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Exploring Parenting Influences: Married African American Fathers' Perspectives

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Abstract

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Keywords

African American Fathers, Black Fathers, Fatherhood, Parenting Influences, Phenomenology, Resident Fathers

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This qualitative study sought to understand married, resident African American fathers' perceptions about parenting influences. Specifically, this study explored fathers' perceptions about sources and/or experiences that informed their approaches and attitudes about parenting. Social learning theory, the modeling and compensation hypothesis, as well as literature on the intergenerational transmission of parenting served as theoretical frameworks. Eight fathers participated in semi-structured interviews. One main theme and four subthemes emerged from the data. Findings indicated that a number of influences including but not limited to experiences from their family of origin informed current parenting approaches and attitudes. Keywords: African American Fathers, Black Fathers, Fatherhood, Parenting Influences, Phenomenology, Resident Fathers

Literature on parenting influences indicated that experiences from the family of origin (Belsky, 1984; Van Ijzendoorn, 1992) as well as formal and informal sources (Cramer, 2016; Radey, & Randolph, 2009) impact parental attitudes, areas of knowledge, and behaviors. Additionally, male children's experiences with their fathers contribute to men's attitudes about fathering, feelings of effectiveness in the role, and the desire to fulfill the father role (Doherty, Kouneski, & Erickson, 1998). Researchers further argued that men's interactions with their own children are shaped by their childhood experiences with their fathers (Pleck, 1997; Shears, Summers, Boller, & Barclay-McLaughlin, 2006). These patterns suggest that children may learn behaviors through direct observation of family members (Bandura, 1977) and their future behaviors may be shaped by these experiences (Pleck, 1997). Moreover, fathers may attempt to imitate experiences they label as positive or work to create different experiences for their offspring that does not mirror the type of parenting fathers received in their families of origin (Pleck, 1997). Scholars further indicated that men who do not view their fathers as positive role models sought to remake their own fathering experiences and attempted to become better role models for their own children (Daly, 1993; Floyd & Morman, 2000; Lamb, 2010).

Past research indicated that parents receive information and advice about childrearing from formal and informal sources (Cramer, 2016; Radey & Randolph, 2009; Taylor, McKasson, Hoy, & Dejong, 2017). Parents are influenced by nonprofessional, professional, and media sources (Radey & Randolph, 2009). Nonprofessional sources include family, friends, and peer parents (Akister & Johnson, 2004; Ateah, 2003; Schultz & Vaughn, 1999; Smith, Tandon, Bair-Merritt, & Hanson, 2015). Professional sources include persons such as pediatricians, religious leaders, and mental health professionals (Smith et al., 2015; Taylor et al., 2017; Taylor, Moeller, Hamvas, & Rice, 2013). Print media such as books, magazines, and newspapers as well as the internet were found to serve as sources of information and advice for parents (Radey & Randolph, 2009).

While parents and children of color are an increasingly growing segment of American society, current parenting literature is dominated by mother-child research mostly from two-parent, white families (Cabrera, Hofferth, & Chae, 2011). Concurrently, literature examining fathering behaviors and involvement with residential fathers is emerging; yet, much of the research on the lived experiences of fathers has focused primarily on issues related to non-residential fathers (Bronte-Tinkew & Horowitz, 2010; Guzzo, 2009; Hawkins, Amato, & King, 2007). Moreover, researchers suggested that there is little known about parenting knowledge, behaviors, and experiences of African American fathers (Julion, Gross, Barclay-McLaughlin, & Fogg, 2007; Smith et al., 2015), thus, the focus of this study.

In this study, we examined married, resident African American fathers' perceptions about sources and influences on parenting approaches. Using social learning theory (Bandura, 1997, 1986), the modeling and compensation hypotheses (Bandura, 1989; Beaton & Doherty, 2007; Gaunt & Bassi, 2012; Radin & Sagi, 1982), and literature on intergenerational transmission of parenting (Bouchard, 2012; Chen & Kaplan, 2001; Pougnet, Serbin, Stack, Ledingham, & Schwartzman, 2012; Roskam, 2013; Serbin & Karp, 2003) as the guiding frameworks, this study posed the following research question:

What sources and/or experiences inform your approaches to and attitudes about parenting?

Married, Resident African American Fathers

Myriad studies highlight the contributions of African American fathers to the family system, yet, much of this scholarship tends to focus on non-residential, single or never married fathers. Although the scholarship on married, resident African American fathers is from the late 20th and early 21st century the findings from these studies provide descriptions of family systems absent from the literature. Researchers described the multi-layered ways in which married African American fathers contribute to the family system. For example, African American fathers were described as actively engaged in fathering duties within a nuclear family setting in multiple studies (Billingsley, 1992; Cochran, 1997; McAdoo, 1993a, 1993b; Murray & Hwang, 2015). Examples of temporal activities included but were not limited to changing diapers, actively participating in child care, and engaging in play activities with their children (Ahmeduzzaman, & Roopnarine, 1992; Cazenave, 1979; Murray & Hwang, 2015). Another study found that married Black fathers were more involved in child care compared to White fathers (McLoyd, Cauce, Takeuchi, & Wilson, 2000). Specifically, research suggested African American fathers were moral teachers (Coles, 2001; Murray & Hwang, 2015), assisted in decision-making as it related to their children (Roopnarine, 2004), engaged with their children in extracurricular activities (Grief, Hrabowski, & Maton, 1998), and promoted racial socialization (Coles, 2009; McAdoo, 1993a, 1993b). Additionally, studies suggested that African American men were more equalitarian in their views about the division of household labor and child care responsibilities (McAdoo & McAdoo, 1994). These studies also counter other characterizations of the African American father as uninvolved and disengaged (Cooper, Ross, Dues, Golden, & Burnett, 2019).

Family of Origin Influences on Parenting

A variety of frameworks exploring fathers' parenting influences, attitudes, and behaviors feature ecological approaches. Domains such as ontogenic factors, individual factors, and other contextual dimensions (Belsky, 1984; Doherty et al., 1998; Lamb, 2010; Pleck, 1997) were prominent in the literature. Relationships within the family of origin, particularly males' relationships with their fathers, were also critical influences on parenting

beliefs and practices (Cowan & Cowan, 1987; Doherty et al, 1998; Forste, Bartkowski, & Jackson, 2009; Parke, 2000). Three theoretical, conceptual, and research-based frameworks were used to inform this study and further explore parenting influences.

Social Learning Theory

Social learning theory supports the belief that men may learn parenting behaviors and model those behaviors as a result of interactions with their own fathers. These messages, whether negative or positive, are possible contributors to the transmission of parenting practices, views about self-efficacy, and commitment to being an involved father (Shears et al., 2006; Snarey, 1993). Bandura (1977) further suggested that this learning may occur by design or subconsciously because the behavior has become internalized. Yet, individuals are more likely to imitate behaviors of persons they hold in high regard (Bandura, 1986). Thus, social learning theory suggests that the level of closeness between father and child plays a pivotal role in the transmission of parenting practices (Gaunt & Bassi, 2012).

Modeling and Compensation Hypothesis

The modeling and compensation hypotheses have been used to examine the connection between family of origin experiences and later parenting practices or attitudes. The modeling hypothesis suggests that fathers take an active role in their children lives because they learned to do so by observing and imitating behaviors from their own fathers (Gaunt & Bassi, 2012). Furthermore, the modeling hypothesis predicts that fathers with positive family of origin experiences will have stronger attitudes about parenting and father involvement (Beaton & Doherty, 2007; Masciadrelli, Pleck, & Stueve, 2006). Finally, the modeling hypothesis suggests that highly supportive fathering is typical of those whose own fathers were highly available and nurturing (Bandura, 1989; Radin & Sagi, 1982).

The compensation hypothesis posits that fathers with less favorable family of origin experiences, particularly poor relationships with their fathers, have strong attitudes about fatherhood. Fathers attempt to change their childhood experiences through active parenting of their own children (Masciadrelli et al., 2006) and course correcting perceived deficits from their childhood experiences (Barnett & Baruch, 1987; Cowan & Cowan, 1987; Radin & Sagi, 1982). Furthermore, fathers may take a fragmented approach and incorporate different experiences from a variety of sources to develop a paternal identity. One study of father involvement in child care found that high involvement may actually occur as a result of negative childhood experiences (Gaunt & Bassi, 2012). Due to deficits in parenting from the previous generation, fathers become more motivated to work toward positive father-child relationships with their offspring (Gaunt & Bassi, 2012). This concept was further supported in studies of low-income fathers which found that fathers rework their difficult childhood experiences by providing positive experiences for their children (Nelson, Clampet-Lundquist, & Edin, 2002; Roy & Lucas, 2006). Additional research yielded similar support for compensatory practices related to parenting as fathers with emotionally distant parents developed positive attitudes about their parenting (Beaton & Doherty, 2007; Beaton, Doherty, & Rueter, 2003; Snarey, 1993).

Intergenerational Transmission of Parenting

The intergenerational transmission of parenting viewpoint suggests that methods and quality of parenting are transmitted generationally as individuals from one generation approach parenting in a manner similar to their own upbringing (Serbin & Karp, 2003). Researchers

highlighted some pathways between child socialization along with other mediators to later positive and problematic parenting behaviors (Bouchard, 2012; Chen & Kaplan, 2001; Pougnet, Serbin, Stack, Ledingham, & Schwartzman, 2012; Roskam, 2013). For example, young parents tend to use parenting practices similar to those they experienced as children (Gaunt & Bassi, 2012). Much of the research in this area, however, focuses on the influence of mothers (Belsky, Conger, & Capaldi, 2009; Campbell & Gilmore, 2007; Kerr, Capaldi, Pears, & Owens, 2009). Aspects of the research revealed that the quality of father-child relationships and father presence in the child's life were possible correlates of positive father involvement across generations. For example, men who grew up in homes with absent fathers were more likely to also be absent (Furstenburg & Weiss, 2000; Pougnet et al., 2012). Similarly, Hofferth, Pleck, and Vesley (2012) reported that men with positive family of origin relationships, particularly with their fathers, engaged in more responsive parenting with their own children. Although research has indicated repetition of parenting behaviors across generations, very little is known about the experiences of African American fathers in this regard (Brown, Kogan, & Kim, 2017).

Other Sources of Parenting Influences

Qualitative studies regarding parenting sources and influences have included mothers and fathers (Radey & Randolph, 2009; Taylor et al., 2017), fathers in the U.S. Air Force (Lee et al., 2013), as well as expectant and recent fathers (Cramer, 2016). These studies found parents utilized multiple sources to obtain parenting information to better inform their parenting approaches. Sources include: family members, social services agency staff, media sources, and community supports such as religious/faith leaders. Closer analysis of these studies, however, revealed the underrepresentation of fathers (Radey & Randolph, 2009; Taylor et al., 2017). Moreover, African American fathers were either excluded or not clearly noted in sample descriptions. One study, however, examined African American fathers' parenting experiences. Smith and colleagues (2015) used a focus group design with 21 urban African American fathers to explore where fathers gained parenting information. The researchers concluded that African American fathers acquired parenting knowledge from myriad sources including: relatives, community members, health care professionals, the internet, print media, and from previous childrearing experience. Beyond the work of Smith et al. (2015), there are limited current empirical data that examines parenting knowledge and knowledge sources for African American fathers.

Role of the Researchers

Reflexivity and prior experiences of the researcher are critical issues to consider in qualitative studies (Kline, 2008). The first author holds a doctorate degree in Family Studies from Texas Woman's University. Her research areas of interests include barriers to father engagement and involvement, father role perceptions, and fathering experiences of men of color. To date, much of the first author's research has explored father involvement, father role perceptions, and the lived experiences of African American fathers. The first author also holds a Masters of Social Welfare degree and practiced in social work agencies for a number of years with families before transitioning to a career in higher education. As a social worker, the first author's experiences with fathers were challenging due lack of resources and an under appreciate of the overall impact of father involvement on child well-being. Her social work practice experience serves as a critical contributor in her interests in research related to fathers. Moreover, as a married, cis-gender, heterosexual Black woman, she endeavors to highlight experiences of two-parent families as research on the black family and black fathers often

represents non-residential fathers and black families in crisis. The first author acknowledges that her lived experiences with black or African American men informs her interest in exploring their lived experiences. The first author has gained an increased appreciation of the role black fathers have on their children through her co-parenting experiences. It is hoped that this study will add to current literature on married African American men and the black family.

The second author holds a doctorate degree in Child and Family Studies from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. His research areas of interests include financial stress and couple conflict on fathering behaviors and involvement with adolescent children. The second author is also a certified family life educator who designs and delivers preventive family life education programs in the community. Through this community engagement opportunity, the second author gets to listen to rich stories from men who are fathers about their roles and experiences with their children. This unique opportunity further informs the second author ideas about research projects. Finally, the second author is a father himself. As an Asian American immigrant raising a child with my wife, we have experienced some ups and downs in our parenting. This has broadened his perspective to appreciate ethnic minority fathers who share their lived experiences with other fathers and educate professionals who work with fathers.

Methods

In this study, we used phenomenological methods to examine married, resident African American fathers' perceptions about sources of parenting approaches. Phenomenological research describes a certain phenomenon via individual experiences (Patton, 2002); thus, this approach assumes common experiences may create a shared meaning about a particular phenomenon in the larger social context (Patton, 2002). In this instance, the shared phenomenon is parenting in intact families.

Recruitment

We sought approval from the institutional review board from a university in North Texas. After we received approval, we collaborated with community gatekeepers to post flyers at local churches. Additionally, we shared recruitment information electronically via through a local university listserv. We also collaborated with gatekeepers from African American men's civic group and fraternal organization to share information about our study and to distribute flyers during their meetings. Also, the first researcher made brief presentations at membership meetings about the study which included addressing questions from potential participants.

Individuals who were interested in the study contacted the first author via email or telephone. The first author then followed up with each potential participant via telephone to outline all logistics of the study. The first author held telephone conversations with each participant prior to the face-to-face interview. At that time, the researchers reviewed the interview questions; established research eligibility; discussed issues related to the questions; described the interview process including the use of audio recorder and hand-written notes; and highlighted the researchers' ethical obligations. At the conclusion of this telephone meeting, all interested parties were emailed a copy of the informed consent document.

Sample

Eight married, African American fathers were gathered using purposeful sampling and snowball sampling (Creswell, 2009; Patton, 2002). Small purposeful samples allow researchers to understand phenomena in deeper ways (Patton, 2002). Eligibility requirements included self-

identification as an African American, married, biological father, 18 years or older living biological children and their mother who is also his wife. Each participant received a $20 stipend to a superstore for their participation.

All of the participants lived in the Dallas Fort-Worth Metroplex. The average age of the participants was 36 years old. The sample was well-educated as all eight had bachelor's degrees and four had master's degrees. Average family income was over $60k and all participants worked full-time, averaging 50 hours a week. Participants were married an average of six years and most men had at least two children (N=5). Two fathers also had biological children from other relationships and two had step-children. Regarding religious preference, the participants identified as Christian (N = 6), Catholic (N = 1), and spiritual (N = 1).

Data Collection

The researchers used three methods for data collection: (1) email and telephone communication, (2) semi-structured individual interviews, and (3) field notes. Emails or telephone calls were the first point of contact with each participant. The first authors provided recruitment documents including informed consent information was shared electronically. This exchange was followed up with telephone conversation to answer any questions, review documents, and establish interview meetings. Semi-structured interviews were held at a private, mutually agreed upon location and lasted approximately 30-75 minutes. Each interview was audio recorded. A digital recorder and audio-recorder mobile application available through the Microsoft Windows cellular phone platform was used to document the interviews. This program was password protected. Prior to the outset of the interview, participants completed a short, demographic questionnaire. Pseudonyms were chosen by each participant. The first author reviewed informed consent and secured participants' signatures. All interviews were conducted by the first author. Open-ended questions were used for the study. Questions were designed to address perceptions about the transmission of parenting beliefs and practices and current parenting practices. Handwritten notes were recorded during and directly following the interviews. As suggested by Patton (2002), the first author wrote field notes to capture basic information and observations, direct quotations, and the researcher's interpretations and initial analysis. The first author also maintained a reflexive journal as recommended by Carlson (2010). Reflexive journaling allows for researchers to reflect upon the research experience in general as a method to address bias and previously held assumptions. Issues of culture and gender and notions about the research process were captured in the first author's reflexive journaling process.

Validating the Data

Addressing researcher bias in qualitative research is paramount. Carlson (2010) suggested that qualitative researchers use approaches like reflexivity, thick and rich descriptions, and triangulation to establish trustworthiness. Patton (2002) suggested that researcher bias should be addressed using a reflexive process. Specifically, Patton (2002) recommended the use of thick and rich descriptions when reporting research findings and data triangulation. Moreover, Patton (2002) advised that employing a reflexive process encourages the researcher to recognize their own biases and understand the impact of these biases on the research process. Reflexive journaling and field notes were used to capture researcher reactivity to all aspects of the research experiences. Thick and rich descriptions provided details about the setting, participants, data collection, and analysis. Carlson (2010) also suggested that imploring multiple strategies like the aforementioned helps to address issues of trustworthiness. Furthermore, verbatim quotations from participants were used to address trustworthiness.

Different sources collected at different times in multiple settings via diverse methods was optimal for data triangulation (Carlson, 2010; Patton, 2002), thus reducing the risk of systematic bias (Maxwell, 1996). This approach allowed researchers to establish trustworthiness by substantiating the various data with each other (Carlson, 2010). Data for this study met triangulation standards as data was collected via audio-recorded face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews, and electronic communication. Utilizing these methods in qualitative research confirms that data were collected, analyzed, and reported in an ethical manner (Carlson, 2010).

Data Analysis

Data analysis was an ongoing process and occurred simultaneously with data collection. Methods to develop codes and broader themes were informed by Bernard and Ryan (2010). Bernard and Ryan (2010) suggested that theme development develops from the data and prior theoretical knowledge. Information gleaned from the telephone and electronic communication, semi-structured interviews, and field notes informed the coding process. Words and brief phrases that captured fathers' experiences and researchers' prior knowledge acquired from the literature informed the data reduction process (Bernard & Ryan, 2010).

Coding

Thematic coding via observational, manual, and computer-assisted techniques were utilized to identify categories in the data. Bernard and Ryan (2010) suggested 12 techniques suitable for manual and computer-assisted coding via NVIVO 10. Techniques utilized by the researchers were repetition, similarities and differences, as well as cutting and sorting. Each line of the transcriptions was reviewed manually and similar statements were grouped in the preliminary process of theme identification. Statements and concepts that occurred multiple times were noted as potential themes. Researchers also utilized word count techniques available through analysis software NVIVO 10. Additionally, the researchers searched for similarities and differences between statements within the context of the interview questions as a way to compare the data. Cross-over themes were noted. Cutting and sorting as well as gathering direct quotations was performed via computer software NVIVO 10. These manual and computer-assisted coding techniques were applied until data saturation was achieved. Saturation is achieved when additional codes do not emerged from the data (Urquhart, 2013). A similar strategy was used to code field notes and the reflexive journal.

Member Checking

Patton (2002) indicated that trustworthiness describes validation strategies utilized in qualitative research. Trustworthiness is established if findings accurately reflect the perspectives of the research participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To that end, utilizing member checks allows research participants to provide feedback about data interpretation and themes (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). This process occurred at the end of the transcription process. Each participate received verbatim text from their interview along with a list of preliminary themes. Sharing themes with the study participant further enhanced the credibility of the findings to ensure accurate interpretations of the phenomenon (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016).. Four participants clarified statement in the transcript and these changes were accounted for in the data analysis process.

Results

Results from the research question are presented along with one main theme and four subthemes. One main theme, Diverse Influences, emerged. This theme also yielded four subthemes: birth father influence, immediate and extended family influence, other influences, and mirror and/or mimic.

Main Theme: Diverse Influences

The main theme, Diverse Influences, highlights influences from familial and extra-familial relationships on parenting. The theme also addresses aspects of fathers' ability to incorporate learned and new patterns of behaviors in their parenting approaches. Fathers' descriptions of parenting sources were varied but aligned with findings represented in previous scholarship.

Subtheme One: Birth Father Influence

Three of the participants grew up with fathers in the home while five had limited to no contact with their fathers. These experiences informed how these men understood the influence their birth fathers had on them as parents. Men who grow up with fathers in the home attributed some of their current parenting knowledge and practices to their birth fathers' behaviors during their childhood. Participants described their birth fathers as "engaged" (Participant 1), "my mentor" (Participant 5), and "always in my life" (Participant 8). Direct questions like "tell me how you learned to parent" yielded "my father…sometimes I don't realize it but I will catch myself and laugh that I got that straight from pops" (Participant 5). Similarly, Participant 8 stated "my father was my hero and I wanted to be just like him when I grew up."

Subtheme Two: Immediate and Extended Family Influence

Five of the men had minimal contact or strained relationships with their fathers during childhood; thus, these fathers described mothers, immediate and extended family members as parenting influences. For example, Participant 3 described his relationship with his brother who was 10 years older. "I watched him with his family and remember thinking that I wanted to have kids and play ball or help with homework like I saw him do with his kids" (Participant 3). Participant 7 grew up in a home with extended family and his mother and shared, "I had seven uncles so I had no lack of father figures. I grew up relatively close to my grandfather…there was a preponderance of father figures around. Positive and negative and I think I learned a lot from all of them" (Participant 7).

Subtheme 3: Other Relationships

Three of the participants identified other non-related men or men related through marriage as sources of parenting knowledge and behaviors. For example, Participant 2 stated watching his father-in-law's relationship with his daughter (Participant 2's wife) and other children informed his "parenting value system." "My wife tells stories about her dad growing up and I believe he has qualities that I want to emulate" (Participant 2). Participant 4 shared that a male in his neighborhood took interests in kids with fathers absent from the home. He described how this non-related male would impart life lessons and taught him about the father's role in the family. Participant 6 described men in his church as major influencers: "they taught

me to use the Bible as a backdrop; here are some biblical principles we will stick to as a family; this is what works for fathers who are believers."

Subtheme 4: Mirror and/or Mimic

The participants described actively incorporating practices used by their fathers from their childhood or using slightly and/or completely opposite approaches. When asked "do you think you are the same type of parent as your father or different," four participants clearly noted that their approaches mirrored their fathers in that they chose behaviors that were opposite from them. Two participants plainly stated that "I am around". "I am around. My father was not. Even if my marriage doesn't last, it will, but if it doesn't my children will know me. I will be a strong, active presence in their lives always" (Participant 7).

Others described making a concerted effort to parent differently than their fathers.

> I look to my dad's life as he showed me all the wrong decision to make. So everywhere he turned right, I went left. I look at dad who had absentee fathers, they have two choices in life. They either go one extreme and become very good dads…or they say I am never going to be like that man and follow a different path. (Participant 4)

In terms of mimicking behaviors, phrases like "I'm passive with the kids like pop sometimes" (Participant 1), "direct correlation" (Participant 2), and "I took a page from dad" (Participant 6) emerged from the data. One participant indicated that he used approaches from his father in certain situation or modified if needed: "I think it depends on the situation. My dad would sometimes make decisions for me because he was the dad and he knew best. I'm kinda of that way but I will give my kids a range of choices" (Participant 5).

Each participant shared stories about watching how their fathers and other influencers navigated parenting and through life in general. Phrases like "what I saw with my own eyes" (Participant 6), "watching mistakes my brother made" (Participant 3), and "seeing what other men did" (Participant 1) are examples that connect to this subtheme. Additionally, some of the participants' observations of their fathers specifically caused them to critically think, question their own ways of parenting, and decide to make alternative choices. This was the case for a couple of participants who were raised with limited or no involvement from their fathers.

> I looked at my wife and her dad's relationship and it's tumultuous at best. I looked at my sisters' and their relationships with their dads and how that is tumultuous. I looked at how if I didn't do well at this father thing, then I turn my daughters into my sisters and wife, their mother, who don't like their dads. So seeing that big picture, I started to look at the ways that I could be a better dad. (Participant 4)

Discussion

This study examined married, resident African American fathers' perceptions about sources and influences on their parenting approaches and attitudes. Social learning theory, the modeling and compensation hypotheses, and literature on intergenerational transmission of parenting informed this study. Social learning theory suggests that messages received during childhood may impact later parenting practices (Shears et al., 2006; Snarey, 1993). The modeling and compensation hypotheses indicates that individuals either model behavior learned from their family of origin or develop new approaches if they viewed their child rearing

experiences negatively (Beaton & Doherty, 2007; Masciadrelli et al., 2006). The intergenerational transmission of parenting literature suggest that qualities of parenting are passed from one generation to the next with parents uses approaches from their own upbringing (Serbin & Karp, 2003).

This study yielded findings supported by the theoretical frameworks and previous scholarship in this area. The main theme Diverse Influences and four subthemes captured fathers' perceptions about sources and/or influences that inform their attitudes and approaches to parenting. Subtheme one, birth father influence, emerged indicating the power of this interaction on future parenting attitudes and behaviors. Data from this subtheme were supported by the study theoretical frameworks social learning theory and the modeling hypotheses. Participants clearly indicated that their current approaches to parenting were influenced by their experiences with their own fathers. This supports notions advanced from social learning theory which suggests that men learn and model behaviors resulting from childhood interactions with their own fathers (Shears et al., 2006; Snarey, 1993). Additionally, fathers in this study like Participant 5 indicated that some of this learning and subsequent behaviors occurred subconsciously (Bandura, 1986) which also aligns with social learning theory. As suggested in social learning theory, the modeling hypothesis, and intergenerational transmission literature, level of closeness and positive family of origin experiences may also play a role in the transmission of parenting influence from one generation to the next (Bandura, 1986; Gaunt & Bassi, 2012). Participants who described their fathers' influence as sources of their parenting practices also characterized their fathers in a positive manner. Participants with less than positive experiences with their own fathers shared that they tweaked aspects from these experiences or behaved in a completely opposite manner, which aligns with ideas from the Compensation Hypothesis.

Findings for subtheme two, immediate and extended family influence, as well as subtheme three, other relationships, were also supported by previous scholarship. Similar to some descriptions shared about their fathers, participants who had positive relationships with immediate and extended family members described these family members as parenting influences. The literature on intergenerational transmission of parenting highlights the role of positive experiences in family of origin relationships on later responsive parenting (Hofferth et al., 2012). Additionally, literature on parenting sources and influences of African American fathers supported the finding of this study suggesting that fathers gain parenting knowledge not only from their family of origin but also from relationships with others within their community (Smith et al., 2015).

Subtheme four, mirror and/or mimic, suggests that fathers actively decided whether or not to incorporate aspects from their own childhood experiences or experiences watching others parent into their own current approaches. From a theoretical standpoint, this subtheme is supported by the modeling and compensation hypotheses. From a modeling or mimicking standpoint, participants shared that watching their fathers, brothers, or other key adult males provided information that was later incorporated into their own behaviors. Although the participants shared examples of behaviors learned from their fathers that they mimicked in their own parenting, the majority of study participants course-corrected for behaviors they deemed maladaptive. This notion of course-correcting aligns with the compensation hypothesis. Most of the participants were reared in homes without fathers or father involvement was limited. For example, Participant 1 shared that his father "was 'there' but he wasn't 'there.'" As a result, the fathers shared stories about father absenteeism and an inability to form consistent, supportive relationships. Participants spoke openly about being more actively involved in their children's lives and intentional with their behaviors to form secure relationships. Speaking about his dad's life, Participant 4 shared "dad's like showed me all the wrong decisions to make, so everywhere he turned left, I turned right." This theme also supports the notion that

previous childhood experiences informs current parenting practice as suggested by Smith and colleagues (2015).

Although the scope of this study did not directly examine the quality of participants' relationships with their own fathers or other relatives, data reveal that relationship quality may have played a pivotal role in the participants' perceptions. Participants who described their fathers' influence as sources of their parenting practices also characterized their fathers in a positive manner. For example, Participant 5 described a childhood with a more supportive, highly involved father. Although his father was non-residential, Participant 5 stressed that his was present both physically and emotionally throughout his upbringing. Moreover, Participant 5 made positive connections to his father's parenting style and he imitated many aspects in his fathering versus the other men in the study.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study. This study explored the lived experiences of eight fathers. As in the nature of qualitative research, the findings of this study lack generalizability. The sample was also limited which further impacts the representativeness of this experience for other married African American fathers. Moreover, this study did not include the perspectives of the participants' fathers as there was evidence that their level of involvement impacted their sons' current parenting practices. Additionally, including the perspectives of participants' spouses and children regarding levels of involvement could have added another dimension to this research. Although this study focused on the lived experiences of married African American men, data about other family members' perceptions may have further illuminated some of the core issues raised in the study. Finally, this study did not explore sources of parenting beyond the relationship component. African American fathers may gain knowledge and tailor parenting behaviors from media influences and information learned from professionals such as parent educators or social workers.

Recommendations

The existing literature on African American fathers in nuclear family settings is narrow and does not address the varied experiences of African American fathers. It is important for family practitioners and policy makers to understand the myriad experiences of African American fathers and families. Although the results of this study support previous scholarship on this subject (see Smith et al., 2015) and adds to the literature by including the experiences of a population overlooked in this area, married African American fathers, the study's contributions are limited. Further studies should include more participants, fathers from different parts of the country, and a cross-section representing a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds. These additions may possibly yield more diverse experiences which can further inform family professionals. Moreover, future studies should exam other factors like family closeness and other intergenerational influences. Thirdly, the inclusion of other theoretical frameworks like family systems theory or ecological system theory may bring additional value to this discussion. Family systems theory provides a context for exploring family structures such as role expectations (Cox & Paley, 2003). Fathers' perceptions about their roles in the family may influence their parenting behavior. Additionally, the ecological systems theory provides a context to explore both individual and family dynamics but also accounts for components such as religion, cultural, and racial identity (McAdoo, 1993a, 1993b). Exploring these issues and others within the social environment may reveal additional parenting influences. Lastly, exploring parenting sources and influences in a broader way to include

variables like media influences may offer greater knowledge about the diverse ways African American fathers approach parenting.

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