.”

SB, stated, “Watch cartoons with the kids, even though we don’t like it. And tea parties. I have a girl so I have to do tea parties. I don’t spoil them with materials, I spoil them with my time, not the bad kinda spoiled, but it’s like this is my daddy, this is our time, you know. My little girl likes to dance, but my son doesn’t. So, you’re trying to be in two places at once. So, you learn how to dance. So now I have to keep myself up on the new dances so I can teach her. My little boy, he wants to play Grand Theft Auto. No, you can’t play Grand Theft Auto, but you know, we will find a game we can play together though, so you know, it never stops.”

Fathers emphasized the importance of being actively engaged with their children by means of learning their children’s interest and finding ways to engage in related activities in order to spend time with their children. Active engagement is more than play, it is also reading and dialoging with children. For example, SF stated “We go to Walmart sometimes, and I’ll just be like, Hey, let’s get two of whatever (to play with). And yeah, we’ll go and get toys and stuff. But I also do things- like read together, we’ll play with whatever they got at the house. Uhm, I like to make sure that I have at least 2 or 3 sit down meals with them, where we eat together, just us three-like I have them during the week uhm. So, if that’s like going to a Chic-fil-A or we just make something at the house, I like to make sure that we- we just eat together just kinda to build that love foundation. So those are some of the activities.”

IM stated, “Well my little girl, I taught her about sports. I got her in volleyball, you know that’s not an all man’s sport but it’s a sport. Basketball, I put her in basketball. I’m talking about her running track. I was in track. Like I said, I played basketball. Just tell her you know. You know, another thing about going places. I done took her places I ain’t never been, like Disney World. It was my first experience at Disneyworld. I just try to do the best thing that my father didn’t teach me or whatever.”

Another construct of active engagement is accessibility and intentionality. For example, Ps, stated, “Activity-wise, I feel like definitely visible. So, in whatever it is you child, you know enjoys, I feel like you should just really be there like at least be intentional to learn what that thing is. Even if it’s something you’re interested in. It’s big for them, so um, I feel like whatever the thing that your child is into, definitely that.

Theme 1: subcategory 2: warmth and responsiveness. A second subcategory that emerged under theme Being Present was warmth and responsiveness. Fathers expressed the importance of showing love and affection to the children, in a way that normalized the acts for their children, especially for fathers’ fathering male children. Fathers expressed the importance of changing the perception of showing affection in the African-American community by being intentional in showing affection to their children. For example, IM2, stated:

“I made the commitment to myself to be better than my father. So many times, in what I feel in the black or African-American community umm

we are taught to be tough on our boys and not display love because it is a weak emotion, and I kiss on my son, I love on my son, I hug him, you know. And I made the decision way before I decided to have kids to be a great father and I got practice being a great uncle. Umm because my sister's kids father is in the penitentiary. So, I've been their stand in dad forever and a day, but when I had my own kids, I made sure that anything that hurt me in the past, I would not allow my son and now my daughter to face those same pains."

Participants also expressed the importance of being tender and responding to their children's needs in a way that communicates love. For example, AS, stated:

"I had to go with being firm, but being tender. Some of the advice that I feel like so many other guys who are fathers have given me, and I feel like that I can see it at work even now because I tend to maybe, at least mentally, think about my relationship with my daughter. It's crazy. She's four months, but to be firm about things, but also know that, well, I love her. To remember to just be patient and to hold her, and like to kind of have her close. And, even when she spits up on me, or whatever, to be, like, yeah that sucked, but you just did that, so it's okay. We're going to keep moving from there. Ah, and to kind of laugh about things, and just remember that she has to get the vibe of being loved, not always just the structure, or this and that, but that I care about her because who she is too."

Participants also expressed the importance of responding to their children when they were discouraged, and their response emphasized the importance of encouragement. For example, SF, stated:

“Like when I see- like when my son- He started soccer this past-uh- this past year and when he would get frustrated, I would just make sure, that you know, I would pat him on his back, you know, give him a high-five and I would see him, like, look up at me and smile. And I was just like, ‘Man, like, why are you smiling so hard?’ And I was like, okay, this is kinda making sense. Like, I’m understanding that like he’s literally hanging on every word that I say now. And he- and could see it just over-over the year of him playing, he just got more confident, and more confident. And uh, he did very well. And, I mean, it was a great feeling and a great thing to see, but uhm- I think it just stemmed from me just pumping that confidence into him.”

These fathers gave specific examples of what it looked like to show love and affection to their children in a way that was responsive to their needs and contributed to their growth. The multitude of examples given by these men depicted the exploratory power of this construct in their perceptions of fathering.

Theme 2: ideal dad. In addition to their commitment to being involved in their children’s lives, it appeared that the bigger overarching theme was the participant’s motivation to be the ideal dad that they did not have. Daly (1993) suggested that men who have distant and or conflicted relationships with their own fathers feel they must serve as a role model to their own children to compensate for

the absence of a role model or teacher in their own lives. They opt to do everything differently than their own biological father (Townsend, 2002) as cited in (Guzzo, 2011).

The participants shared how their reflectiveness of their own childhood put in perspective what kind of fathers they wanted to be for their children. For example, PS, stated:

“Really my own experience as well as some trial and error. I mean like I thought about things I missed out on when I was younger. When I was like- I feel like a father should teach their kids how to ride a bike and tie shoes and I don’t have those memories. So, for me, it’s more like I took what I had and what I saw from other people around me and I started to kinda make my own viewpoint per se from that.”

They also stated their perceived importance of being a teacher and mentor for their children because they grew up without one. For example, WB, stated “My perception of fatherhood would be a teacher, to be a leader, to educate. To be a leader for my children, to be an example. That is what I perceive it to be.”

When asked, “How has it shaped your fathering to be raised without a father, WB stated” It made me wanna try to be the best father that I could be. Even though I didn’t really know what it was. Definitely, not do the things my father did to me. Definitely not do those things.”

Theme 2: subcategory 1: restless journey. Participants described their experience as growing up without a father in terms of the sub-theme a “restless

journey”, characterized by sadness and anger and the desire that their own children not have the same experiences.

Fathers expressed their experience of feeling lost and how the absence of fatherly validation sent them down a path that neglected to provide what they were seeking. For example, PS, went on to state:

“So, I think when you don’t have a father present, you kind of feel a sense of inadequacy. Uh, you don’t want to...you don’t want to say that, but it’s there. Like you know, we all want the information from our fathers, but we might not say it, but we really do, and so we don’t have it. You look for it in dang near anything. So, I think when you don’t have that father-whether it’s your own father or even a father figure there, it really makes you topsy-turvy like, you don’t really have a consistent lifestyle honestly. You are all over the place. Lord knows I did enough of that.”

These fathers saw the importance of being a role model, mentor, teacher, and source of guidance for their children in the absence of those exact things in their own childhood. They were able to construct their own perceptions of fatherhood based on the ideal fathers they longed for.

Theme 3: teaching. The fathers shared how teaching was an important part of fathering their children. They often shared that the role of a fatherly teacher was one of the biggest voids in their lives. They expressed how if they had that teacher their lives would have been easier and as a result, they desire to be that teacher for their own children.

IM stated, “Be there for your kids, teach them better than whatever you learned in life. Show them support.” He went on to say, “Teach them to do right. Take the good route, not the bad route. Don’t hang out in the streets, continue to go to school. Do what is right and if you have any problems, go to your father. Ask, should I do this, should I do that?”

PS stated, “I thought about things I missed out on when I was younger. I feel like a father should teach their kids how to ride a bike and tie their shoes. I don’t have those memories.”

GW stated, “Well what part do I play? Teacher, role model. To be the rock. Daddy is always there.”

These men shared how they wanted to impact their children’s lives by being there to teach them and guide them. Something they determined was important by the absence of it in their own lives.

Theme 4: spirituality. The participants shared how their faith molded them as fathers and informs their fathering practices. The fathers spoke of the mentorship and role modeling received from church-leaders and clergymen, as well as about their beliefs, morality, spiritual disciplines, and how it guides their fathering practices.

IM2 stated, “Umm, depending who you are your answer will be different, for me It’s to love God first, and my son being the oldest, always protect you sister and always protect your mom. With the things happening now with school shootings, and movie theatre shootings. So, things that need to prepare for, I think that it is my responsibility to make sure that they are as

engaged in cartoons as they are in society issues. And I teach it blindly because my son is three, so instead of having a direct conversation with him about Parkland High School or whatever. When we pray, we talk about safety in prayer, being in daycare and guiding us from one place to another, so that's what I mean when I say I teach them blindly cause we don't have that direct conversation now."

These men shared the perceived importance of teaching them about prioritizing God in their lives and how their faith is an important tool to help them accomplish things in life. For example, SB, stated:

"Ah man, to uh, always dream, aim high, always and don't let reality dim your spirit, don't let your dreams die. Always dream big, aim high and to put God first, always put God first. There is nothing you can do without God. I'm not even the most spiritual person, but I understand that its important. Lead by faith. You know, I always look at- I always try to check to see if it's okay. The answer will come over time. Just keep going. Don't stop, because once you stop, you'll lose yourself. Don't ever get confident."

The participants also stated how the Bible is a source of guidance that informed their fathering. For example, AS stated: "And, then probably just looking at the Bible; looking at what fathers look like, and what you should to, and how you should be grounded, and how you should look to the Lord for guidance in so many-well in every area."

AS, went on to say: “I would say my experiences have taught me that fathering is-it’s a huge responsibility. Um, I don’t know that our culture gives any man-young or old- a great picture of that responsibility. Um, I think you typically have to go, um to the Bible, or to maybe a role model that you know to really grab hold of that. Um, I would also say that it’s a- it’s a really cool gift, um, and that so much of my relationship with my wife has changed having a child now because outside of God, there is no one in the world that loves my daughter more than my wife.”

They also shared the impactful role that clergy men played in shaping them as men and as fathers. For example, WB, stated, when asked who were his role models in life;

“It used to be gangster rappers when I was younger, that didn’t work out well (laughs). I didn’t have anybody to look up to really, I never did until. I’m 41 and until I got into my mid 30’s and realized that I needed a mentor, I never did have or look up to anyone, you know. I always has God on my side, I believed God was here with me. Until I was 35 I had a couple of mentors. Umm, So, I didn’t have any role model as a kid. There was none there, that is how I grew up, you know.”

WB stated, when asked to describe a time when they were most helpful or impactful: “Yeah umm the first one that I had was my pastor, and he umm, he actually mentored me. I am not gonna say his name but he is a pretty prevalent pastor in the Texas area, and he mentored me right before I turned 36 and everything changed for me. He helped me to look at self and

stop looking at what everything else did to me growing up. Why this, why I was here, why is that. You know start focusing in on myself and those beautiful children that I can put so much energy into. So that mentor, he was a man of God and really anointed. He changed my life.”

AS also stated when asked who were his role models in life, “I know a big role model would be the senior pastor at the church I grew up in. I don’t know anyone who has said anything bad about him. Because he is my Godfather, and because of our talks, and stuff, and getting to see how, like he lives, he’s a huge role model. And, just the- you know, talk about, like being consistent; being faithful; being um; just a man a Godly man.”

Participants also stated how their faith informs their activities with their children. For example, PS, stated, “I taught him how to pray, because we’re pretty cool. He doesn’t want to do it much now. I pray and he puts his hands together, and he is always going to say amen. That’d be the only part he does say, but he got that much down.”

When asked who were his role models in life, Ps stated; “I have a couple different ones. Probably the first guys that really come and discipline me were big, huge impacts on my life. So, that one guy was a friend I met at FCA camp. He was the first person I literally- tell me straight up about myself, and he opened up a Bible to me and just blew my mind with that. Umm a Reverend who has mentored me for years and he kinda stepped in like a father. It was really-he came to me when I was

doing some things I shouldn't of been doing and really gave it a firm presence that I needed.”

Researcher Reflections

The responses of the participants were moving, and I was surprised by their candidness, especially in sharing their raw emotions around desiring a father and how it affected their childhood and adolescence.

I was also surprised that these men were very in touch with their emotions and detailed why showing affection to their children is important and how they do so. These responses were much different than the gendered responses we expect for men, like the importance of being a disciplinarian and provider. Although those were some of the responses I received, but being that warmth and responsiveness was more salient than both of those more traditional male roles was eye opening. These responses showed me a much softer and vulnerable side of black men that society is often blind to. It was emotionally moving for me.

The use of field notes allowed me to process my thoughts and emotions throughout the interview process. This was important to allow me to maintain an unbiased position. I also relied on my therapeutic skills to maintain a therapist stance, in the way of being empathetic, but not over-identifying or countertransferring my experiences onto the participant. I also used bracketing by discussing findings, thoughts, and reactions with my chair.

The nature of this topic was a heavy one because of its focus on race and the current racial climate in our society. I also relied on counseling services provided by

the university to process thoughts, emotions, reactions, and experiences to maintain healthy boundaries and unbiased nature throughout the study process.

Summary

This chapter summarized the data collection procedures of this phenomenological study. The research question, “How do African American men raised without fathers, perceive fatherhood?” yielded four themes including: being present, ideal dad, teaching, and spirituality. It also yielded the sub-themes, warm and responsiveness, interactive engagement, and restless journey. Chapter V will include an in-depth description of the themes and subthemes sought to capture the essence of the perception of fatherhood of these fatherless fathers.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

This phenomenological study was conducted with 10 semi-structured interviews of fathers who were raised fatherless. The purpose of the study was to explore the perceptions and seek answers to a single research question:

How do African American fathers raised fatherless perceive fatherhood?

The researcher sought to understand how these participants perceived fatherhood in the absence of their biological fathers, as serving as role models.

A theoretical framework for this study focused on role theory (Turner, 1990) and fathering. Role making is the most relevant theoretical concept, when investigating fathering in role theory terms. Role making is the process of a social actor actively making up their own roles without norms and criteria as he progresses through his life (Turner, 1990). This theory was important to the study of fatherless fathers' perceptions of fatherhood due to the idea that fathers learn to father from their own fathers who serve as a role model for fathering behaviors.

Based upon Saldaña's (2009) work in finding themes in data, the Open, Axial, and Selective coding methods were used. Desantis and Ugarriza (2000) stated that a theme is an abstract entity that brings nuance, essence, insight, meaning, and understanding to repeated experiences or important phenomena manifestations as they relate to the research question. "A theme captures and unifies the nature or basis of the experience into a meaningful whole" (Saldaña, 2009, p. 362). According to

Van Manen (1990), themes serve phenomenology in the way of studying life and world as we immediately experience instead of how we conceptualize, categorize or reflect on it. “Themes are interpretative, insightful discoveries-written attempts to get at the ‘notions’ of data to make sense of them and give them shape” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 9).

In the current study, a total of four main themes and subthemes were found: (1) Being Present; Subtheme 1: Interactive Engagement; Subtheme 2: Warmth and Responsiveness; (2) Ideal Dad; Subtheme 3: Restless Journey; (3) Teaching; and (4) Spirituality.

This final chapter will provide a discussion of themes and subthemes and how they relate to the theoretical framework and relevant literature. In addition, this final chapter will present implications for future research, implications for family therapists, a summary of the study, limitations of the study, researcher reflections, and chapter summary.

Discussion of Theoretical Framework Related Literature and Themes

The theoretical framework provided ample support for the outcomes that emerged from the research question through mining the data for codes, categories, and subsequently, themes. Each major theme will be presented below in order to clearly gain a deeper understanding of the meaning of fatherhood as expressed by these participants. The following is a discussion of how those themes are related to the literature as well as the theoretical framework discussed in role theory (Turner, 1990), which theorizes that fathers learn to father from their own fathers who serve as

a role model for fathering behaviors. The findings in the study amplified the literature, because it appeared that these men created their own fathering identity and roles by negotiating them based on experiences with social fathers and cultural norms, as suggested by LaRossa and Reites (1993).

Each major theme will be presented below in order to clearly gain a deeper understanding of the meaning of being raised without a father as expressed by thick and rich descriptions of the participants' lived experiences (Van Manen, 1990).

Theme 1: Being Present

Being present was the most salient theme in the research findings. These fathers expressed how important it was to them to be present in their children's lives, declaring it as the single most meaningful and basic task of fathering. The phrase was used repeatedly, but each time it was expressed, it was just as powerful as the first. These men spoke from a place of devotion, commitment, and raw passion about the importance of being there, a term they used interchangeably with positive fathering.

These fathers described the task of being present in terms of being available and active with their children, what the literature conceptualizes as interactive engagement, a salient subtheme in this study's findings (Pleck, 2010).

Subtheme 1: interactive engagement. Pleck (2010) described interactive engagement as parent's direct interaction with their children that illustrates accessibility, care taking, shared interests, and positive engagement activities that shape the child's development. These activities may include, reading, talking with, and sharing the interests of their children. The activities described by the fathers in

this study aligns with what the research describes in terms of father engagement and involvement (Pleck, 2010), and was a subtheme that emerged in this study. This was a substantial finding, based on the theoretical framework of this study that suggests that fathers learn to father from their fathers (Guzzo, 2011). Role theory (Biddle, 1986) and social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) conceptualize intergenerational transmission in terms of modeling which highlights the link between modeling and fathering behaviors. Researchers postulate that without the direct role modeling of the father's biological father, they will struggle with role identity as a father, or even deem the role insignificant if they feel they turned out fine without their father (Bryant & Zimmerman, 2003; Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1994; Guzzo, 2011; Hetherington & Stanley Hagan, 1997). Findings in this study suggest that these fathers' fathering identity and role salience were not directly determined by the role modeling of their biological fathers. The idea of being present for many of the fathers was a juxtaposition of their father's absence, and their very conscious determination to father their children better than they were fathered. Contrary to the depictions of the literature, these men did not struggle with a fathering role identity, due to the absence of their fathers. Instead they created a schema of the ideal dad fashioned on what they desired from their own dads. These men were not only committed to fathering but expressed the importance of being warm and responsive to their children, a sub theme that emerged in the research findings.

Subtheme 2: warmth and responsiveness. Warmth and Responsiveness was a subtheme that emerged as these fathers expressed what it looked like to be present

for their children. What these men seemed to categorize as a positive fathering behavior appeared to be motivated by the juxtaposition of their father's negative examples of fathering. This could be explained by the compensatory hypothesis (Townsend, 2002), which suggests that men who had negative relationships with their own fathers, use the negative model of a father they received and are determined to be nothing like that father. For example,

IM2 stated, "I made the commitment to be better than my father...and I kiss on my son, I love on my son. I hug him... I made the decision way before I had kids to be a great father. I made sure that anything that hurt me in my past I would not allow my son and daughter to face those same pains." Murray and Hwang (2015) found that the married fathers they interviewed placed the same emphasis on being physically and emotionally present for their kids. Eight the six they interviewed described their relationship with their fathers as distant or conflicted. These behaviors seemed to be a part of the bigger schema of what an ideal dad looks like, which was another prominent theme that appeared in the findings.

Theme 2: Ideal Dad

The theme Ideal Dad was also a salient theme that emerged from this study. Out of the ten men, nine expressed the importance of fathering better than they were fathered. When asked how their fathering was shaped by the absence of their own fathers, many of them shared the drive to be everything they wanted in a father but did not have. As stated above, this is contradictory to the idea that specifies fathers as role models that model behavior that determines positive parenting behaviors in their

sons (Hetherington & Stanley Hagan, 1997). Instead, it appeared that these men fashioned their fathering roles from their own fathering ideals, and possibly from what LaRossa and Reitzes (1993) stated as behaviors influenced by shared norms across culture. This phenomenon could be explained by the Compensatory Hypothesis (Townsend, 2002), which suggests that men who themselves were raised in the absence of their father, aspire to do everything differently than their own father by acquiring positive fathering behaviors from experiences with social fathers and or father-figures that are distinctively different than their biological father experiences (Guzzo, 2011). These men stated over and over that they desired to give their children the relationship and experiences they did not have as sons.

As stated in the literature review, Stryker and Burke (2000) posited that identities are the result of an individual finding themselves within social categories and negotiating the associated behaviors. Several of the fathers stated that their schemas for fathering came from watching other men in their neighborhoods as well as fathers depicted on television. The two that were often or routinely named were Cliff Huxtable from *The Cosby Show* and Uncle Phil from *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*, two black fatherly exemplars widely revered in black culture.

Subtheme 3: restless journey. A coinciding subtheme that emerged was the participants' experience of father absence being characterized by feelings of being lost and without support, conceptualized here as a Restless Journey. When asked how it felt to be raised without a father, participants often expressed feelings of regretful loss, pain, and directionless. Many expressing that they desired someone they could

go to for advice, or by conveying how having a father could have been the influence they needed to inspire them and teach them to make better life choices. Several fathers shared that they struggled either with authority figures or found themselves in pubescent mischief that they associated with the absence of the male leadership and guidance provided by a father. Research states that when African-American youth do not have the role of a father being fulfilled in their lives that they are at more risk to face exposure to drugs, early sex, violence, poverty, gang activity, and incarceration among other negative outcomes (Mandara & Murray, 2006).

Although this was only the shared experience of a third of the participants in this study, a large portion shared how their own restless journey, inspired them to be the teachers or role models for their own children. This phenomenon may also be explained by the compensatory hypothesis presented above, which is the idea of compensating for their biological father's mistakes, and short comings (Guzzo, 2011). Daly (1993) stated that as a result fathers may feel the need to be the role models to their own children in a response to the absence of a fatherly role model of their own. This aligns with next salient theme that emerged from the study, which was these father's perceptions of the importance of teaching their children.

Theme 3: Teaching

Teaching was another pronounced theme that emerged while combing the data for patterns and themes. This perception for most fathers appeared to be motivated by not wanting their children to have the unfortunate experience of going through life without the support and direction of a father, and the aimlessness that comes with it.

The participant fathers often made statements such as: “A father should teach his kids everything he knows to protect them from pitfalls and bad decisions. I learned that first hand. Always take advantage of teachable moments.” (PB)

As mentioned in the literature review, identity theory suggests that the roles and behaviors of an individual, emerge from the meaning individuals give to social interactions, people, positions, and the expectations attached to such positions (Stryker, 2002). It is the idea that identities are self-meanings that are merged into role expectations and are associated with cultural or structural social norms that are then reflected in behaviors. Men who had a distant relationship with their father, derive ideas of positive fathering behaviors from experiences they had with social fathers or father figures, specifically the need to act as role models and teachers to their own children (Cabrera, Ryan, Mitchell, Shannon, & Tamis-LeMonda, 2008; Daly, 1993).

Some of the fathers shared that they were able to make meaning of the absence of their fathers, as well as the social norms of fathering that they observed from social fathers, father figures, or media fathers, to construct their own fathering identities. Stryker and Burke (2000) stated that role salience is the most important component that motivates behavior. Role salience is the idea that the more an individual identifies with a role, the more likely they are to adapt to the positive expectations of that role (Burke & Reitzes, 1999).

It appears that these men may have taken on a sense of duty to be the teacher, an advice-giving father figure to their children. They inductively conceptualized

teaching as positive father attributes from the meanings they made of their own experiences, as well as the examples they observed. This correlates with the next theme that emerged from the study which was how spirituality and religion informed their fathering perceptions and behaviors.

Theme 4: Spirituality

The last theme that emerged here was spirituality. These men shared how their faith and beliefs shaped their fathering behaviors. Several of them shared how scripture was a guiding influence for them. For example, AS stated, “I look to the Bible to see what a father looks like, what I should do, how I should be grounded and how to look to God for guidance”. In addition, the mentorship and support received from church leaders and clergy were important and supportive influences for them.

They shared the importance of teaching their children to keep God first and the importance of prayer in their one-on-one time with their children. Although the literature reviewed in this study did not highlight spirituality as a component of fathering perceptions and identity, considering the history of the role of the church as a source of support in African-American culture may substantiate these findings. In the face of marginalization, oppression, and despair, the church has provided African-Americans with a space for catharsis, and maybe most importantly here, a reflective point to making meaning of their struggles.

Summary of the Study

In summary, the findings of this study included the following themes and subthemes: Themes (1) Being Present, (2) Ideal Dad, (3) Teaching and (4)

Spirituality. Subthemes were (1) Interactive Engagement, (2) Warmth and Responsiveness, (3) Restless Journey. Role theory and Identity theory served as theoretical guides for this study. The principal investigator employed a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of these fathers without bias.

Recommendations for Future Research

Additional qualitative research that includes fatherless fathers of all ages, income levels, and education backgrounds could be conducted. The benefit of widening the inclusion criteria could provide researchers with richer data about the similarities and differences of the participants experiences and perceptions of fatherhood. This could give researchers a deeper look in how men from different backgrounds construct their father roles. Also, including a demographic question about what the participant's social and economic status as children could also be beneficial to understanding the experiences of these men. It may also be beneficial to include men who experienced father absence for other reasons, including death, and military deployment to see if they constructed their fathering identity similarly to men who experienced father absence due to reasons mentioned in this study. Men in this study named their fathers' absence as motivating factors to be better dads. Lastly, another recommendation for future research would be to include mothers who were raised without their fathers. This would allow researchers to explore father absence effected their mothering and how mothers with similar experiences perceive their mothering roles and identity.

Implications for Family Therapists

Based on this research of African-American fathers raised fatherless, the following are recommendations for family therapists:

1. One major implication of this study is that family therapists should assume that fatherless fathers have strengths, and in their work with them it is important to highlight and emphasize them.
2. Another major implication of this study is the need for cultural competence of family therapists. The men in this study have very specific experiences that are different from the majority of men in our society. Many of them shared the experiences of being raised poor and fatherless in addition to their everyday experiences as black men in America. To ensure that the counseling relationship is beneficial to a client of this experience and avoid maleficence, the therapist must be culturally competent.
3. A third implication is to better understand the identity development of African-American fathers, to capitalize on their insight for future generations, and to appropriately intervene in the family process
4. The fourth and final implication is to advocate for African-American fathers and helping to support and affirm the important role they play in fathering their children.

Implications for Family Life Educators

1. To aid in effectively supporting the father and to validate their experience, it is important that family life educators be knowledgeable about what other men of this experience have shared about fathering.
2. Also, it is important that family life educators be aware of community resources that would be appropriate and available to these men thrive as strong fathers.

Limitations and Disadvantages

. Qualitative methodology seeks to allow the researcher to understand the participants' perceptions in a structured context, but it does not come without limitations and disadvantages. Several limitations existed throughout the course of this study that were beyond the researcher's control. These limitations are presented below.

Limitations

1. The researcher utilized a semi-structured interview guide that consisted of an interview protocol with open-ended questions. (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). Some of the participants may have responded better to a conversational interview technique, which would have allowed for participants to share their experiences without being limited to interview questions (Marshall & Rossman, 2014).
2. The researcher allowed the participant to pick locations that were public and provided the necessary privacy for confidentiality, but most locations were

public and did not always provide a quiet setting without distractions. For a study of this nature, having a semi-private location to control for those things would be ideal.

3. There was also a lack of diversity in the father's accounts. There were no participants that reported that they were inactive in their own children's lives. Finding participants willing to share this experience, considering that father absence is deemed socially unfavorable, may be unlikely.
4. The inclusion criteria of the study consisted of the participant's perception of their own father's involvement. The definition of involvement is subjective, as well as the participant's perception of their father's involvement. Because of this, it is harder to draw concrete conclusions from the findings.

Disadvantages

1. There were a small number of participants that took part in the study which omits the generalizability of study's findings.
2. Replicating the results of this study may be very difficult due to the variability of research bias and the possible presence of informational bias.

Strengths of the Study

There were several strengths of this study. This study provided an opportunity for black fatherless fathers to have their voices heard, and the data collected was all based on human experiences. The interview process allowed for these men to sincerely share their experiences in an open-ended process that allowed for vulnerability and transparency, a method that sought to be scrupulous in technique.

The design of the study allowed for not only creativity, but the space for the participants to share their experiences without attempting to forcefully fit them into fathering constructs that have been widely and often inappropriately used in terms of Black fathering.

This study allowed for a more in depth look into human behavior and the lived experiences of these participants, because the researcher had the privilege of sitting and interacting with participants in interviews that allowed them to share their stories in an intimate, one-on-one meeting.

The themes found in this study will help the principal investigator in her future family therapy work with men of this experience. To understand how their experiences mold their own identities and behaviors will help to form hypothesis that may help the clinician meet the client in their experience.

Also, the findings of this study may help to change the narrative of past and present research that depicts a very negative impression of the black father. This study allowed the strength, resiliency, and determination of black fathers to be highlighted.

Reflections of Researcher

I am grateful to the men that took the time to be a part of my study. I know that it was not an easy to task to speak with a stranger about such a vulnerable experience in their lives, but these men courageously shared their experiences with no hesitation. Many of them expressed that they felt it was important to be a part of my study, because they understood the need for men of their experience to have a voice.

They went on to say that society wants people to believe that committed involved Black fathers do not exist, and by doing this study it would prove otherwise.

These men spoke from such conviction that fatherlessness in this generation was not acceptable, and that they were not only doing what they could to eradicate it in their own families, but by also holding those they knew accountable. After each interview, I was so inspired by each of their stories, and moved by the undying love they expressed for their children. It made me so proud to be in the presence of men so powerful and determined to raise their children as best they could. After each interview, I took the time to praise each father for his efforts, and to tell him how proud I was of him, because I know that in a world where African American men are targeted and disenfranchised, they needed to hear it. To see the gratitude on their faces will be a lasting imprint on my life. In a world where Black men are told they should be stoic and detached, I was emotionally moved to hear them express love and compassion, deep self-realizations, and insights from their life experiences, having taken what many of them expressed as painful childhood experiences and fashion a much different experience for their own children.

As a part of the interview protocol, I asked the fathers how it felt to be raised without a father. Some shared they felt lost and directionless, and others shared feelings of pain, anger, and unworthiness, while one participant expressed it felt normal because no one around him had a father present either. I found myself identifying with most of their answers. As a girl who grew up in house with no father figure present, I could relate to each of them, because I shared their pain, but also, I

identified with using that same pain as a source for triumph. Every interview re-emphasized for me the importance of this work, and reframing that often pain is for the purpose of authoring a better future for you and those like you.

Reflexivity is the process of examining personal experiences and preconceptions in an attempt to control prejudices and biases. Daly (2007) stated that writing is a form of reflexivity that allows the researcher to think through ideas and is a way of expanding inner thoughts and engaging in the process of discovery. I did this by journaling random thoughts, emotions, responses, and insights that emerged throughout the process. This helped me process my own biases about what fatherlessness looked like and how it affected men. It also allowed me to reflect on emotions that arose during the process. To hear accounts from men who experienced similar life events as I did, reflexivity was necessary to protect the objectivity of the researcher and possible distortion of the data. Lynch (2000) stated that reflexivity should be at the heart of qualitative inquiry because the researcher is engaged in a process of interpretation of data in all stages of inquiry that involves their own life experiences and social position.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of fatherhood among a group of African American fathers who were raised fatherless. Role theory was the lens in which the researcher sought to view the experiences of these fathers. This chapter included an overview of the results of the study, strengths, limitations and disadvantages, implications for family therapists and implications for

future research. This study produced data on a population that has been overlooked in research studies according to (Pasley, Petren, & Fish, 2014). This study gave African American fathers the opportunity for their voices to be heard about their experiences as both fathers and men who were raised without fathers.

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Appendix A “Are you a
Father” Flyer

YOU CAN BE A PART OF A DISSERTATION RESEARCH STUDY OF BLACK FATHERS



ARE YOU?

A FATHER?

AFRICAN AMERICAN?

**Between the ages of 25-45 years old?
Were you raised without your father?**

IF SO, I WOULD LIKE TO HEAR ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE. OUR CONVERSATION WILL TAKE 90 MINUTES. PLEASE CALL OR EMAIL ME SO I CAN TELL YOU MORE.

JADE HUNTER, LPC (817)966-6266 JHUNTER@TWU.EDU

BENEFIT: \$20 VISA GIFT CARD

**PARTICIPATION IS VOLUNTARY, YOU MAY WITHDRAW AT ANYTIME
NOTE: THERE IS A POTENTIAL RISK OF LOSS OF CONFIDENTIALITY IN ALL EMAIL, DOWNLOADING, ELECTRONIC MEETINGS AND INTERNET TRANSACTIONS**

Appendix B
Consent Form

TEXAS WOMAN'S UNIVERSITY
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Title: The Perceptions of Fatherhood Amongst African American Fathers Raised Fatherless

Investigator: Jade Hunter, LPC jhunter4@twu.edu (817)966-6266

Advisor: Dr. Karen Petty..... kpetty@twu.edu (940)898-2698

Explanation and Purpose of Research

You are being asked to participate in a research study for Jade Hunter's dissertation at Texas Woman's University. The purpose of this research is to examine the perceptions of fatherhood among a sample of African American fathers between the ages of 25-45, who were raised without their fathers. This study will examine how experiences shape the perceptions of a father's roles. Questions will be asked that pertain to fatherhood and fatherhood perceptions. Please feel free to share your experiences about being raised as a fatherless child as well as your reality as a father now.

Research Procedures

The principal investigator will review the consent form with participants before requesting the participant to sign it. The principal investigator will conduct face-to face interviews with African American fathers. The interviews will be audiotaped for accurate transcription purposes. The interviews will take place in a private location that will be agreed on between the investigator and the participant. Your maximum total time commitment in the study is approximately 90 minutes. You will be compensated for your time with a \$20 Visa Gift Card.

Potential Risks

You will be assigned a pseudonym rather than using your real name for anonymity purposes, which will be used throughout the interview; only the researcher will know your real

Participant Initials _____ Page 1 of 3

name. The audiotapes obtained from these interviews are the sole property of the principal investigator, parts of the transcribed interview will be reviewed by three other individuals on the research team, but all information will be de-identified. The audiotapes, hard copies of transcriptions, and flash drives containing the transcription text files will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the investigator's home. Only the researcher will hear the tapes but field notes (the researcher's personal notes) will be shared with her advisor. The tapes, the field notes, transcriptions and flash drives will be shredded within 5 years after the study is finished. The results of the study will be reported in scientific magazines or journals but your name or any other identifying information will not be included. There is a potential risk of loss of confidentiality in all email, downloading, electronic meetings and internet transactions, but your confidentiality will be protected to the extent that is allowed by law.

The researchers will try to prevent any problem that could happen because of this research. You should let the researchers know at once if there is a problem and they will help you. However, TWU does not provide medical services or financial assistance for injuries that might happen because you are taking part in this research.

There are potential risks related to your participation in this study including loss of confidentiality and anonymity. Confidentiality of each participant will be protected to the extent of the law. All information and data obtained in this study will be de-identified and nothing containing any identifying information will be used in publication.

Other potential risks related to research participation include emotional discomfort or distress. Discussing past childhood experiences can bring up trauma or unresolved feelings that may cause distress, if at any time, you feel discomfort during an interview; you have the right to withdraw from the study without reason or explanation. If at any time, you are experiencing

fatigue you may request a break at any time. The principal investigator will provide participants with a social services referral list in case the participant needs the following services: professional counseling, employment, appropriate housing, parenting classes or services at Fathers for Equal Rights Organization.

Participation and Benefits

Your involvement in this study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time. If you would like to know the results of this study we will mail them to you.

Questions Regarding the Study

You will be given a copy of this signed and dated consent form to keep. If you have any questions about the research study you should ask the researchers; their phone numbers are at the top of this form. If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this research or the way this study has been conducted, you may contact the Texas Woman's University Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at 940-898-3378 or via e-mail at IRB@twu.edu.

Signature of Participant

Date

If you would like to know the results of this study tell us where you want them to be sent:

Email: _____

or

Address:

Participant Initials _____ Page 3 of 3

Appendix C
Interview Guide

Semi-structured Interview questions

To assist me in my research it would helpful to know your demographic characteristics. Your responses are completely voluntary.

Demographic information:

1. What year were you born?
2. Do you earn more or less than: 25K a year, 50k a year, 100k a year?
3. Are you a residential or non-residential father? Do you live in or outside of the home of child?

Opening Questions

1. How would you describe your father's involvement when you were a child? (absent, involved, deceased, etc.)
2. What are your perceptions of fathering?
 - a. Follow-up: What does positive fathering look like? Or what does negative fathering look like? How did you come to that conclusion?
3. What kind of activities does a father do?
4. How did it feel to be raised without a father?
5. How has it shaped your fathering behaviors to be raised without a father?
6. With everything you've experienced, what is fathering to you?
7. What part do you think you play when it comes to parenting your children?
8. What should a father teach his children?
 - a. Follow-up: Is that any different than what you've taught your children? Hmm, Tell me more? What are somethings you've taught your children?
9. Who were your role models in life?
10. Describe a time when they were most helpful or impactful?
11. Was there anyone outside that role model or a source to teach you to be a dad?
 - a. For example, in music, television, sports, your neighborhood, pop-culture, etc.
12. How are you fathering any different than you were fathered?
13. Is there anything else you can tell me about your perceptions of fathering.

Appendix D Social

Service List

Social Services Referral List

Fathers for Equal Rights (Legal help with custody, child support etc.)

Fort Worth Chapter
1500 N. Main
Suite 120
Ft. Worth, Texas 76164
Tel: (817) 870-4880

Dallas Chapter (Downtown)
701 Commerce Street
Suite 302
Dallas, Texas 75202
Tel: (214) 953-2233

The Lena Pope Home (Family and Individual Counseling)

Free / Sliding Fee
Fort Worth: 817-255-2652
3200 Sanguinet Street, Fort Worth, Texas 76107

Hurst: 817-255-2652
625 Grapevine Highway, Hurst, Texas 76054
(located at the Alliance for Children Center, next to the sub-courthouse building)

ACH Child and Family Counseling (Family and Individual Counseling)

Free/ Sliding Fee
3712 Wichita St, Fort Worth, TX 76119
(817)335-4673

Jewish Family Services (Family and Individual Counseling)

Sliding Fee
5402 Arapaho Rd, Dallas, TX 7524
(972)437-9950

UT Southwestern Family Studies Center (Individual, Couples and Family Counseling)

Sliding Scale
Paul M. Bass Administrative and Clinical Center
6363 Forest Park Road
Tower 2, 7th Floor, Suite 722
Dallas, Texas 75390-9121
214-645-8300

Child and Family Guidance Center (Individual and Family counseling)

Free/ Sliding Scale
8915 Harry Hines Blvd.
Dallas TX 75235
214-351-3490
1-866-695-3794

Additional Resources:

AAMFT therapist locator

https://www.aamft.org/iMIS15/AAMFT/Content/directories/locator_terms_of_use.aspx

APA therapist locator

<http://locator.apa.org>