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# The Voices, Views, and Experiences of 13 Nonresident African American Fathers

## Abstract

This qualitative study focused on how nonresident African American fathers maintain their role as fathers while dealing with the stereotypes, myths, and ambiguities associated with nonresident fatherhood. In addition, this study explored some of the cultural challenges specific to the experience of the nonresident African American father. The qualitative inquiry research explored the nonresident African American father's experience through interviews with 13 nonresident African American fathers to gain insight about their perspectives on being a nonresident African American father. For this study, six open-ended questions were selected from the research literature. The aim of this study was to fill a void by offering to the academic community, a fresh perspective on the experience of African American fatherhood. Qualitative analysis of interview data yielded a core theme, which became the grounded theory that emerged from the research. The theory is that nonresident African American fathers experience a sense of powerlessness with regards to fatherhood, particularly in regards to negative stereotypes of African American fathers, their own experiences of being sons of African American fathers, the challenges of financially supporting their children, their ability to evaluate their efficacy as fathers, and their disproportionate need for affirmation. The researcher recommends that continuing efforts be made to conduct similar studies on a much larger scale.

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The Voices, Views, and Experiences of 13 Nonresident African American Fathers

By

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Submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree  
Ed.D. in Executive Leadership

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Christopher Griffin, Ed.D.

Committee Member

Janice Kelly, Ph.D.

Ralph C. Wilson Jr., School of Education  
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## **Dedication**

Thank you to my wife, Tanisha Thomas Asbery, who has stood by me during all of my endeavors. She has provided me with the inspiration to keep moving forward and I would have never completed this program without her assistance. I must also thank my mother, Hattie Lee Asbery and my mother in-law, Brenda Lang Thomas, whose continued support has helped me to endure and prosper. To my sister and my brother, Angela and Joseph Asbery, I thank you for cheering me on and keeping me focused. Special thanks to Dr. Johana Rivera, Dr. Ellen Gambino, Dr. Dwight Bonk, Dr. Carleen Evans, Keleisha Phillip, Maurena Holder, and Sonia Robinson for all of their love and support.

I would like to thank my chair, my mentor, and my committee members, Dr. Christopher Griffin, Dr. Janice Kelly, and Dr. Jerry Willis for bestowing upon me the knowledge, guidance, and inspiration that I needed to complete this journey.

Last, I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my father, Mr. Harry Lee Asbery. Every son should be so lucky to have a father like you. I will continue to follow your lead and work hard in the field of fatherhood with the goal of inspiring mothers and fathers to recognize their full potential as parents. I love you and I miss you.

### **Biographical Sketch**

David Asbery currently works for a New York City real estate firm as the Director of Records and Office Services. The author of four books and numerous articles on the topic of fatherhood, Mr. Asbery received his baccalaureate and master's degrees from the College of New Rochelle. In the summer of 2010, Mr. Asbery came to St. John Fisher College and began his doctoral studies in the Ed.D. Program in Executive Leadership. Under the direction of Dr. Christopher Griffin, Dr. Janice Kelly, and Dr. Jerry Willis, Mr. Asbery's research study focused on the voices, views, and experiences of 13 nonresident African American fathers. Mr. Asbery received his Ed.D degree in Executive Leadership in 2013.

## **Abstract**

This qualitative study focused on how nonresident African American fathers maintain their role as fathers while dealing with the stereotypes, myths, and ambiguities associated with nonresident fatherhood. In addition, this study explored some of the cultural challenges specific to the experience of the nonresident African American father. The qualitative inquiry research explored the nonresident African American father's experience through interviews with 13 nonresident African American fathers to gain insight about their perspectives on being a nonresident African American father. For this study, six open-ended questions were selected from the research literature. The aim of this study was to fill a void by offering to the academic community, a fresh perspective on the experience of African American fatherhood. Qualitative analysis of interview data yielded a core theme, which became the grounded theory that emerged from the research. The theory is that nonresident African American fathers experience a sense of powerlessness with regards to fatherhood, particularly in regards to negative stereotypes of African American fathers, their own experiences of being sons of African American fathers, the challenges of financially supporting their children, their ability to evaluate their efficacy as fathers, and their disproportionate need for affirmation. The researcher recommends that continuing efforts be made to conduct similar studies on a much larger scale.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

Therapists, attorneys, and judges are often frustrated with divorced parents who maintain high levels of conflict in the process of co-parenting, and who are unable to establish independent lives that are satisfying (Leichtentritt, Retig, & Stanton 1999). As the cultural template of the nuclear family loses its ideological and numerical dominance, a large and growing number of families have been sharing the responsibilities for the care of children across two households (Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Bradshaw, Stimson, Skinner, & Williams, 1999). Although the literature on this topic has been growing, there remains a substantial need for research, as it pertains to nonresident African American fathers, on the ongoing patterns of father involvement and the factors likely to influence their involvement (Lamb, 2003; Leite & McKenry, 2006).

### **Background Information**

In 1965, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, then Assistant Secretary of Labor to President Lyndon Johnson, published a report entitled *The Negro Family* (later called the Moynihan Report). The report, which focused on the state of the African American family, caused an uproar among African American leaders. After the release of the report, if you talked about fatherlessness amongst African Americans, it meant that you were a racist (Blankenhorn, 2000). The report claimed that African American absentee fathers have been the fundamental weakness of the African American community and that the consequences of the African American absentee father have included a direct and negative impact on their children.

The report stated that without the African American father there is disorganization in the African American family, a higher proportion of delinquency among African American children, lower test scores when compared to White counterparts, and loneliness and isolation because young African American children are unable to discuss major life issues with their fathers (Koch, 2000). Moynihan (1965) stated that growing up with little knowledge about the father, and less about the family occupations and traditions, has put African American children at a disadvantage. The report claimed that excluding what mother and child are able to build together, an uninvolved father results in the reduction of the transfer of property from one generation to the next as well as a total dependence on the mother for valuable social and professional contacts within the educational world and the work force. Though these components of father involvement hinted at its importance, psychological research demonstrated the personality effects children without a father face. The research claimed that children from fatherless homes seek immediate gratification of their desires far more than children with fathers present. Furthermore, studies revealed that children who hunger for immediate gratification are more prone to social issues and delinquency (Mischel, 1961).

Forty years after the publication of Moynihan's (1965) report, many children are still being raised by women, and men have less responsibility for financial, emotional and logistical support for children they have helped to create (Gallagher, 1998). In just three decades, between 1960 and 1990, the percentage of children living apart from their fathers has more than doubled (Popenoe, 1998). Of the 66.3 million fathers in the United States, the number of single fathers has increased from 393,000 in 1970 to 2.3 million in 2003 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2003). In 1960, one in 13 children in America under

the age of 18 lived with their mother and without their father. By 2006, the ratio had changed to one in four (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2007). Although this data represented a broad and general view with respect to fatherlessness in the United States, the data on fatherlessness solely in the African American community is of special interest because more than half of Black families are headed by mothers, and more than 80% of African American children can expect to spend part of their childhood living apart from their fathers. This has reduced the chances for a structured father and child relationship and has reduced the amount of fatherly knowledge that a child can benefit from by having a relationship with his or her father (Cherlin, 2005; Popenoe, 1998).

### **Problem Statement**

There is an abundance of literature that has focused on increasing the knowledge available with respect to father involvement. Taken together, these studies have provided a generalized view on the benefits of a father's involvement, the problems caused by fathers who are uninvolved, and ways some of these problems can be solved. Although the studies have had universal value in that they have been believed to encompass issues relating to all fathers, additional research is needed to discover if the extant studies are universally applicable or are limited to particular groups of fathers. Although there has been an abundance of research on the topic of fatherhood, there remains a need for research on nonresident African American fathers. This dissertation research addressed the challenges that may not be considered in research on other populations or in previous studies of African American fathers (Ricketts, 2007). It is this lack of consideration that led to the emergence of the problem statement which focuses on how nonresident African American fathers practice their role as fathers, perceive their role as fathers, and deal with

the barriers and problems associated with fatherhood. Moreover, this study focused specifically on the values that underline the nonresident African American father's approach to fatherhood.

### **Theoretical Rationale**

Few people doubt the fundamental importance of mothers. However, with fathers, there has always been a question of whether they are necessary in a child's life (Popenoe, 1998). Though the view of fatherhood has been changing with a trend to emphasize the critical significance of fathers and their relationships with their children (Lamb, 2003), research specifically pertaining to the sociological and psychological foundations of relationships between African American fathers and their children has been less common. Instead, there has been an abundance of studies driven by research and public perception where African American men are perceived as inherently impossible, erratic in their behavior, perpetrators of crime and violence, and are unable to assume the responsibilities of employment and fatherhood (Gadsden & Smith, 1994). African American men have continued to represent the negative aspects of fatherlessness but not the positive potential of fatherhood (Roberts, 1998). For instance, they are portrayed as uninterested, uninvolved and uncommitted to their children (Kissman, 1997). Even when race is not mentioned, images of promiscuous Black mothers and their shiftless partners has shaped the debate about the issue of fatherlessness (Roberts, 1998). The African American father has been presented as an invisible figure (Bozett & Hanson, 1991; Moynihan, 1965). This is seen in the parlance of social psychology, social work, and in the urban social sciences. African American men have continued to be described as absent, missing, nonresidential, noncustodial, unmarried, irresponsible and immature

(Conner & White, 2006). This negative unilateral perspective of the nonresident African American father has continued to dominate the research, media, and the minds of many Americans respectively causing a fixed embedment of perceptions, imagery, and ideas that only the voice of the African American father can remedy. Without this voice, the research, as it pertains to nonresident African American fathers, remains stagnant, ambiguous, speculative, and stereotypical at best. As noted by Conner and White (2006), there has seemed to be major discrepancies between the negative absent father images of Black men described in demographic studies, and the pictures of Black men in fathering roles which emerged from structured interviews, narratives, biographical sketches, observations, and ethnographic investigations.

The research is in need of a more comprehensive examination of the issue, which could broaden perspectives, increase knowledge, fill gaps, and perhaps remind researchers that nonresident African American fathers experience feelings of anger and love, exhibit parental steadiness and devotion, feel excitement and frustration, are sensitive to pain and rejection, and express feelings of sorrow and joy (Hamer, 2001). These components are among many that researchers, policymakers, social workers, counselors, and educators consider as prerequisites to good fathering.

### **Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to explore, analyze, and add the voices, views, experiences, and interpretations of nonresident African American fathers to the research on parental involvement.

## **Research Questions**

1. How do nonresident African American fathers practice their role as fathers?
2. How do nonresident African American fathers perceive their role as fathers?
3. How do nonresident African American fathers deal with the barriers and problems associated with fatherhood?
4. What are the values that underline the nonresident African American fathers approach to fatherhood?

## **Significance of the Study**

In recent years, research literature has focused on the issues of quality, such as the parenting behaviors of the father, and the relationship between father and child (Harper, 2006). Researchers have argued that the father's contribution, or lack of contribution, may significantly impact their child's healthy growth and development (Coley & Schindler, 2008). Studies have demonstrated that quality father involvement benefits the children (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999). There has also been evidence that displays of warmth and support from fathers are associated with lower levels of anxiety, depression, delinquency, and drug use among adolescents (Thomas, Farrell, & Barnes, 1996). A father's presence has been shown to increase self-esteem, academic achievement, and stability in peer relations (Harris, 2002). Strong fathers also have been shown to help support the functioning and well being of mothers, the family system, and the home environment (Cox & Paley, 1997). However, children who grow up without ongoing contact with their biological fathers have been at a disadvantage across a broad array of outcomes (McLanahan, 1998). Thanks to emerging research on the topic of fatherhood,

we are now able to acknowledge the relationship between a father's absence and specific pathologies in society such as crime and teen pregnancy (Eberly, 1999). In addition, teenage boys without fathers are notoriously prone to trouble (Popenoe, 1998). Young boys are more at risk of first time substance use and are more likely to use drugs (Jacinta et al., 2004). Rodney and Mupier (1999) found that African American adolescents without a father at home are significantly more likely to be held back a grade, truant or suspended from school, to run away from home, and to have trouble with the police. Without a father, mother and child are five times more likely to live in poverty, twice as likely to drop out of school. In addition, 80% of adolescents in psychiatric hospitals come from broken homes and 70% of juveniles in state reform institutions grew up in fatherless homes. As noted by Hewlett and West (1998), fatherhood and fathering are enormously important to the well-being of children.

### **Definition of Terms**

**Good father.** As discussed by Morman and Floyd (2006), the components that can be added to the growing list of what defines a good father are as follows: (a) a role model; (b) in control; (c) loves, cares and respects his child; (d) is a provider; (e) makes sacrifices; (f) available; (g) forgiving; (h) a good listener; (i) teacher, specific and general; (j) involved in his child's life (k) protects his child from physical harm; (l) provides discipline; (m) supports his child emotionally; (n) affectionate; (o) maintains a positive relationship with the child's mother; (p) relinquishes control appropriately; (q) a friend; (r) admits mistakes; and (s) seeks the child's approval.

**Nonresident rather.** Contemporary social scientists generally define noncustodial and nonresident fathers as fathers who do not provide daily emotional

support to their children. This study focused on nonresident African American fathers who at some point lived away from their children and provide emotional support.

Black and African American: For this study, the terms Black and African American were used interchangeably.

### **Chapter Summary**

Researchers have spent a considerable amount of time and resources writing about the problems that relate to the nonresident African American father. Few studies have given this group the opportunity to speak and be heard. This study adds to the limited amount of research that has focused solely on the nonresident African American father's approach to fatherhood. Each of the sections from Chapter 1 helped to lay the foundation for this study. Chapter 2 provides an analysis of the research literature on fatherhood issues. Chapter 3 discusses the methodology used for the study. In Chapter 4, the results from the individual interviews with nonresident African American fathers are discussed. Chapter 5 assesses the implications of the results from Chapter 4 and includes recommendations for future research.

## **Chapter 2: Review of the Literature**

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an extensive review of the current literature as it relates to how nonresident African American fathers practice their role as fathers, perceive their role as fathers, and deal with the barriers and problems associated with fatherhood. In addition, this review of the literature draws attention to the values that underline the nonresident African American father's approach to fatherhood while focusing specifically on the characteristics of this particular group. Conner and White (2006) stated that it is difficult to find literature, research, and comments regarding the positive attributes of African American fathers. This review of the literature adds an alternative perspective to the research that has been, for the last 45 years, negative, speculative, ambiguous, stereotypical, and inconclusive at best.

### **Divorce, the New Social Institution**

Researchers, policy makers, and the general public are interested in demographical characteristics of events such as marriage and divorce. Part of this stems from the fact that men and women in the southern United States have the highest divorce rates in the country (U.S. Bureau of Census, 2009). As these numbers continue to increase, legal and social policies with respect to the institution of marriage and the institution of divorce have caused a sense of uncertainty with researchers, policy makers, judges and the general public.

On one hand, Americans have continued to marry in large numbers. It is estimated that 85% of adults will marry at some point in their lives (Bachrach, Hindin, &

Thomson, 2002; Popenoe & Whitehead, 2004). On the other hand, recent estimates indicated that approximately 50% of marriages end in divorce and 20% are terminated within the first five years (Bramlett & Mosher, 2002).

As noted by Popenoe (2009) marriages are not only breaking up in large numbers, but the institution itself is in decline. In place of marriage, there is a rapid rise in nonmarital cohabitation, which, according to some researchers, has implied a lower level of commitment. More problematic is the increase in single parenting. Popenoe's view seemed to link to what many researchers have argued; divorce threatens marriage-based families, creates fragile and unreliable families, and that half the children of divorced parents experience long-term pain, worry, and insecurity that adversely affects their love and work relationships (Wallerstein & Blakeslee 1996). However, what has become unclear with respect to the traditional pro-marriage view is the contradictory message being sent. Although marriage is unstable, Americans have continued to marry in large numbers and divorce in large numbers. This raises the question: what can be said about the saliency of the traditional nuclear family?

### **The Nuclear Family and the Contemporary Father**

Across time and cultures, fathers have always been considered an essential part of the nuclear family. Moreover, researchers contended that marriage and the nuclear family, consisting of a mother, father, and child, are the most universal social institutions in existence (Popenoe, 1999). But as the nuclear family loses some of its prominence, the perception of the father has remained the same and continues to point toward an increased recognition of the potential importance of fathers in child development (Pleck, 2007). This view has resonated with researchers regardless of whether the father's status

is resident or nonresident, married or single. As noted by Horn (2006), the research consistently found that children who grow up with the active involvement of a father are less likely to fail at school, develop behavioral and emotional problems, engage in early and promiscuous sexual activity, or become welfare-dependent. Bronfenbrenner (1999) further contested that:

When fathers are absent children are at a greater risk for experiencing a variety of educational problems, including extremes of hyperactivity and withdrawal, lack of attentiveness in the classroom, difficulty in deferring gratification, impaired academic achievement, school misbehavior, absenteeism, dropping out, involvement in socially alienated peer groups, and the so-called teenage syndrome of behaviors that tend to hang together such as smoking, drinking, early and frequent sexual experiences, and in more extreme cases, drugs, suicide, vandalism, violence, and criminal acts. (p. 3)

The literature on father absence predominates the area of father-child relations and has arrived at the conclusion that fatherhood and fathering is enormously important, and when the father is crippled and cast aside, a serious repercussion is felt throughout the nation. (Hewlett & West, 1998). A large body of literature suggested that children who grow up without their fathers are more likely to drop out of school, exhibit disruptive and delinquent behaviors, earn less money as adults, have poorer physical and mental health as adults, and are more likely themselves to experience divorce as adults (Sigle-Rushton & McLanahan, 2004).

With the extensive changes to the characteristics of the American family, one can understand why researchers have been interested in father involvement (Teachman,

Tedrow, & Crowder, 2000). With a decrease in the value of marriage, a decline in remarriage and divorce rates that have increased since 1940, researchers recognized that fathers offer a different kind of parenting from mothers (Dick, 2004). However, looking into the inner workings of the nuclear family as it relates specifically to fatherhood could give researchers a better understanding about the behaviors and ideas of how the contemporary father has evolved.

The research on the importance of the nuclear family form is overwhelming. Most of the data pointed to a more promising future for children if both parents are together. Blackwell (2010) stated the following:

Children in nuclear families are generally less likely than children in non-nuclear families to have a basic action disability, to have learning disabilities or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, to lack health insurance coverage, to have had two or more emergency room visits, to have receipt of needed prescription medication delayed, to have gone without needed dental care due to cost, to be poorly behaved, and to have definite or severe emotional or behavioral difficulties.

Children living in a single parent exhibited similar rates with respect to child health access to care and emotional or behavioral difficulties.

The paradigm of the nuclear family has shown the benefits of this family form. However, as divorce rates remain high, marriage rates remain low, and cohabitation becomes more commonplace, children have been predicted to spend more of their time in a nontraditional, non-nuclear family (Blackwell, 2010). It is here that that research is both supportive of and in contrast to the nuclear family form. According to the numbers, the low marriage rates have indicated that the nuclear family is being avoided, and based on

the divorce rates, the nuclear family has succeeded in bringing couples together, but it has failed at keeping them together. In short, researchers have succeeded in reporting the benefits of the nuclear family, and to some degree they have convinced the public of its significance. As noted by Lamb (1999) researchers have been preoccupied with the superiority of the traditional family styles and traditional parental roles. However, researchers have failed at transforming the supposed superiority of the nuclear family into a formula where couples are staying together and marriages are successful. The high divorce rates, the low marriage rates, and the public's choice to cohabitate have challenged the saliency of the nuclear family. The public has seemingly launched a nuclear war on the principles of the nuclear family, and as researchers have continued to profess its significance, the remnants from this failed family form have continued to challenge its history, its importance, its need, and its future.

### **The African American Nuclear Family**

The research rarely has shown the terms African American and Nuclear Family together. African American fatherhood has been rarely discussed from the perspective of men anticipating fatherhood or the positive involvement of African American fathers in the parenting process (Caldwell & Reese, 2006). Black males have continued to be stereotyped as a demographic, a sociological construct, a media caricature, or a crime statistic (Coles & Green, 2010). Researchers have confirmed that family structure is a cue by which individuals are stereotyped (Bryan, Coleman, & Ganong, & Bryan, 1986). In addition, it has been argued that the standards by which all family forms are measured is the intact nuclear family (Mills, 1984; Prosen & Farmer, 1982; Uzoka, 1979). When families vary from this standard, they have been stereotyped as dysfunctional, unstable

and disorganized (Cherlin, 1998; Mills, 1984; Price Bonham & Balswick, 1980; Uzoka, 1979). This has appeared to be the case for the African American family, which is seen only as legitimate when it conforms to the middle class White family or nuclear family formation (Bryant & Coleman, 1998). Lamb (1999) stated that researchers and social scientists have focused largely on middle-class White families because these families are most familiar to the majority of the researchers. Furthermore, researchers have continued to treat the nuclear family as if it is the goal standard of family forms; something that the public, regardless of race, religion, cultural background, or personal preference, should strive and work towards. Lamb (1999) stated the following:

The exclusive focus on white middle-class nuclear families has become increasingly anachronistic in the face of demographic changes that have made traditional families less characteristic of the environments in which most children are raised, and have made, even in the United States, the White affluent, educated families that are widely studied increasingly unrepresentative of the population.

(p. 1)

In addition to being unrepresentative of the population, this exclusive focus on the middle-class nuclear family is problematic in that it has stigmatized those who fail to make the nuclear family grade. For the last 45 years the Black family has been addressed from the deviant perspective. This is seen in the research, the mass media, social science, and high school and college textbooks (Anderson & Williams, 1983; Billingsley, 1968). These negative stereotypes not only work on the minds of the non-African American public, research of the past indicated that African Americans have accepted the negative stereotypes society ascribed to them as well as believing the positive ones society

ascribed to Whites. (Bayton, 1941; Proenza & Strickland, 1965; Steckler, 1957). This negative biasing has contributed to the public's perception of the Black family and has helped confirm the Black family's failure to live up to the standards of the presumed acceptability of the nuclear family form. The penalty for this failure has been to stigmatize the Black family, namely the Black mother and father, with stereotypical titles that make them out to be deviants, pathological, dysfunctional, unstable, and abnormal (Moynihan, 1965). This image and these perceptions have been reinforced in the hallowed halls of universities, on the frenetic sets of movies and television shows, as well as in the august halls of Congress (Allen, 1995).

Popenoe's (1999) assertions that marriage and the nuclear family, mother, father, and child are the most universal social institutions in existence and that the transformation, in the form of the nontraditional family, has weakened the institution of family, has set an imaginary measuring bar with respect to the saliency of nontraditional non-nuclear families. The United States is made up of a multiplicity of family types including two parent families, one parent families, cohabitating couples, gay and lesbian families, and extended family households (Teachman, Tedrow, & Crowder, 2000). If these families are a part of a universal social institution, then what are the prerequisites that have placed the proponents of the nuclear family in the prominent position to act as a superior judge?

Coontz (1992) stated that the motivation behind the push for conformity of the nuclear family has stemmed from the starry-eyed relationship that researchers have with the traditional family. As researchers have continued to romanticize the traditional families of the past, they have missed opportunity by consistently confusing the

symbolism of the nuclear family with the realities of today's growing nontraditional contemporary family (Stacey, 1993). Empirical findings indicated that today's young adults expect divorce even as they enter marriage (Campbell & Wright, 2008). As contemporaries have continued to be shocked by the high divorce rates and the low marriage rates, a certain degree of acceptability is expected to emerge toward the view that in today's climate of choice, divorce is here to stay (Coontz, 2007).

In that more than 25% of American families have been headed by either a mother or a father, single parent families, so called nontraditional families, can no longer be viewed as nontraditional (Kleist, 1999). As more individuals choose to remain unmarried, social values will continue to shift toward greater acceptance of diverse lifestyles (Campbell & Wright, 2008). This shift will hopefully erode the elitism of professing the saliency of a specific family type. Moreover, this shift could put a stop to research that exclusively has focused on the strengths of the traditional family in comparison to the weaknesses of the alternative families. In short, the change in patterns of nuptiality and divorce has prompted some scholars to speculate about the future of the American family. On one side, researchers such as Popenoe (1988, 1993) and Skolnick (1991) have claimed that the family is in decline and have warned that its demise holds negative consequences for all Americans. On the other side, researchers have noted the changes to the American family and have claimed that decline and demise of families is inevitable and may even be for the best (Stacey, 1993).

### **Separated and Divorced Families**

Americans have always had a higher propensity to divorce and separation than Europeans and people of North Atlantic countries (Kleist, 1999). As a result, the

American family has never been static (Teachman, Tedrow, & Crowder, 2000). As couples with children divorce, never get married, or never live together, new types of family structures have multiplied. The issue now is whether the two-parent household is best for the children, or if children's well-being can be nurtured in other types of family structures (Kleist, 1999). As previously noted, most of the data on family types has pointed to a more promising future for children if parents are together. Unfortunately this is not a reality for all children in that more than 25% of American families are headed by either a single mother or father (Kleist, 1999). Census and demographic data have confirmed that the number of single parent families has been increasing since the late 1960s (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1992). This has drastically altered the family lives of children in the United States. As a consequence, researchers have turned their attention to families in which children do not live with their two biological parents.

Researchers have been studying extensively on how divorce and single parenthood affects the mother, father and the child (Emery, 1994; Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1997; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). Lamb (1999) stated that because nontraditional family styles are being adopted by an increasing number of parents, researchers must continue to find answers to the questions of how does this affect children, how does this affect their experiences, and how does this affect their developmental processes? According to Lamb, Sternberg and Thompson (1997), family dissolution is clearly disruptive for mothers, fathers, and children, most of whom experience varying degrees of distress, depression, loneliness, regret, lack of control, haplessness, and anger.

## **The Consensus on Fatherhood Involvement**

Pleck (2007) stated that because a father's personality differs from the mother's, children's proximal interactions with their fathers differ from those with their mothers. This is potentially important for child development. Research showed that in almost all of their interactions with children, fathers do things a little differently from mothers. A father's special parenting style is highly complementary to what mothers do and is important in its own right to optimum child rearing (Popenoe, 1999). This special parenting style was captured by Pruett (2000) who eavesdropped on a discussion between two women at a local food market. Pruett noted the following in their discussion:

I think that men just raise them differently than we do. They are rougher and softer at the same time. They are firmer about setting limits than I am, but are cream puffs about hurting their feelings. I think it (father and daughter relationship) has been good for both of them. Somehow she made him sweeter, even to me.

Pruett's (2000) observation drew a direct parallel to Parke's (2002) view that a father's rough-and-tumble-play may have a special role in promoting the child's emotional regulation. According to Pruett (2000), the father's rough-and-tumble play with the children promotes a particular aspect of development that has distinctive consequences. In Pruett's (2000) eavesdropping observation, the distinctive consequences appeared to have a positive effect not only on the father and daughter relationship, but also the mother and father relationship. Brott (1999) noted that on the most basic level, by wrestling and rolling around on the floor, a father can give his children some valuable

lessons in self-control, managing their emotions, recognizing the emotions of others, and that biting, kicking, and other forms of physical violence are not acceptable.

Brott (1999) further noted that babies are among the first to notice the difference in parenting styles. In a study at the University of California, when toddlers were given a choice of playing with their mother or father, more than two-thirds picked their father. Researchers have argued that this rough-and-tumble play is something that mothers can also learn. However, the same can be said for tasks that are associated with mothering. Renshaw (2005) stated that patience, endurance, tolerating sleep deprivation, acute hearing to wake up for a crying baby, coping with messy secretions, laundry, and food preparation are tasks that fathers can also learn to do. Renshaw (2005) added that this leaves giving birth to a child and breastfeeding as the only two components in which mothers differ from fathers. Though the research has been robust in presenting challenging questions about the significance of father involvement, the research is clear that if father and child have a close connection, both father and child will be better off in the future (Pruett, 2000). Researchers contend that children are better off when they have two parents in their lives who love them, cuddle them, and contribute to their college fund (Brott, 1999).

### **The Consensus on African American Father Involvement**

In November 1998, Morehouse College and the Institute for American Values assembled a conference on the state of African American fathers. Present at the conference was Pulitzer Prize winner William Raspberry (Blankenhorn & Clayton, 2003). When asked the question, “Are Black fathers necessary?” Raspberry, (1998) answered:

Are Black fathers necessary? You know, I am old and tired, and there are some things I just don't want to debate any more. One of them is whether African American children need fathers. Another is whether marriage matters. Does marriage matter? You bet it does. Are Black fathers necessary? Damn straight we are. (p. 1)

The research also contended that father presence extends beyond physical and fiscal boundaries to practical and emotional relations with children (Ishii-Kuntz, 1992; Marino & McCowan, 1976). A growing base of empirical research asserted that the father's social and economic resources, particularly parenting involvement and monetary contributions is directly related to children's well-being (Cabrera et al., 2000; Marsiglio et al., 2000). The father's social capital also has been shown to provide resources such as time emotional and practical supports (Amato, 1998; Coley & Schindler, 2008).

The research, as it relates to the significance of a father's involvement with his child has been quite robust. Therefore, the research clearly indicated that children who have contact with their father have an advantage over kids without that same kind of contact (Brott, 1999). Furthermore, researchers can no longer view the fatherlessness problem as a problem that only affects African Americans and the poor. Fatherlessness among Whites almost has matched the 1965 figures of fatherlessness amongst Blacks. Blankenhorn (1999) stated that for this reason the issues of fatherlessness can be seen as an issue that bridges the racial divide and brings people together for a common purpose.

Researchers have attempted to bridge the racial divide on issues of fatherlessness. Instead of research referring exclusively to African American fathers, research now generally addresses the issue of fatherlessness. The research has universal appeal as it

describes father involvement, significance, and as it focuses on the distinct differences between mothers and fathers. However, the research fails, and makes no attempt at universally dealing with the perception of fathers. This issue, a component of fatherlessness, has continued to be presented as an African American problem. It is here the question arises of the role of perception as it relates to the African American fathers' involvement, the worldview, his view regarding his significance, and his parental style as it relates to his child. Moreover, Julion et al., (2007) noted that despite the growth in research on paternal involvement, the recognition of its relevance to the African American divorced and nonresident father has been undermined by four major problems: (a) much of the data on paternal involvement has been obtained from interviews with mothers (Cabrera et al., 2003; Kissman, 1997), (b) small samples, usually consisting of low income and adolescent African American fathers (Dallas, Wilson, & Salgado, 2000, Gavin et al., 2002; Johnson, 1996) have been used for studies, (c) much of what is known about the father and child relationships derive from married or divorced White fathers (Hawkins & Palkovitz, 1999; McAdoo, 1997), and (d) paternal involvement typically has been measured using research instruments not relevant to African American fathers, particularly nonresident African American fathers.

There has been a trend among researchers to emphasize the critical significance of fathers and their relationships with their children (Lamb, 2003). However, research pertaining specifically to the sociological and psychological foundations of relationships between African American fathers and their children is less common. Instead, there has been an abundance of studies driven by research and public perception in which African American men and boys are perceived as inherently impossible, erratic in their behavior,

perpetrators of crime and violence, and are unable to assume the responsibilities of employment and fatherhood (Gadsden & Smith, 1994). The nonresident African American father is portrayed as uninterested in, uninvolved with, and uncommitted to his children (Kissman, 1997; McAdoo, 1997). In the minds of many Americans, African American men are perceived as gangster rappers, hustlers, rapists, gang bangers, drug dealers, and crack heads. Over the past 50 years the media has emerged as a socializer, and Black culture within the media has been perceived as the benchmark of social degeneracy (Roberts, 1998).

The media, by way of the television, radio, and the Internet is a central influence in the lives of Americans. Therefore, what is seen on television or the Internet, what is read in the research, magazines, and newspapers, or what is heard on the radio has been understood to create perceptions that can consequently thwart the idea that a African American man can suitably mentor his child (Roberts, 1998). For some, the stereotypical explanation is easier to digest compared to a meticulous investigational explanation or report of the African American father's economic prospects and the discriminatory practices that he faces (Moynihan, 1965). Stereotypes save human energy by enabling us to ignore all of the diverse and detailed information that is associated with any given group (McGarty, Yzerbyt, & Spears, 2002).

Before judging the nonresident African American father, we must address the institutional forces that have convinced the public that the problems of disempowered groups, such as African American single mothers and African American nonresident fathers, are a result of their own bad habits and not from an unequal social structure (Roberts, 1998). The following sections discuss those institutional structures and forces.

## **Slavery and Institutionalized Racism**

A variety of historical periods have played a major role in the overall makeup of the African American father. A look into the institution of slavery as it relates to the African American father can give researchers and the public a more comprehensive understanding of the dichotomy between the universal perception of fatherhood and the rigid perception and reality of the African American father.

Much like the African American, the United States has disturbing aspects of its past that are inextricably woven into its identity (Waterhouse, 2011). Slavery in the United States was a concerted dehumanizing project that caused turmoil even in the mind of President Abraham Lincoln. As noted by Nagler, (2009) President Lincoln politically and morally detested the system of slavery throughout his life, and in one of his most famous statements he offered the following: “I am naturally anti-slavery. If slavery is not wrong, nothing is wrong.” Though President Lincoln was equally passionate about honoring the constitutional laws passed down onto him, including laws that supported the institution of slavery, his personal impression of slavery has been historically significant because it is a representation identified through the collective memory of a President who was forced to make personal and political concessions and compromises. Nagler (2009) noted that a letter President Lincoln wrote to his sister, a slave owner encapsulated his feelings on slavery. He wrote

The slaves were chained six and six together. A small iron clevis was around the left wrist of each, and this fastened to the main chain by a shorter one at a convenient distance from the other; so that the Negroes were strung together precisely like so many fish upon a trotline. In this condition they were being

separated forever from the scenes of their childhood, their friends, their fathers and mothers, and brothers and sisters, and many of them, from their wives and children and going into perpetual slavery where the lash of the master is proverbially ruthless and unrelenting. (p. 5)

Who can claim that the historical events of slavery and the mistreatment over the course of three centuries have been irrelevant and inconsequential to the African American contemporary experience (Waterhouse, 2011)? As stated by Eyerman (2001), the contemporary African American father has not had to experience the forced servitude, the subordination to the will and whims of slave owners, and the inability of protecting his wife and daughter from rape, to have experienced some degree of cultural trauma.

Eyerman, (2001) further stated:

As a cultural process, trauma is mediated through various forms of representation and linked to the reformation of collective identity and the reworking of the collective memory. National or cultural trauma is rooted in an event or series of events but not necessarily in their direct experience. These experiences are usually mediated through newspapers, radio, or television. (p. 1 & 3)

To be Black within the American narrative is to be inextricably connected to the fundamental contradiction of freedom and equality (Waterhouse, 2011). When slavery is reintroduced to Americans through an article in the newspaper, on the radio or television, it is the African American who identifies, who can relate and find a degree of commonality with the overall experience of slavery. This is no different than that of the American Jew who sheds an emotional tear for the Holocaust. As President Lincoln described slavery, it appears that America was to the African American what Hitler was

to the Jews. Both believed in segregation, considered their victims to be members of a weaker race, imprisoned humans against their will, and considered their victims to be sub-human and animalistic. In addition, both mutilated and murdered their victims. After the fall of Hitler, the International Refugee Organization worked with Jews from the Holocaust and spent four years helping victims reestablish their lives and relocate into new homes. Much like the events that followed the African American's emancipation from slavery, the Jewish people were also an unwanted race and struggled to find a welcoming home. They too were faced with yet another fight for freedom and equality.

However, unlike the African American, the salient symbolism of Hitler had been erased along with many of the aforementioned atrocities. The carnage that occurred under the realm of the Third Reich was over. For the Jewish population, the death of Hitler meant that the nightmare was over, and for the African American, the emancipation proclamation meant that the nightmare of slavery was over. However, as noted by Waterhouse (2011), the legacy of slavery led to a new type of enslavement. Black Codes and Jim Crow segregation laws became the device legally used to strategically dominate, humiliate, and infuriate African American men, women, and children. This is where the African American experience has differed from that of any other group. Here is the uniqueness of their struggle, a struggle that started with slavery and has continued to plague the contemporary African American community.

For the African American, the nightmare would continue with laws that legally released them from the shackles of slavery while simultaneously delivering them into a new cleverly adaptive paradigm equipped with transformational tendencies. As noted by Du Bois (1910), slaves had a brief moment in the sun before they were returned to a

status akin to slavery. Freedom under the guise of the Black Codes and Jim Crow laws became the new institutionalized system where Black people found themselves again powerless. They were now in a situation that was in many ways worse than slavery (Alexander, 2010).

Emancipation challenged the racial hierarchy and the response to this challenge materialized in the form of new rules, new rhetoric, new language, and a new consensus that produced the same results (Alexander, 2010). Siegel (1997) labeled this preservation through transformation, which is the process through which White privilege is maintained through the rules and rhetorical change. What has been remarkable is that few seem to have understood that similar political dynamics may have produced a racial caste system that exists today. Experience as an African American man has confirmed that Black Codes and Jim Crow laws are not dead; they simply have been adapted and have taken on a different form, and this new form is a specific challenge to Black men, and to African American fathers in particular (Alexander, 2010). While some may see the relationship between America's Black Codes, Jim Crow laws, and the contemporary issues that plague the African American community as a coincidence, the effects of slavery, the Black Codes, and the Jim Crow laws, as they relate specifically to this group, has warranted further investigation into the psychological damage stemming from the African American's association and cultural connection with slavery. It is the African American who feels the cultural trauma, shame, humiliation, embarrassment, economic loss, and anger at America's institutionalized system of slavery, Black Codes, and Jim Crow laws.

Though Jim Crow laws have been repealed, African Americans have continued to fight for some of the same rights they were denied during slavery and during the era of

the Black Codes and Jim Crow laws. As noted by Randall (2010), there were Jim Crow laws that touched upon many of the issues that African Americans face today. These include the inequality of education, employment discrimination, bigotry, humiliation, self-esteem issues, and favoritism. The following list shows many of the Jim Crow laws that were in place across the United States.

- Florida's Jim Crow law stated that schools for White children and schools for Black children shall be conducted separately.
- North Carolina's Jim Crow law stated that the White and Colored militia shall be separately enrolled and shall never be compelled to serve in the same organization. The law further stated that no organization of colored troops shall be permitted where white troops are available, and while Whites are permitted to be organized, Colored troops shall be under command of White officers. The state's textbook law stated that textbooks shall not be interchangeable between the White and Colored school but shall continue to be used by the race first using them.
- Texas Jim Crow laws stated that any White person of such county may use the county free library under the rules and regulations prescribed by the commissioner's court and may be entitled to all the privileges thereof. Said court shall make proper provisions for the Negroes of said county to be served through a separate branch or branches of the county free library, which shall be administered by a custodian of the Negro race under the supervision of the county librarian.

- South Carolina Jim Crow laws stated that it shall be unlawful for any parent, relative, or other White person in this state, having the control or custody of any White child, by right of guardianship, natural or acquired, or otherwise, to dispose of, give or surrender such White child permanently into the custody, control, maintenance, or support of a Negro.
- Texas Jim Crow laws stated that the County Board of Education shall provide schools of two kinds; those for White children and those for Colored children.
- South Carolina Jim Crow laws stated that no person, firms, or corporations, who or which furnish meals to passengers at station restaurants or station eating houses, in times limited by common carriers of said passengers, shall furnish said meals to White and Colored passengers in the same room, or at the same table, or at the same counter.
- Missouri Jim Crow laws stated that all marriages between White persons and Negroes are prohibited and declared absolutely void. No person having one-eighth part or more Negro blood shall be permitted to marry any White person, nor shall any White person be permitted to marry any Negro or person having one-eighth part or more of Negro blood.

In addition one can look at laws such as the Homestead Act, which distributed nearly 205 million acres of land to nearly 1.5 million homesteading families, virtually all of them White. The creation of the Federal Housing Administration home loan program and the Veterans Association program provided loans amounting to approximately 120 billion dollars in housing equity almost exclusively to whites. By 1962, 40% of all mortgages held by Whites were being paid through the preferential lending policies of the

FHA or VA programs, which most people of color were denied access to (Wise, 2010). The GI Bill also placed nearly 100 billion dollars worth of benefits in the hands of white male veterans (Wise, 2010). As researchers have agreed, for some, the ownership of property provides generational economic opportunities for a family including buying low and selling high, refinancing, and the creation of a family legacy of home ownership. Today at least 50 million people, mostly white, have continued to benefit from these early land giveaways either by virtue of still holding the property or by having the opportunity to sell the land and reap the benefits of these sales (Wise, 2010). As a result of these loans, young Whites today are about twice as likely as young Blacks to find themselves in families where their parents are able to help them financially.

With the emerging emphasis on civil society and the growth of democracy, it has become imperative for the nations of the world to examine the ugliness of their past (Glendon, 2001). Without some form of reconciliation or resolution, the collective traumas of the past will continue to have enduring effects on contemporary life (Nytagodien & Neal, 2004). Robinson (2002) stated that the affects of the American institution of slavery are with us today and are commonly displayed in racist attitudes and behavior patterns. The high rates of homicide, suicide, and other forms of personal pathologies have provided evidence for the enduring affects of the legacy of the past on African Americans as a disadvantage minority (Wilson, 1997). Researchers suggested that the African American have continued to feel the sting of slavery even as the rest of society has come to view it as an ancient event that has no bearing on their lives or on the present. To set the correct framework for future generations, the United States must restore honor to millions of forgotten African American forbearers. A social

acknowledgment of the dignity, humanity, worth, and contributions of enslaved Blacks is required (Waterhouse, 2011).

### **Senator Patrick Moynihan**

The Moynihan report was originally an internal memorandum written for the sole purpose of guiding the Johnson administration in the aftermath of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Wilson, 2008). After the report was leaked to the press, Moynihan found himself embroiled in a bitter and intense debate on the internal dynamics of the Black family (Bobo & Charles, 2009). Some say that the tone of the report, its bold expressions and attention grabbing phrases heightened not only an awareness of the problems within the African American family, but added fuel to an already burning fire; that fire being the race relations of the 1960's. As noted by Wilson, (2008) Senator Moynihan's report also heightened concerns about the public's perception of the African American family, specifically the African American father. Several sections from the Moynihan (1965) Report have appeared repeatedly in a the research regarding the state of the African American father. The follow quotes reveal Moyhihan's stance on the state of the African American family:

- Consider the fact that relief investigators or caseworkers are normally women and deal with the housewife. Already suffering a loss in prestige and authority in the family because of his failure to be the chief breadwinner, the male head of the family feels deeply this obvious transfer of planning for the family's well-being to two women, one of them an outsider. His role is reduced to that of errand boy to and from the relief office. (p. 19)

- The ultimate mark of inadequate preparation for life is the failure rate on the Armed Forces mental test. The Armed Forces Qualification Test is not quite a mental test, nor yet an education test. It is a test of ability to perform at an acceptable level of competence. It roughly measures ability that ought to be found in an average 7th or 8th grade student. A grown young man who cannot pass this test is in trouble. Fifty-six percent of Negroes fail it. (p. 40)
- The unemployment statistics for Negro teenagers -- 29% in January 1965 -- reflect lack of training and opportunity in the greatest measure, but it may not be doubted that they also reflect a certain failure of nerve. "Are you looking for a job?" Secretary of Labor Wirtz asked a young man on a Harlem street corner. "Why?" was the reply. (p. 44)
- Family disorganization has been partially responsible for a large amount of juvenile delinquency and adult crime among Negroes. Since the widespread family disorganization among Negroes has resulted from the failure of the father to play the role in family life required by American society, the mitigation of this problem must await those changes in the Negro and American society, which will enable the Negro father to play the role required of him. (p. 48)

Rainwater and Yancy (1967) pointed out that Senator Moynihan's frequent use of the word "failure" to describe the unsuccessful adaptation of many Black men to American society signified to many that individual responsibility was the cause of poor outcomes rather than the structure of opportunity, racial discrimination, access to quality education, or lack of employment prospects. The bold expressions and attention grabbing

phrases were frequently quoted and embellished in editorials and the media (Wilson, 2008). This is how stereotypes are created. According to Jussim (1991), stereotypes emerge from the actual differences between groups, and when the differences or behaviors are detected, they become accentuated or magnified, thus becoming the story that affects the way a member of one group treats a member of another group. Wilson (2009) confirmed this perspective in their discussion of Black males.

Reporters and columnists organized their coverage around the attention grabbing statements on the breakdown of the Black family and the predicament of Black males. Readers who had not read the actual document would often have no idea that Senator Moynihan devoted an entire chapter to the root causes of family fragmentation, including Jim Crow segregation, urbanization, unemployment, and poverty. (p. 95-132)

As stated by McGraty et al. (2002), the psychological instantiation of a stereotype must refer to the development of a set of constraint relations between the following:

- The application of the label.
- The perception that members of some group are very similar to each other or very different from members of the other group.
- An accumulation of background knowledge about the members of those groups.

These components jointly develop stereotypical depictions that in turn inform behaviors toward the members of the stereotyped group and facilitate communication between members of the group to which the perceiver belongs. Under these conditions stereotypes become long lasting and concrete (McGraty et al., 2002).

The Moynihan Report has since been praised for its insight and intuitiveness. However, the recycling of its content within the research, newspapers, radio and television has helped create a one sided perspective of the African American father. Putting aside the positive and negative critiques of the Moynihan Report, there is little talk about the report's damaging effect on the perception of the African American father. Moynihan's report was specifically aimed at bringing attention to the problems that low-income Black families were facing. However, almost 50 years after the release of the report, researchers in the field of social psychology, social work, and urban social scientists, have continued to generalize, dehumanize, and classify African Americans as absent, missing, nonresident, noncustodial, unavailable, non-married, irresponsible, and immature (Conner & White, 2006). Once again this generalized view has become long lasting and concrete without any regard for the fathers who have been actively present in the lives of many African American children as mentors, teachers, preachers, maternal partners, stepfathers, uncles, older male friends social fathers, and of course biological fathers (Conner & White, 2006).

### **The Economic System and its Effect on African American Men**

The African American father has continued to be judged by the number of hours spent with his child and the amount of financial support given to the mother of his child. Researchers claimed that with respect to some African American fathers these instruments are problematic and cannot be the final determinant in measuring paternal involvement (Gavin et al., 2002; Hijjawi, 2005). When using these instruments to measure the amount of time an African American father spends with his child, the relationship with the child's mother, the mother's family, and the mother's significant

other must be considered. In addition, the geographical location of mother and child must be taken into consideration as this can significantly reduce the amount of access and time the father has to spend with his child (Bunting & McAuley, 2004; Gavin et al., 2002). Measuring paternal involvement by the amount of financial support also has been problematic. According to Mincy and Sorensen (1998), many nonresident fathers may have insufficient income, yet this is ignored and these fathers are labeled as deadbeat dads. Working to meet financial obligations is an important factor in father involvement (Devault et al., 2008). However, there are researchers who claimed that the father's ability or inability to settle financial obligations are no longer viewed by scholars as a key ingredient of good fathering (Devault et al., 2008). According to many African American fathers, providing non-monetary support when financial support is problematic has been a valuable contribution to their child's life (Amato, 1998; Cabrera et al., 2004; Wilson, 2003). However, the African American fathers' declining ability to contribute financially has been a major cause of fatherlessness in the African American home. For better or worse, women have been less likely to marry or otherwise stay with men who have offered little or no financial advantage (Roberts, 1998). African American men who have failed to fit the patriarchal model of the husband who sustains his family economically also have failed to measure up to the ideology in which the husband represents the family in the public arena (Cott, 1977). The development of more jobs in the African American community has not solved the fatherlessness issues. As noted by Coats (1999), economics is not enough.

However, according to the research, job creation in the African American community could offer African American men an opportunity to respectfully sustain the

family. In 1965, Moynihan argued that the African American man's economic prospects were the paramount explanation for the fatherlessness issues in the African American community (U.S. Department of Labor, 1965). Forty-five years later, these sentiments have remained valid as on average, African American men have had lower employment rates and lower earnings than White men. For the first time in the twentieth century, most adult African American men in inner city ghetto neighborhoods are not working in a typical week, and those working earn very low wages (Hewlett & West, 1998). This situation reduces their ability to fulfill the role of provider. As a result, African American men have been less likely to marry or be sought after as partners in marriage. They also have been more likely than white men to divorce shortly after marriage (Mincy & Pouncy, 1999).

### **Fatherhood Responsibility Movement**

The fatherhood responsibility movement, one of today's most successful political movements, has claimed to be situated beyond politics, particularly beyond gendered and sexual politics. Crucial factors in shaping and reframing United States debates on families have belonged to the fatherhood responsibility movement (Mincy & Pouncy 1999). The movement emerged in the 1990's as United States policy debates on single motherhood, the family breakdown, and family values shifted into a debate on fatherlessness, masculinity, and marriage. The fatherhood responsibility movement contended that fathers have been marginalized in families and parenting has been feminized by becoming synonymous with motherhood (Blankenhorn, 1995).

## **Vice President Dan Quayle**

On May 19, 1992, Vice President Dan Quayle, while campaigning for re-election, delivered a speech at the Commonwealth Club in California (Horn, 1999). This speech would go down in history as one that opened the door to a discussion on the saliency of fathers and their role as it relates to the well being of children. In 39 words, Vice President Quayle aimed his speech at the show's writer, producer, and the star of the hit television show, *Murphy Brown*, and the title character played by actress Candice Bergen. Quayle's attack on the sitcom stemmed from a series of episodes in which Murphy Brown decided to have a child out of wedlock. As noted by Horn, (1999) Quayle's words galvanized the fatherhood movement. Specifically Quayle said,

It does not help matters, when prime time TV has Murphy Brown, a character who supposedly epitomizes today's intelligent, highly paid, professional woman, mocking the importance of fathers by bearing a child alone, and calling it just another lifestyle choice. (p. 5)

Quayle's words brought politics into the bedroom of millions of Americans. As noted by Morgan, Leggett, and Shanahan (1999), Quayle's speech became a significant theme during the 1992 presidential campaign and would forever link the Vice President and single motherhood as a defining moment of popular history.

On the night that Murphy Brown became an unwed mother, 34 million Americans tuned in. CBS posted a 35% share of the audience, and the show did not stir a significant protest. Instead, fans were quick to point out that Murphy had suffered over her decision to bear a child out of wedlock (Whitehead, 1993). This decision was seen as heroic in the eyes of the public. In addition, Candice Bergen went on to win an Emmy award for her

portrayal of Murphy Brown on the show and received worldwide notoriety by appearing on nearly every women's and news magazine in the country. She also received an honorary degree from the University of Pennsylvania (Whitehead, 1993).

Conversely, Quayle's speech was ridiculed, but even so, it struck a responsive chord with many who believed that something had gone seriously wrong with the contemporary American family (Morgan, Leggett, & Shanahan 1999). In 1992, Americans were faced with the question politicians, social workers, and researchers have continued to debate. That question is, was Vice President Dan Quayle right?

### **The Million Man March**

In the summer of 1995, approximately two and a half years after the Quayle and Brown dispute on single motherhood, Minister Louis Farrakhan called upon one million African American men and their sons for a meeting. One of the focal points of this meeting was to show the world a vastly different picture of the African American male (Allen, 1995). The meeting, exclusively and independently seized by Black men and leaders of the communities, presented a more diverse agenda than the customary meetings that question the African American's self worth or lean toward a discussion about the perplexities of the growing number of African American males in jail or in mortuary preparation rooms (Manago, 2001). As an alternative, the agenda for the meeting presented African American men with an opportunity to prove to the world that Black men could gather together in one location, with mutual respect and without incident (Allen, 1995). The meeting brought together a diverse group of African Americans. Black men made a pilgrimage from thousands of cities, towns, and communities throughout the country, and represented different social classes, religious

faiths, and political orientations (Marble, 1998). Despite these differences, all of the men could stake a claim to the commonality of having endured the effects of chattel slavery, the Black Codes, Jim Crow racism, and the humiliation of being pushed to the margins of society. The meeting, which we now call the Million Man March, was different than previous meetings in that it was a day of atonement and reconciliation in honor of Black men (Manago, 2001). Despite this positive framing, the media and research have continued to frame the Million Man March through the following problematic lenses.

- controversial status of the meeting's leader, Minister Louis Farrakhan;
- exclusion of women;
- invitation addressed solely to African American men;
- timing of the event, which was on the heels of the decision in the controversial OJ Simpson case;
- the adverse reactions by the African American community and church leaders.

Allen (1995) stated that this historical event, which received worldwide coverage, was one of the few times where Black men were on the front pages of newspapers and featured on television. However, the news was not about murders, drugs, riots, or sports. Instead, the news was about a huge, dignified, and morally powerful gathering by African American men for African American men.

The challenges and differences of opinions with respect to the march failed to resonate with the attendees. Allen (1995) stated that in the face of justifiable doubt, the Million Man March turned out to be an overwhelmingly positive affair. At first glance, the concept of having Minister Louis Farrakhan as the navigating officer responsible for overseeing one million African American men appeared like a protest against the

Washington power structures and policies, but as noted by Allen (1995) if there was to be a protest it was turned inward with a fundamental responsibility placed upon African American men to get their houses in order and assume a greater responsibility both individually and for their communities. As noted by Allen (1995), the Million Man March tapped into an urgent need for Black men to stand up for justice and the principles of self-determination, self-reliance, and respect for oneself and for others.

### **Promise Keepers**

On October 6, 1997, almost two years after the Million Man March, approximately 600,000 men massed on the Mall in Washington, DC, this time for the 'Stand in the Gap' rally sponsored by the Evangelical Christian Men's group, Promise Keepers (Poling & Kirkley, 2000). Not unlike the Million Man March, the Promise Keepers looked to motivate men to have a good relationship with their children. They stressed with integrity the importance of personal responsibility with respect to fathering (Cangield, 1999). The Promise Keepers was a private organization started by former Colorado football coach Bill McCarney. McCarney's dream was to bring thousands of men together for the purpose of publicly renewing and committing themselves to the promises they made to God, their wives, their children, and their fellow citizens (Stanton, 1999). McCarney's belief was that as men pray and convert to Christianity they reclaim their roles as head of the household and leaders in their churches. He believed that this leads to a stronger family and congregational life, a more Godly community, and ultimately a more Godly nation (Poling & Kirkley, 2000). In 1991, McCarney's dream became a reality as more than 4,000 men gathered at the University of Colorado's basketball campus for the Promise Keeper's first event. The next event, two years later,

attracted 50,000 men, and in 1994 events were held in seven cities attracting nearly 300,000 men. These numbers continued to grow and eventually swelled to involve 27 cities and an estimated 1.5 million men (Stanton, 1999).

As the membership of Promise Keepers increased, opponents of the organization's ideology also increased. Feminist and gay men organizations became critics of both the Promise Keepers and the Million Man March. This was due to the alleged exclusionary practices of the two organizations toward women and gay men and their crystallized contestations over gendered and sexual order (Gavanas, 2004). Feminist and gay rights groups criticized both groups for promoting sexism, homophobia, and benevolent patriarchy. In addition, the two Black men's organizations have been accused of reasserting male dominance at a time when men were threatened by feminist and womanist critiques of male violence and male privilege (Poling & Kirkley, 1998). Although the Promise Keepers downplay these accusations, critics have pointed to their vision and agenda, which are geared specifically to men. In addition, critics also have pointed to the Promise Keeper's mission statement where the exclusion of women is unmistakably evident as they promote the bonding and banding together of men in ministries with the intent of evangelizing biblical scriptures and creating a global cultural change (Cole, 2000). For example, Angela Davis (as cited in Poling & Kirkley, 1998) noted that no march, movement, or agenda that defines manhood in the narrowest terms and seeks to make women lesser partners in this quest from equality can be considered a positive step. The leaders of Promise Keepers and the Million Man March rallies were without a dissenting speech on this issue. Instead, they only shared songs, prayers and

sermons to inspire the masses of men to repentance and obedience (Poling & Kirkley, 2000).

## **Chapter 3: Research Design Methodology**

### **Introduction**

This chapter provides an outline of the methodology and strategy that used to assess how nonresident African American fathers practice their role as fathers, perceive their role as fathers, and deal with the barriers and problems associated with fatherhood. Through the use of 13 individual interviews, this study focused specifically on the values that underlie the nonresident African American father's approach to fatherhood while attempting to disprove and or confirm the negative and unilateral prospective that has continued to dominate the research, media, and minds of many Americans. A qualitative method perspective was used to provide readers with an alternative perspective. Moreover, the chapter presents components of the grounded theory approach as it pertains to strategies for the collection of data and as a process to generate or discover a theory grounded in the views of the participants associated with this study (Creswell, 2007).

### **Qualitative Design**

For this study a qualitative method of research was applied. As stated by Creswell (2009), qualitative research is interpretive research where the inquirer is typically involved in a sustained and intensive experience with participants. The decision for utilizing the principles and procedures associated with qualitative research, versus quantitative or mixed methods research, has stemmed from the stereotypes, myths,

and ambiguities associated with the experiences and perceptions of African American fathers. African American men have continued to represent the negative aspects of fatherlessness but not of the positive potential of fatherhood (Roberts, 1998). They have been portrayed as uninterested, uninvolved and uncommitted to their children (Kissman, 1997). Moreover, researchers have presented African American fathers as invisible figures (Bozett & Hanson, 1991; Moynihan, 1965).

Qualitative methods were used to confirm and/or challenge the myths, beliefs perceptions, and stereotypes bestowed upon African American fathers. Qualitative methods give participants the opportunity to voice their opinions and be heard within the academic community. This study provided the opportunity to pull away from simply talking about African American fathers and move from the negative stereotypical unilateral perceptions seen in the extant research. Through qualitative inquiry, this study used talk and listening, to explore the views of 13 nonresident African American fathers. The purpose of this study was to fill a void by offering the academic community a fresh perspective on fatherhood as it relates to the world's generalized universal perspective on fatherhood. In addition, this study presented a fresh perspective on fatherhood as it relates to the universal view towards nonresident African American fathers.

For the last 45 years, there have been numerous studies with consistent, predictable, stagnant, ambiguous and speculative findings in respect to the African American father. This study not only challenged the current research that has to this point played a significant role in shaping the negative view of the nonresident African American father, it also cautioned future researchers to frame the nonresident African American fathers experience in a more comprehensive light and utilize multiple lenses

that can lead to a wider range of perceptions, interpretations, and observations. There is little doubt that too many Black children have resided in single parent homes and have limited meaningful relationships with their fathers. However, in numerous situations African American men have been present in the lives of their children. Unfortunately, these men have been missing from the research. They have been ignored and their contributions to their families have been minimized (Conner & White, 2006).

### **Basics for Qualitative Design**

There is more to the nonresident African American father's story than what has been seen through the media and quantitative research. Quantitative methods in which theories are tested or confirmed worked against the goal of exploration and theory development (Fitzpatrick, Sanders, & Worthen, 2011). Qualitative research has provided the perspectives, voices, and experiences of the general research on fatherhood. Moreover, this qualitative study has added to the research that relates specifically to nonresident African American fathers. A qualitative method approach rather than a quantitative approach has provided a comprehensive and deep understanding of the phenomena. Moreover, the research included interpretation of the knowledge, perspectives, voices, opinions, feelings, behaviors, and experiences of 13 nonresident African American men (Roberts, 2004).

### **Validity in Qualitative Research**

This study incorporated three commonly used validity strategies to enhance the ability to assess the accuracy of findings and convince readers of that accuracy (Creswell, 2009). Triangulation was a validation strategy. Triangulation involves the use of multiple and different source methods, investigators, and theories to provide corroborating

evidence (Ely et al., 1991; Erlandson et al., 1993; Glesne & Peshkin 1992; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 1990). According to Creswell (2007), triangulation involves corroborating evidence from different sources to shed light on a theme or perspective. Moreover, combining multiple theories, methods, and observations strengthens a study and increases credibility and validity of the results. For the purpose of this study the research utilized

- the literature that specifically pertains to fatherhood issues.
- two different methods (interviews and observations of non-verbal and emotional communication) for collecting data.
- the help of an additional researcher during the investigation.

In an effort to promote a valid and credible study, the research also included member checking to further support the accuracy of the study. In member checking, the researcher solicits the views of participants for credibility of the findings and interpretations (Ely et al., 1991; Erlandson et al., 1993; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1994). For the purpose of this study, the participants were asked to review the preliminary analyses and give their view on these analyses. Moreover, they were asked if the resulting themes and interpretations associated with their interviews were correct and whether anything was missing (Creswell, 2007).

The final validation strategy utilized was peer review or debriefing. Lincoln and Guba (1985) defined the role of the peer reviewer as one who acts as a “devil’s advocate.” For this study the peer reviewers included the committee chair, who served as a resource in both quantitative and qualitative methods and two committee members, one

who is an expert in the field of fatherhood and family studies, the other, an expert on qualitative methods. With respect to this study, these individuals asked tough questions about methods, meanings, and interpretations. In addition, these individuals kept the researcher honest (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### **Research Context**

The 13 individual interviews were held at various locations spanning from New York to Connecticut. Five participants were selected from a pool of fathers associated with the New Haven Family Alliance (NHFA). Eight participants were selected using the qualitative snowballing method.

The mission of NHFA is to improve the quality of life for all families in New Haven. NHFA's aim is to support families at all stages of development with programs such as the Intensive Family Preservation and Reunification Program and the Moving to Work Program.

For the purpose of this study, the focus was on The Male Involvement Network (MIN), a program that falls under the umbrella of NHFA. In 1997, representatives from the New Haven Family Alliance, Incorporated began a dialogue with community leaders about increasing the role and responsibility of non-custodial fathers. With the help of local and state direct service providers, administrators, consumers, and funders, MIN was launched. MIN has worked with low-income nonresident and non-custodial fathers in Greater New Haven. The organization's goal has been to help fathers establish strong, loving relationships with their children. MIN has accomplished this by helping empower fathers to become nurturing and responsible forces in their children's lives, impacting policy, and promoting advocacy and support for all stages of development. MIN has

utilized a public health approach to address and prevent problems. This has included the use of three levels of interventions:

- Universal strategies that target everyone in the population  
(10,000+ people /year)
- Selective strategies that are focused on populations with heightened risks (150 fathers and 225 children/year)
- Indicated strategies aimed at those in the population who have already experienced or been affected by the issues (80 fathers and 400 children/year)

In addition, MIN has focused on nine core intervention strategies aimed at helping fathers reach their goals. All participants in the MIN program take part in a 12-week course. During the 12 weeks, MIN works with various member agencies and offers the following to fathers:

- Education: Parenting classes, child development training, and life skills training.
- Employment and Career Development: Resume development, interview skills training, career development, job search, employment referrals, and employment readiness.
- Family and Child Support: Support groups, clinical services, court readiness, and court advocacy services
- Health: Health education, connection to health screenings, connection to health insurance, and child abuse and neglect programming and intervention supports.

- Housing: Housing resources, foreclosure counseling, and first time home ownership education.
- Legal Services: Legal representation, referral to legal aid, referral to statewide legal services, education about legal rights and responsibilities, paternity establishment, mediation, and establishing visitation orders.
- Mediation, Access, and Self-sufficiency: Supervised visitation services, supervised community activities, mediation, and establishing visitation orders.
- Outreach and Case Management: Outreach services, fatherhood support group, and community forums.
- Economic Stability and Self-sufficiency: Money management training, financial planning, financial literacy, and budgeting.

MIN has been run by committed fathers who use their experiences of being a father to provide a first hand account of the often difficult process of becoming a father.

In addition to interviewing participants from the MIN program, a snowball sampling strategy was used for the selection of the remaining eight participants. Snowball sampling, a method used by both quantitative and qualitative researchers (Patten, 2009), is a purposeful sampling technique that identifies cases of interest from people who know of cases that are rich with respect to information on a particular topic (Miles & Huberman, 1994). If the researcher can identify, convince and or gain the trust of a participant or an individual interested in the topic, this individual might put the researcher in contact with others, who might be interested in being potential participants for the study (Patten, 2009).

Dr. Janice Kelly, an expert in the field of fatherhood and family studies, provided contact information for the owner of the Real Dad's Network. The Real Dad's Network is an action oriented organization whose mission has been to strengthen the institution of Black fatherhood by promoting positive aspects of fatherhood in all medians while connecting men with resources designed to empower them to be present in the lives of their children, as well as to be providers, protectors and peacemakers for their families. Once contact was made, the owner of the Real Dad's Network made a request to the pool of fathers within the organization who fit the criteria of the study. The initial request resulted in one participant with an interest in participating in the study. Upon completion of the individual interview, the participant offered to send out an email blast to inform fellow members of the Real Dads Network about the study. The email blast was successful and resulted in three more participants interested in the study. These three new participants were then individually interviewed. The last four participants were also selected using the snowballing method. However in this case, participants were selected from the researcher's community.

### **Gatekeeper**

As noted by Creswell (2009), it is important to gain access to research sites by seeking the approval of gatekeepers. These are individuals at the research sites who provide access to the site and allow or permit the research to be done. For the purpose of this study, the researcher developed a working relationship with MIN's project manager who agreed to act as the gatekeeper. The project manager selected five African American nonresident fathers from the pool of fathers associated with the MIN program. The individual interviews were held in a conference room at New Haven Family Alliance.

The individual interviews of the eight remaining participants were conducted in various agreed upon and convenient locations in New York City. Two of the eight participants were interviewed over the telephone.

### **Research Participants**

The population for this study consisted of 13 nonresident African American fathers. Their ages ranged from 16-63. All participants selected for individual interviews were offered a stipend of \$10.00 for their time and contribution to the study. A confidentiality agreement was given to participants to sign at the time of each interview (Appendix A). Participants were also asked to fill out a consent form (Appendix B). In addition, a sign-in sheet was used to collect the participant's demographic information (Appendix C).

For the purpose of this study, a purposive sampling approach was used. Creswell (2009) stated that the idea behind qualitative research is to purposefully select participants or sites that will best help the researchers understand the problem and research questions. The MIN program and the Real Dad's Network were selected because the researcher believed that that these organizations would provide the desired information for the study (Fitzpatrick, Sanders, & Worthen, 2011). The programs include a pool of African American fathers as clients and fathering recourses that teach men how to be better fathers to their children. In addition, both organizations were able to locate fathers that claimed the title of nonresident African American father and offer these fathers, in particular, the opportunity to participate in the study.

## **Data Collection Instruments**

The study utilized components from Creswell's (2007) compendium of data collection approaches in qualitative research. The compendium of data is an evolving list of qualitative data collection approaches that researchers can use when gathering data.

The compendium of data is located in Appendix D.

Creswell's (2007) list consists of four categories:

1. Observations
2. Interviews
3. Documents
4. Audiovisual materials

**Interviews.** For this study, 13 nonresident African American fathers were interviewed. Data was collected from February 2012 through September of 2012. Interviews were used for learning the perspectives, attitudes, behaviors, and experiences of 13 nonresident African American fathers. The decision to use methods and strategies of qualitative interviews stems from its acceptance as being the most widely used data collection strategy in qualitative research (Sandelowski 2002, Nunkoosing, 2005). Lambert and Loiselle (2008) agreed that individual interviews are the undisputed 'gold standard' of qualitative research.

Interviews are useful when the nature of the information collected is more ambiguous and greater depth is needed (Fitzpatrick, Sanders, & Worthen 2011). The researcher selected qualitative research interviews because interviews seek to, and can, describe the meanings of the central themes in the life experiences of the nonresident African American father. For this study the individual interviews helped build an

understanding of the meaning of what nonresident African American fathers have to say (Kvale, 1996). Moreover, qualitative interviews are particularly useful for getting the story behind a participant's experiences; stories that can be at times personal in nature. Unlike quantitative research, qualitative research provides the option to conduct interviews and to probe into the unknown sensitive areas.

Under the category of interviews the research utilized components from Creswell's compendium of data collection. The research included semi-structured interviews with 13 nonresident African American fathers. Each of the 13 interviews lasted no more than 90 minutes and no less than 30 minutes. All interviews were digitally recorded and files were saved on the researcher's external hard drive. Two legal Administrative Assistants were hired to transcribe the data. Each assistant has over 30 years of experience transcribing documents. Audio files are stored in a secure location and will be destroyed after three years.

The interview protocol was taken from Julion et al.'s (2007) study of African American nonresident fathers' views on parental involvement. Julion, the lead author in the study, granted permission (Appendix E) to use the following six open-ended interview questions for this study.

- Describe what it's like being a father?
- We have all probably heard stories, or even know people who are very involved with their children. What does being an involved father mean?
- As I listened to you, what I heard is that being a father is a mixture of joys and challenges. I'd like to hear more about what makes it easier or harder to be involved with your children?

- How did your relationship with your own father or father figure influence your involvement with your children?
- In what way does being an African American make your role different than other fathers? What do you think is the role of a father?
- If you had five minutes of fame, and you had your chance to tell the world about fathers what would you tell them about the African American father?

In addition to the six open-ended questions, additional probing questions were used when needed (Appendix F). Field notes were taken during the individual interviews and two digital recording devices, one primary and one backup, were used to record the participants involved in the study.

**Documents.** Under the category of documents the researcher maintained a journal during the data collection period. In addition, the researcher took field notes before during and after each interview. The digital audio files were reviewed immediately after each individual interview.

The researcher also used a reflective electronic journal during the research study. Keeping a reflective journal is a common practice in qualitative research. It is a strategy that can facilitate reflexivity, whereby researchers use their journal in an effort to create transparency within the research process, and explore the impact of critical self-reflection on research design (Ortlitt, 2008).

### **Data Analysis – Grounded Theory**

A grounded theory approach was used as a process to generate or discover a theory that is grounded in the views of the participants (Creswell, 2007). For the purpose of this study, components of grounded theory were used as a data collection strategy.

After each interview, data were analyzed using open coding. As defined by Corbin and Strauss (2008) open coding refers to breaking data (such as interview transcriptions) apart and delineating concepts to stand for blocks of raw data. For example, within this study, if a nonresident African American father referred to feelings of uncertainty, the word uncertainty was used as a code. After further scrutiny of the data, subcategories were created. For example, the word uncertainty had two subcategories: uncertainty about parental involvement and uncertainty about parental responsibility.

The second step in grounded theory is axial coding. At this stage, transcripts of interviews, memos, and notes were re-examined. Axial coding was used to identify relationships between the categories and themes identified during open coding (Patten, 2009). Corbin and Strauss (2008) called this the act of relating concepts and categories to each other. For example, in some cases, unemployment caused uncertainty and also decreased involvement with a child.

The final stage in grounded theory is the development of core categories, which are the overarching groups under which the other categories and subcategories belong. Corbin and Strauss (2008) stated that the core categories represent a phenomenon or main theme of the research that emerges from the data.

In an effort to organize, analyze, explore, and visualize the information obtained from the participants, data were analyzed using NVivo 10 a popular qualitative research software program for analyzing unstructured information. For the purpose of this study, NVivo 10 supported the processes of classifying, sorting and arranging the information obtained through the 13 individual interviews. NVivo 10 also assisted the process of coding, identifying patterns and themes, and developing a meaningful conclusion in the

form of a theory. Five themes emerged from the data analysis and will be discussed in Chapter 4.

### **Chapter Summary**

The research design was qualitative and involved interviews of 13 nonresident African American fathers. Eleven of the interviews were conducted face to face and two were conducted over the telephone. Six open-ended questions along with probing questions were used. The interviews were recorded on a high quality digital recorder and transcribed by two professional transcribers. The data was transferred to NVivo, a qualitative and mixed methods research software program. This software was a crucial component in that it helped collect, organize, and analyze the content from the 13 interviews. For the purpose of this study, components of grounded theory were used and after a careful and detailed analysis of the data, five themes emerged from the data collected. A theory that resembles a hypothesis emerged and is at the end of the analysis. The five themes are discussed in Chapter 4, and the implications of those themes are discussed in Chapter 5 as implications for researchers, policymakers, social workers, counselors, and educators to use to capture and broaden perspectives, increase knowledge, and fill gaps, while adding the voices, views, experiences, and interpretations of 13 nonresident African American fathers to the research literature.

## **Chapter 4: Results**

### **Introduction**

The dissertation research study was conducted to examine the gap in previous studies of nonresident African American fathers. Specifically, the study involved an inquiry into how this population practices their roles as fathers, perceives their roles as fathers, and deal with the barriers and problems associated with fatherhood. After a detailed analysis of the data using methods consistent with grounded theory, five themes emerged from responses given to the six open-ended questions presented to each participant. In addition, one overarching theory emerged. The five themes that emerged were (a) stereotype phobia, (b) fathers in default, (c) money matters, (d) need for acknowledgement and change in perception, and (e) prerequisites for evaluating the nonresident African American father. The overarching core theory was a sense of powerlessness. This chapter provides an analysis and interpretation of the demographic data, the five themes, the overarching core theory that emerged from the themes and the individual interviews, and a detailed exploration of the answers to the six interview questions.

### **Demographic Data**

The demographic data for this qualitative study (Table 4.1) is based on individual interviews conducted with 13 nonresident African American fathers. Three of the fathers reported that they were unemployed at the time of the interview. The remaining 10 participants each reported employment in jobs ranging from roles in unskilled work to

management/executive positions in the public, private, and nonprofit sectors. Seven of the fathers reported that they are in new relationships and married, and the other six reported being either divorced or single. Each participant reported that they are African American. The participating nonresident African American fathers ranged from 18 - 63 years old with an average age of 40.38 years (SD = 11.21). The fathers had from one to four children (M = 2.3, SD = 1.03), from zero to two sons (M = 1.1, SD = 0.64), and from zero to three daughters (M = 1.2, SD = 1.17). The children of the fathers who participated in this study showed a large range of ages (from 1 to 39 years of age), with eight of them being age 18 or older. Overall the mean age of all children was 13.9 years (SD = 8.4). The fathers' sons ranged from 2 to 22 years of age (M = 12.29, SD = 6.28), and daughters ranged from one to 39 years of age (M = 15.4, SD = 9.9).

### **Data Analysis and Findings**

To answer the research questions, 13 fathers who fit the criteria of nonresident, African American, with a minimum of one or more children were selected and interviewed. Eleven of the interviews were conducted face to face. The remaining two interviews were conducted over the telephone. Each interview lasted from 30 minutes to 90 minutes. Each participant answered six open-ended questions along with probing questions (Appendix F).

In order to maintain confidentiality, the following pseudonyms were used to identify the participants selected for this study: Paul, Jim, Sammy, Kevin, Melvin, Harry, Bruce, Billy, Mike, Rodney, Tony, Perry and Thomas. Demographic information for each participant is provided in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1

*Demographic Data of Participants*

Pseudonym	Age	# of Children	# of Boys	# of Girls	Ethnicity	Occupation	Current Status
Paul	35	2	1	1	AA	Bridge Tender	Single
Jim	29	2	1	1	AA	Purchasing Agent	Single
Sammy	33	2	1	1	AA	Director	Single
Kevin	50	2	2		AA	Adult Ed Inst.	Married
Melvin	44	4	1	3	AA	Unemployed	Single
Harry	47	1		1	AA	Self Employed	Single
Bruce	63	3		3	AA	Non-Profit Org.	Divorced
Billy	35	3	1	2	AA	General Manager	Married
Mike	50	1	1		AA	Investigator UPS	Married
Rodney	43	3	2	1	AA	CEO Youth Org.	Married
Tony	39	1	1		AA	Detective	Married
Perry	39	4	1	3	AA	Unemployed	Married
Thomas	18	2	2		AA	Unemployed	Married

**Qualitative Design/Grounded Theory**

A qualitative methods perspective was used to an alternative perspective to the question of how African American nonresident fathers perceive their roles. Grounded theory guided the data collection and analysis as a way to generate or discover a theory grounded in the views of the participants associated with the study (Creswell, 2007).

Qualitative methods give participants the opportunity to voice their opinions and be heard by the academic community. In the dissertation study, qualitative inquiry was used to talk with, listen to, and explore the views of 13 nonresident African American fathers. The purpose of this study was to fill a void in the research literature by offering the academic community a fresh perspective on nonresident African American fatherhood as it relates to the world's generalized universal perspective of these fathers.

Components of grounded theory were used as a data collection and analysis strategy. After each interview, open coding and axial coding was used. As defined by Corbin and Strauss (2008) open coding refers to breaking data apart and delineating concepts to stand for blocks of raw data. Axial coding was used to identify relationships between the categories and themes identified during open coding (Patten, 2009). Corbin and Strauss (2008) call this the act of relating concepts and categories to each other. The final stage in grounded theory is the development of core categories which is the main overarching category under which the other categories and subcategories belong. The core categories represent a phenomenon, the main theme or theory of the research that emerges from the data. It is important to remember that the emerging themes and the theory are not generalizations that can be applied to all African American nonresident fathers. The themes and the theory presented in this chapter are the experiences of the fathers from this particular study.

### **Stereotype Phobia**

In an effort to avoid being stereotyped as a deadbeat dad, the fathers from this study indicated that it is essential to correct or make amends for the alleged errors, weaknesses, and problems associated with African American fathers. Of the 13 fathers,

10 reported that they often feel a need to distance themselves from the negative perceptions and stereotypes associated with African American fathers. These negative perceptions invoke a kind of fear that leaves them vulnerable. These fathers are in fear of being stereotyped as a deadbeat dad, they are in fear of how they are perceived by others, they are in fear of how their own children will perceive them as fathers, and they are in fear of the effect that these negative stereotypes have on their decisions as fathers. For the study participants, it is essential that they are aware of both their relationships with their children, and the actions, perceptions and communications that surround their relationships with their children because this is what shapes the perception and the stereotypes. This is what makes stereotypes long lasting and concrete.

When asked about some of the challenges that African American fathers face, Jim stated the following:

When my son is in need of something I go out of my way to get it for him. Some might say that this is what a father is supposed to do, and I agree. However, other fathers go out of their way to provide for different reasons. A lot of times I end up overcompensating so that no one can say that I don't provide for my son. For example, if my son needs some sneakers, instead of buying him one pair, I buy him three. All of this has nothing to do with him needing three pairs of sneakers, and everything to do with me not being stereotyped as a bad father. So in a sense I'm doing things for him out of love and out of not being stereotyped as a bad dad. I don't think that other fathers have to deal with this shit.

Here is a father who obviously loves his son and will do anything for him. However because of the negative stereotypical perceptions that Jim feels are present in the minds

of many, his decisions with respect to his son must be questioned or at the least examined. It is obvious that Jim responds to his son's needs with the kind of love that a father is expected to have for his child. He loves his child and will go out of his way to get him what is needed. Hence, it can be concluded that Jim's decisions are based on his love for his son and his commitment in being responsible for getting his son what he needs. What is problematic is that in addition to the agreed upon and recognized components of fathering, Jim also feels obligated to add negative concrete stereotypes to his decision making process. Here is a father whose decisions are driven by love for his child, by his feelings of what a father is suppose to do for his son, but also his fear of being stereotyped as a deadbeat dad.

The theme of combatting stereotypes became more prominent after speaking to Paul:

Negative stereotypes about Black fathers are the norm and if it does not affect you consciously, it's definitely going to affect you subconsciously. It has become normal for folks to think negative of African American fathers. I'm not going to say that it's preprogrammed into everyone's mind, but it's programmed into our minds. When we talk about our kids, we are always thinking about the perception of the Black father and when we are finished talking about our kids we always think about how we were perceived as a Black father. I don't think that White fathers grow up with this mentality.

Paul confirmed what is discussed in many of the research on African American fathers. Paul believes that the negative perception of the African American father is so salient that it is perceived as a normal acceptable analysis. This could mean that anything

contrary to this view may be viewed as abnormal. According to Paul, the negative stereotype of the African American father is not only in the minds of many, it is programmed into the mind of the African American father as well. This point of view could alter the way men practice their role as fathers, perceive their role as fathers, deal with the barriers and obstacles associated with fatherhood, and shape the values that underline their approach to fatherhood. Paul stated that this is a component of fatherhood that other fathers, namely White fathers, do not have to deal with.

As previously discussed, Paul believes that the negative perception of the African American father is so salient that in the eyes of many, it is perceived as a normal acceptable analysis. The participants, however, indicated that they worked to resist that negative perception, and Harry provided an example of what happens when the negative stereotypical perception of the African American father comes in contact with a seemingly abnormal but positive example of African American fatherhood:

When I go to school with my daughter, it's like a shock to people. No one will say it to your face, but you can feel it, you can see it on their faces. This makes me want to do more. We have to go the extra mile to prove that we are worthy. But what is more important than what they think of us are the images that we have of each other, the images that are in our heads. We know that the world thinks that we are going to leave, we are not good fathers, that we have 3 baby mamas and we don't take care of any of them. You know what I mean? All of this makes you want to prove people wrong, it makes you want to do more, and it makes you want to prove to the world that their stereotype is wrong. As a Black father I take

pride in saying, No, I'm not part of that stereotype. I'm a human being that's a father.

When Harry stated that he takes his daughter to school, this is, according to the negative stereotypical view, an abnormal occurrence. As a result of this perceived abnormal occurrence, those in close proximity to Harry and his daughter appear to be surprised to see the two together, perhaps confused or unsure why they are together. Though this has a positive effect on Harry and makes him want to do more, both Harry and Paul seemed to focus and worry about the consequences these negative stereotypical perceptions have on others like them.

Table 4.2 summarizes the theme of stereotype phobia based on the pattern of ideas extracted from the raw data. The data illustrates the participants' awareness of stereotypes, consequences of stereotypes, and ways the participants cope with stereotypes.

### **Fathers in Default: An Impetus for Generational Growth and Change**

Of the 13 fathers interviewed, 7 reported that their own fathers failed at providing them with the necessary supports and knowledge needed to help them to become effective fathers. However, instead of creating a generational replica of history, the fathers in the study used their fathers' inadequacies as a catalyst for effective fathering with their own children. Consequently, their fathers' inability to effectively father them became the impetus for generational growth and change within their family unit. For the fathers in the study, their father's failures gave them a reason to live and the motivation to work toward personal redefinition and transformation (Coley, 2001).

Table 4.2

*Stereotype Phobia*

Related Concepts	Supporting Quotes
An awareness of the negative stereotypes aimed at nonresident African American fathers	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I don't provide for my kids.</li> <li>2. We are not good fathers.</li> <li>3. Negative stereotypes about Black fathers are the norm.</li> <li>4. We know that the world thinks that we are going to leave, we are not good fathers, that we have 3 baby mamas and we don't take care of any of them.</li> </ol>
Consequences of stereotypes aimed at nonresident African American fathers	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What is more important than what they think of us are the images that we have of each other, the images that are in our heads.</li> <li>2. When we talk about our kids we always think about how we are being perceived as a black father.</li> <li>3. When I go to school with my daughter, it is like a shock to people.</li> </ol>
Coping mechanisms	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. When my son needs something, I go out of my way to get it for him.</li> <li>2. We have to go the extra mile to prove that we are worthy.</li> <li>3. I take pride in saying that I am not part of that stereotype.</li> <li>4. If my son needs some sneakers, instead of buying him one pair, I buy him three so that no one can say that I don't provide for my son.</li> </ol>

The data analysis showed the participating fathers actively shaping their roles through improvisation, reformulation, and by creatively piecing together bits and pieces of fathering behaviors. Daly (1995) suggested that men in modern American society regard their fathers not as role models, but as a point of reference to begin sorting out the ways they want to be different. This became evident as the majority of the fathers from the dissertation study vowed to be better fathers than their own fathers while using their fathers' shortcomings as a point of reference and creatively carving out their own way of effective fathering. For instance, Mike stated the following of his father:

Unfortunately for me my dad left when I was six years old so as a little boy I grew up knowing that if I had a son, I would always be there for him. So in a sense, my father's absence played a tremendous role in who I am as a father.

Harry also talked about how, as a child, he learned to accept his father's infrequent visits. However, Harry's knowledge of his friends' fathers confirmed that his father's behavior was not normal and that it was in fact abnormal. Harry used his father's abnormal behavior as an impetus for growth and change in his life. While growing up, Harry knew that he would be a better father to his child. Harry stated the following:

As a child growing up I learned to accept the fact that my father was more of a visitor than a father. He would come around for holidays, birthdays, cook-outs, and Christmas. Because of my father's inability to be a father, I grew up without knowing one soul in his family. I have a whole generation of cousins, uncles and aunts from my father's side and I don't know them. Isn't this crazy? As a child, I accepted this as the norm, but as a grown up I knew that I would do much better for my child. I could never do this to my daughter.

Perry talked about the structural changes within his family and the transformation of roles that occurred during his father's absence. At a young age Perry witnessed not only the destruction of his parents relationship, he also witnessed the destruction of his father's role as a father. This is something that Perry believes did not have to happen. Perry indicated that he believes it is possible to maintain the role as father even if you are not in a relationship with the biological mother. Now that Perry is a nonresident father, he has used his father's inability to maintain a relationship with him as an impetus for growth and change within his own family. Unlike his father, Harry stated that he would not "give up" his role as a father. Perry stated the following:

I was 13 when my mother and father split up. It was during that time that my father's role as a parent diminished and I became my own man. My mother became my father and she was the only person that felt I had to listen to. When I would go to his house, I did not want to be there. Once he was out of the house I felt like, 'man, get out of here, you can't discipline me. I'm the one who made Mom breakfast this morning'. Looking back on it now, I don't think that it had to be this way. My dad simply gave up. This is something that I will never do with my kids. I live away from my kids but I still have a relationship with them. A respectable one I might add.

Although Thomas also grew up without the presence of a father, his experience differed significantly from the others. The end result, however, was the same. Thomas' father was in a motorcycle accident and died when Thomas was young. His mother remarried, and for a while his relationship with his stepfather was fine. However, as Thomas grew older he started to feel a strain in his relationship with his stepfather.

Thomas accepted the fact that he was happy just as long as his stepfather was keeping his mother happy. But when Thomas became a father, he realized that stepping into the role as father is important and that takes a lot of effort. Thomas used this experience with this stepfather as an impetus for growth and change. As a father, Thomas vowed that he would be engaged and attentive to the needs of his children. Thomas stated the following:

My dad is not here; he passed away...a motorcycle accident. My mother remarried and my stepdad and I became close. But as I got older, our relationship changed. I realized that he was really there for my mother. At the time I was okay with this, you know, just as long as he was keeping my mom happy, I was happy. Now that I have kids I see things differently. As a stepfather, he could have been more engaged with me. I promised myself that I would always be there for my children. You have to make sure that you put some effort into raising your children because it is very important.

Jim also had an absent father, but in his case, an uncle served as a model for what it means to be a man and a father. After Jim's mother and father separated, his father moved into an apartment about 15 minutes away. Jim thought that this meant that he would still see his father, but this did not happen. Instead of crediting his father for shaping him into the man that he is today, Jim recognizes his uncle as the impetus for growth and change. Jim stated the following about his uncle:

One time while hanging out my car ran out of gas. My first thought was to call my uncle, not my father. Even though his wife was sick, my uncle got out of his bed and came to my rescue with a gas tank and a \$20.00 bill. This is something that I

will never forget. This is what fatherhood is all about. My goal is to do the absolute opposite of what my father did. I'm going to be there for my kids.

In sum, the participants in this study indicated that they used their father's elusive behavior as an impetus for change and growth within their families.

Table 4.3 summarizes the theme: Fathers in Default. An Impetus for Generational Growth and Change. Analysis of the raw data revealed a pattern of ideas relevant to the concerns of the participants. Specifically, Table 4.3 illustrates the participant's acknowledgement of their own father's failures and how the participants used the failures as an impetus for change within their own family units.

Table 4.3

*Fathers in Default: An Impetus for Generational Growth and Change*

Related Concepts	Supporting Quotes
Fathers own fathers failing to provide them with lifetime support	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Unfortunately my dad left when I was six years old.</li> <li>2. As a child growing up I learned to accept that my father was more of a visitor than a father.</li> <li>3. My mother became my father.</li> <li>4. My first thought was to call my uncle not my father.</li> </ol>
Making generational change	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I became my own man.</li> <li>2. I live away from my kids but I still have a relationship with them. A respectable one I might add.</li> <li>3. I promised myself that I would always be there for my children.</li> <li>4. My goal is to do the absolute opposite of what my dad did.</li> </ol>

### **Money Matters: It's about Life Support, not Financial Support**

All 13 of the participants stressed the importance of financial support for their children and acknowledged their role as a financial provider. However, the participants agreed that financial support should not be a prerequisite for the amount of time they are allowed to spend with their children. The fathers stated that their disagreements with the biological mothers on issues of financial support have decreased the amount of contact that they have with their children. Fathers feel like too much emphasis is placed on the need to provide financial support and not enough is placed on the importance of the father's involvement. As shown in Table 4.3, five of the fathers questioned the significance that mothers place on financial support especially when it prevents the fathers from seeing their children. For instance, Jim stated the following:

When we first broke up, I didn't see my son for three weeks. This is because we were fighting about money. One time my ex-girlfriend called me and said she needed \$200.00 for milk and Pampers. I said, what kind of milk are you buying for \$200.00? I then brought over to her house two tins of milk and two big boxes of Pampers. After doing this, she refused to let me see my son until I agreed to give her the \$200.00.

Paul's feelings on this issue were consistent with Jim's. In the past, Paul has struggled with trying to find a job while also trying to maintain a relationship with his children. It was during this time in Paul's life that he was able to see how money, or the lack of it, could determine one's significance as a father. Though researchers claimed that the father's ability or inability to settle financial obligations no longer are viewed by scholars as a key ingredient of good fathering (Devault et al. 2008), Paul believes that if

you are a nonresident father without a job or without a sufficient amount of money, this alone can prevent you from seeing your children, which is a key component or ingredient of being a good father. Paul believes that this is wrong and stated the following:

When I didn't have a job, I really didn't get to see my kids a lot. The excuse that my ex-girlfriend gave me was that I wasn't giving her money so I couldn't see the kids. I feel like even if I wasn't taken care of them financially, I should still get to see my kids. I am more than just a means of financial support. I go to PTA meetings, I'm interested in their after school activities, I make an effort to know how they are doing physically. As an involved father, I am involved in their life. It's not just about financial support, it's about life support.

Kevin agreed that he is more than just a financial provider, but this fact fails to resonate and has caused problems in many relationships. As previously stated, women have been less likely to marry or otherwise stick with men who offer little financial advantage (Roberts, 1998). African American men who have failed to fit the patriarchal model of the husband who sustains his family economically will also fail to measure up to the ideology in which the husband represents the family in the public arena (Cott, 1977). Kevin stated the following:

I don't provide as much financial support as I want to right now, but I do provide a lot of other things for my kids. I am responsible for picking them up from daycare, I am a problem solver and I am on top of everything that is going on in their lives.

Perry also feels as though he is more than just a financial provider and believes that mothers fail to understand the importance of the father's role. This failure to

understand the various components of fatherhood is dangerous in that it merges the significance of the various roles into one category, which is the role of financial provider. When this occurs, the result is fathers like Perry who feel that their children are being held hostage because they have failed at the role of financial provider. Perry stated,

There are mothers out there that don't understand that we can't get a job, that the economy is bad. My role as a father is important and it should not be compromised because I cannot pay child support, you know what I mean? I know that there are fathers out there that fail when it comes to seeing their child, but there are also mothers out there that play a part in this too. They prevent fathers from being fathers because of money and if they don't get what they want, they hold the child hostage until they do.

Harry also is convinced that his ex-girlfriend has placed money over the welfare of their daughter., In response, Harry has removed the significance of money by giving the biological mother everything that she wants, which included money and his car. Harry feels his daughter's relationship with him is far more important than fighting over money. He said,

I don't care about money. You see, I've known all of my life that I can make money, I can hustle. You see those old boxes right there? I could sell those if I had to. My main concern is to raise my daughter to be a productive citizen. This is something that money cannot buy. So my ex-girlfriend fought me and got the money that she wanted and she got my car, but I got something more valuable. I got shared parenting. My ex-girlfriend did what she had to do to get the money. This is what was important to her. I did what I had to do which was to get more

time with my daughter. As it stands now, I get to see my daughter 14 days out of the month.

Table 4.4 summarizes the theme Money Matters: It's about Life Support, not Financial Support. Analysis of the raw data showed a pattern of ideas relevant to the concerns of the participants with respect to financial support, participant's time and involvement with children when financial support is problematic, and participants view on the saliency of non-monetary support.

Table 4.4

*Money Matters: It's about Life Support, Not Financial Support*

Related Concepts	Supporting Quotes
Financial support as a prerequisite for time and involvement	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. When we first broke up, I didn't see my son for three weeks.</li> <li>2. The excuse my girlfriend gave me was that I wasn't giving her the money so I could not see the kids.</li> <li>3. They prevent fathers from being fathers because of money.</li> </ol>
Providing non-monetary support when financial support is problematic	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. My role as a father should not be compromised because I cannot pay child support.</li> <li>2. She got the money and my car, but I got something more valuable, I got shared parenting.</li> <li>3. I am involved in their life. It is not about child support, it is about life support</li> <li>4. Women believe that a father's responsibility is solely tied to a paycheck</li> </ol>

## **The Need for Acknowledgment and Change in Perception**

One of the interview questions provided each father with an opportunity to tell the world about the nonresident African American father. The salient theme that emerged from the majority of fathers was a need to be acknowledged for their commitment to fatherhood. In addition the fathers made an appeal for a change in the way that they are perceived. In the following quote, Harry talks about how his perception changed after he became a father.

Now that I'm a father, I've met so many other Black fathers that are involved and engaged with their children. It was like I acquired a new network of men that I didn't know anything about. The unfortunate thing about these guys is that they don't get any shine. I've been to some of these large Black organizations and seen with my own eyes, Black men that are doing good, Black men that are engaged with their children. I could guarantee that if you go online, every week you will find an African American father's organization that's doing something good for their children and their community. But like I said, these fathers don't get any shine! There needs to be more of a focus on the positive aspects of fatherhood, especially for this group of fathers.

This comment reveals a major discrepancy between the negative absent father images of Black men described in the demographic studies and the depiction of Black men in fathering roles which have emerged from structured interviews, narratives, and ethnographic investigations (Conner & White, 2006). This observation was made numerous times throughout the interviewing process. The fathers from the dissertation study disagreed with the images and perception that have been used to define who they

are as fathers. The structured interviews and narratives from the study painted a different picture than that of the negative perceptions salient in the extant research. In the dissertation study, the criminal, drug dealer, and the gangster rapper images that are portrayed in the research and in the media are replaced by imagery and descriptions of nonresident African American fathers in positive fathering roles where they are loving and engaged in their child's life. As stated by Harry and Rodney, the men feel they do not get any "shine" and "need to be recognized" and acknowledged for their commitment to fatherhood and their children. Rodney stated the following:

African American fathers are to be cherished, loved, and appreciated. They are nowhere near the bad guys that our society has depicted them to be. There's a hell of a lot of Black fathers who are warm, loving, and caring towards their children and they need to be recognized.

This theme became more prominent after speaking to Billy who pointed out that nonresident African American fathers are present in the lives of their children, that they are involved, and that they have helped to shape the lives of many of the individuals that we look up to today. Billy stated,

Folks need to know that we are around, we are here, and we are not a dying species, so forget about what you heard or what you think you know about the Black man as a father. We are doing right by our children and you need to take the time to talk to us because you will learn some valuable lessons on how to be a father. We also need to be acknowledged because a lot of the folks that you look up to, that actor, politician, professional athlete, police officer or even the mail carrier, have African American fathers who gave them guidance, who loved them,

who got them to the point where they are right now, and who cared enough to give them the valuable life skills that you have grown so fond of.

Bruce also agreed with this thought, but went a step further and talked extensively about the antiquated beliefs with respect to the nonresident African American father's reality versus what can be deemed as stereotypical. Bruce strongly opposed the belief that one parent is better than the other, especially when the parent whose parenting skills are in question are the fathers. Researchers have challenged the notion of single parenthood as preferable, and have reached a consensus that a father's special parenting style is highly complementary to what mothers do and is important in its own right to optimum child rearing (Popenoe, 1999). Though this view has been widely accepted, Bruce believes that it is not salient in the minds of law officials or significant enough to change Family Court laws. Bruce stated the following:

African American fathers are no different than any other ethnic group of fathers that love their kids. We love our children just as much and we should be acknowledged for this. We can even make the case that we are culturally stronger when it comes to fatherly involvement. But this is not what the media would have you to believe. Instead, the media, the research, and the public chooses to focus on the few challenged Black fathers that unfortunately do not have the tools to deal with the institutional obstacles and antiquated beliefs with respect to who we are as men. With family court laws that don't have room for compromise, law officials with misguided beliefs that one parent is better than the other, and women that believe that a father's responsibility is solely tied to a paycheck, it's

no wonder why the stereotypes of the Black fathers are so negative and prominent.

Paul focused more on the lack of positive perceptions with respect to nonresident African American fathers and how negative perceptions have created negative self-imposed, self-proclaimed stereotypical views among this population of fathers. Researchers believed that negative stereotypes and perceptions of African Americans not only work on the minds of the non-African American public, research has indicated that African Americans have accepted the negative stereotypes society has ascribed to them as well as believing the positive ones society has ascribed to Whites. (Bayton, 1941; Proenza & Strickland, 1965; Steckler, 1957). Paul stated the following:

Because of the negative perceptions and stereotypes, there is a good deal of Black women out there that hate Black men. What ends up happening is that these same Black women share these beliefs with their daughters and they also end up with a negative perception of not only the one Black man that failed them, but the entire population of Black men. This perspective takes a toll on the Black man's self-esteem and I think that some of us get to a point where we feel and believe that it's true, that we aren't worth much as fathers or as men.

The fathers' responses indicated a frustration with the situation between the fathers' and the mothers' of their children. Bruce's insights offered a potential solution to many of the issues discussed in this section:

We need to get more Black mothers to the table because they are a big part of the solution to this problem and we need to have a more open dialog with them. Also, I believe that you get what you aspire for. If all we're doing is talking about the

negative aspects of Black fathers, we will end up with a new generation of young Black men and women who accept these negative perceptions. So we have to raise the expectation in the African American community. We have to flood the media with the positive images that do exist, and as a consequence we will then raise the expectations. This is what we want in terms of our family and our children to grow up into. Positive images will bring on positive acknowledgement which will bring on the perception that it is possible to be involved in your child's life, that it is desirable to be in your child's life, and that this is the norm. To do this we need to start by acknowledging the Black fathers who are doing these things now. We need to get to a point where Black fatherhood is so fashionable that the media is forced to advertise more of the positive aspects of African American fatherhood as opposed to the negative ones.

Table 4.5 summarizes the emerging theme where participants expressed their need for positive acknowledgment as fathers and a change in the overall perception of them as fathers. Analysis of the raw data reveals a pattern of ideas relevant to the concerns of the participants. Table 4.5 illustrates the participant's view regarding the lack of acknowledgment for their commitment to fatherhood, their need for a change in perception of who they are as fathers, and the consequences of negative and positive perceptions.

Table 4.5

*The Need for Acknowledgment and Change in Perception*

Related Concepts	Supporting Quotes
A need for and acknowledgment of their commitment to fatherhood	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I've met so many Black fathers that are involved and engaged with their children. These guys don't get any shine.</li> <li>2. African American fathers are to be cherished, loved, and appreciated.</li> <li>3. We are here. We are not a dying species, so forget about what you heard.</li> <li>4. A lot of folks that you look up to have African American fathers who gave them guidance.</li> <li>5. There needs to be more of a focus on the positive aspects of fatherhood.</li> </ol>
The remnants of a negative perception of nonresident African American fathers	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Low self esteem.</li> <li>2. New generation of men and women who accept these negative perceptions.</li> <li>3. Black women hate black men, share their beliefs with daughters.</li> <li>4. Get to a point where we believe that we are not worth much as fathers or as men.</li> </ol>
The Remnants of a Positive Perception of African American Fathers	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Get more black women to the table and have a more open dialog with them.</li> <li>2. The media will be forced to advertise the positive aspect as oppose to the negative ones.</li> </ol>

## **The Prerequisites for Evaluating the Nonresident African American Father**

All participants agreed that their lives changed dramatically once they became fathers. When asked to talk about the challenges that they faced as fathers, each father provided his own narrative of challenges that he dealt with or was currently dealing with. These challenges can be viewed as prerequisites for evaluating the men's commitment to being a father. Researchers, social workers, and others working with fathers at fathering organizations can further analyze how these fathers can better deal with racism, unemployment, and their own emotions and the emotions of their children. In addition these fathers must learn how to make adjustments and better deal with realities associated with the new locations of their children. An analysis of and subsequent information on these issues could help reduce the strain that these fathers are feeling and provide them with the tools needed to better cope with the emotional issues that arise while facing a decreased in the amount of time with their children, as well as with periods of unemployment, and with racism. These challenges can be seen as obstructions that prevent and hinder the men from being better fathers to their children. Attention and information about these issues could result in a stronger bond between father and child.

One of the participants, Harry, talked about his daughter's emotional issues that he continues to deal with long after his separation from her biological mother. This is an on going problem in Harry's household that has needed attention. Perhaps researchers could focus studies on how fathers such as Harry can strengthen their relationships skills to better serve and deal with the emotional issues that a child in this situation faces. Doing so could help prevent or decrease the emotional pain that Harry mentioned when

asked about some of the challenges that he faces. For example, Harry stated the following:

Dealing with my daughter's emotions after my breakup, seeing firsthand the affect that it has on my daughter is indeed a challenge. When she comes over to my house for the weekend I can sense that she knows that this situation between her mother and me is not normal. My daughter has a younger brother from my ex-girlfriend's new relationship. When she visits me, I can tell that she misses her brother and that she wishes he could come along with us.

Jim's sentiments on the emotional challenges were similar; however, he talked about his personal struggles. Though Jim and his son's mother are separated, Jim has been able to maintain a relationship with his son. His son has adjusted well and enjoys the company of both his mother and his father even though they are living in separate households. However, it is Jim who is having a hard time dealing with the decreased amount of time that he has to be a father to his children. Jim stated the following about his son:

When my son is not around I miss him like crazy. I'll give you an example. He likes to play video games on my iPad. One day while traveling to work I noticed that he achieved a high score, as a reward, he gets to sign his name in the designated area for high scores. I looked down at what he had accomplished in the game and for some reason I started crying right there on the train. At that moment, I missed my son so much. These are the little things that grab at your emotions.

In addition to the emotional issues that these fathers face, three of the fathers talked about the struggles that they experienced after their child's geographical location changed. The change occurred after the father's relationship with the biological mother ended. Along with the change in the child's location, there appeared to be a shift in the control, power, and influence with respect to the decisions regarding the child's life. In each of the cases, after the separation, the mothers took control and made the decision that the child would live with her. In addition, the biological mothers made use of their motherly influence, knowingly or unknowingly, within the family court system. This has been where bold and powerful decisions can be made with respect to the kind of relationship that will emerge in respect to the biological mother, father and the child. In many cases, as with the fathers from this study, fathers have been left with the option of either fighting it out in court to obtain custody or visitation, or making life adjustments and agreements that involve seeing their children on terms determined by the biological mother. Although there are many fathers who fight hard, there are also many fathers who, in the long run, end up powerless and must give in to the decisions rendered in court, or in some cases the decisions rendered by the biological mother. One participant, Tony, described how his child's mother left him powerless when she moved out of state illegally and without any notice. As a result Tony's contact with his son suddenly was reduced. Tony explained,

Because of their new location I now see my son every other weekend compared to seeing him on a weekly basis. The negative part of this is that you can't truly be the father that you want to be in 48 hours. If I had run off with my child like she did, I'm sure that I would be on Riker's Island for kidnapping. My daily

interactions with my son was almost everyday compared to now where it is mostly telephone conversations; and that's only when his mother decides to answer her cell phone. I'm telling you man, location is really a challenge. My son went from living only 15 minutes away from me to living an hour away. This has changed the way that we now communicate. I'm not going to let this stop me from being there for my son. This is simply a bump in the road. But I'll tell you, their new location puts all of the power in my ex-wife's hands.

Perry also agreed that the location of his child has been a challenge. He has experienced it first hand with this daughter when a move resulted in the sudden and drastic reduction in the amount of time he could spend with his daughter. However in his case, the move was much more extreme and as a result, his relationship with his child suffered. Once again, the same sense of powerlessness described by Tony is evident.

Perry stated the following:

My ex-wife moved to another state and took my daughter. I can tell you that because of this move, my relationship with my daughter has suffered. After our divorce, I remarried. I now have three more children. There were times when I wanted all of my children together. At the time I didn't think that I was asking for too much. Her mother's decision to move was based on money and her feelings towards my new family. Because of this decision, my relationship with my daughter suffered. She did not get to enjoy the benefits of having an involved father in her life. I could not fly out every other weekend and be with her. The three kids that I am raising now were the ones that got to enjoy these benefits. I will say that as my kids got older, as time moved on, things got better. I mean,

I'm her father, and you can't keep denying a kid something that rightfully belongs to them.

Billy also talked about the strained relationship he had with his daughter's biological mother. After their separation, Billy struggled with the decisions that were made by the court regarding the limited amount of time that he would get to see his daughter. In addition, Billy also struggled with the biological mother's decision regarding his visitation rights, which was in direct contrast with the court order. As previously stated, in many cases, as with the fathers from this study, fathers are left with the option of a court battle or they make life adjustments and see their children on terms determined by the biological mother. Billy's decision to fight it out in court did not change the biological mother's decisions regarding his right to see his daughter. She still would not adhere to the court's order. As a result, valuable time that could have been spent with his daughter was lost. Billy stated the following:

Some might say I'm from the old school of parenting for believing that a 3 year old child, in this case my daughter, isn't really going to know what is best for her. As her father, I know what is best for her. So when a child makes a statement like, 'I don't want to stay with dad' why would a parent take this at face value? This is what the mother of my daughter did and because of this, I had to take her to court and valuable time with my daughter was lost. At the age of 3 a child is not going to know about the significance of fatherhood. I've known this all of my life. My daughter's mother knows this too, but when you are dealing with what I call the 'mood of the mother', whatever personal issues the mother may have with you or with the world, could potentially make it difficult for you to sustain a relationship

with your child. Sometimes I think that my decision to take my daughter's mother to court did more harm than good because while fighting in court, I lost a lot of valuable time that could have been spent with my daughter. But this is something that had to be done to confirm the importance of my role as a father. The funny thing about all of this is that as my daughter got older she wanted to know more about me, she wanted to know more about my side of the family, and I am feeding that. When my daughter spends time with me now, it's getting harder and harder for her to go back to her mother's house.

The fathers interviewed for the dissertation study also talked about the struggles of securing employment and issues of race. All 13 of the study participants stressed the importance of financial support for their children and acknowledge the importance of their role as a financial provider. However, without a job it has become problematic for these men to fulfill the financial provider role. Thomas believes that securing employment as an African American man can be quite a challenge. He said,

I'm trying to find a job right now. I want to make sure my boys are 100%, but I'm having a hard time. Basically I feel that Caucasian men have a stronger network of associates and friends. They can simply talk to a friend during dinner and end up employed the next day.

Mike also talked about the employment challenges that are evident, however he also focused on the racial challenges that his son will face. With respect to racism, there is a sense of powerlessness in that Mike could not prevent racism from occurring in his life, and cannot prevent it from occurring in his son's life. There is no doubt in Mike's

mind that racism exists in contemporary America, and that it is something that his son will encounter. Mike stated the following:

As an African American father one of my biggest fears is that my son will have to deal with the challenges of an unfair work place. I don't think that this problem will ever go away. My son is a smart kid, a good kid. He doesn't deserve to have to deal with the racism that's coming his way. Unfortunately, as a young Black man, it's inevitable. This is something that other fathers don't have to deal with.

The fathers who participated in this study have dealt with racism by acknowledging its existence and power. They have acknowledged it by educating their children to the point where they fully understand that it is a problem that they will face as they move through the various cycles of life. Paul believes that racism is inevitable, that African American children must be prepared because racism is a reality for him and will be a reality for them too. However, in addition to worrying about how his son will deal with the perils of racism, Paul also worries about the implications of having a conversation about race, especially when racism is explained as a reality of African American life, not as a hunch or a gut feeling. Paul worries about how his son will process the information and whether he will grow up hating people that he might end up having to work with, or in most cases work for. Paul stated the following:

It is very difficult to explain how it feels to be an African American man in America. If you are poor and Black you will be put in a box from day one and racism will hit you hard. I hate the fact that I am going to have to explain to my son that there are people in this world that are going to hate him just because he is Black, that they are going to try to hold him back because he is Black. The worse

part of this is that I will have to tell him that a good deal of the people that will be working against him will be White. I don't want to poison his mind with racism and make him angry against all White people, but I don't want him walking around in this world naïve to the situation. As a Black man you got to be prepared for this world because if racism didn't come at you already, it is gonna come at you eventually. It's gonna happen.

Table 4.6 summarizes the emerging theme where participants expressed the prerequisites for evaluating the nonresident African American father. Analysis of the raw data reveals a pattern of ideas relevant to the concerns of the participants. Table 4.6 illustrates the participant's view regarding employment challenges and racism.

### **Sense of Powerless: The Overarching Core Theory**

The final stage in grounded theory is the development of core categories. The core category is the main overarching concept under which the other categories and subcategories belong. Corbin and Strauss (2008) stated that core categories represent a phenomenon or the main theme of the research that emerges from the data. The phenomenon or main theme that emerged from the data collected for this dissertation study pointed to a sense of powerlessness with respect to how the fathers practice their roles as fathers, perceive their roles as fathers, and deal with the problems and barriers associated with fatherhood.

The fathers who participated in this study have experienced a sense of powerlessness as it relates to society's reliance and dependence on the negative concrete stereotypes aimed at nonresident African American fathers. For many, this reliance on negative concrete stereotypes has become a practical means for defining the way in

which the nonresident the African American man practices his role as a father, perceives his role as a father, and deals with the barriers and problems associated with fatherhood. Moreover, this reliance on negative stereotypes has been used as a means to undermine the nonresident African American fathers approach to fatherhood.

Table 4.6

*Prerequisites for Evaluating the Nonresident African American Father*

Related Concepts	Supporting Quotes
Employment Challenges	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Caucasian men have a stronger network of associates and friends.</li> <li>2. My biggest fear is that my son will have to deal with an unfair workplace.</li> <li>3. I am trying to find a job right now, but I am having a hard time.</li> <li>4. They [White men] can talk to a friend during dinner and end up employed the next day.</li> </ol>
Race Matters	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I have to explain to my son that there are people who are going to hate him because he is black.</li> <li>2. If racism didn't come at you already, it is gonna come at you eventually. It's gonna happen.</li> <li>3. The worse part of this is that I will have to tell him that a good deal of the people working against him will be White.</li> <li>4. I don't want to poison his mind [his son's mind] with racism and make him angry against all White people.</li> <li>5. This is something that other fathers don't have to deal with.</li> </ol>

**The role of stereotypes.** The reasoning behind the nonresident African American father's sense of powerlessness has stemmed from society's unwillingness to examine

comprehensively the validity of the negative stereotypes aimed at the nonresident African American father. These stereotypes view African American men as inherently impossible, erratic in their behavior, perpetrators of crime and violence, and unable to assume the responsibilities of employment and fatherhood have become long lasting and concrete (Gadsden & Smith, 1994). The fathers who participated in this study have acknowledged that negative stereotypes about African American men have settled into a place of normalcy and that in the minds of many Americans, African American men are not good fathers, they are going to leave their children, they do not provide for their children, and they have children by a multitude of women. In addition, these fathers are also labeled as gangster rappers, hustlers, rapists, gang bangers, drug dealers, and crack heads (Roberts, 1998).

For the African American father, getting society to talk more about the many fathers who are actively present in the lives of African American children as mentors, teachers, preachers, maternal partners, stepfathers, uncles, older male friends, social fathers, and of course biological fathers seems to be an impossible task (Connor & White, 2006). The research indicated that regardless of the nonresident African American father's attentiveness to being a good father, an involved father, and a responsible father, negative concrete stereotypes that are intentionally or unintentionally bestowed upon them have created, in the minds of the fathers from this study, a phobia of stereotypes where they are in constant fear of the perceptions of others.

When negative stereotypes infiltrate and stigmatize the innate ability to investigate and explore the images and ideas that formulate perceptions, it becomes easy to believe the following set of assumptions: (a) that nonresident African American fathers

do not provide for their children; and (b) even if they do, that all nonresident African American fathers are going to leave their children; and, (c) even if they are present in the lives of their children, that (d) all nonresident African American fathers are not good fathers even if they are good fathers.

While these stereotypes may at times be dormant in the mind of the nonresident African American father, when they are detected they become accentuated or magnified (Jussim, 1991). It is during this accentuated stage that the nonresident African American father experiences a sense of powerlessness where he has no choice but to acknowledge the stereotypes aimed at him. One must question, as did the fathers from this study, the psychological consequences of these stereotypes.

**Need for acknowledgment.** In addition to experiencing a sense of powerlessness with respect to negative concrete stereotypes, the majority of the fathers from this study communicated their need to be recognized and acknowledged for their commitment to fatherhood. This need has stemmed from a lack of acceptance for their family form. Lamb (1999) stated that researchers and social scientists have focused largely on middle-class-white families because these families are most familiar to the majority of them. Researchers have continued to treat the nuclear family as if it is the gold standard of family forms, which is something that the public, regardless of race, religion, cultural background, or personal preference, should strive and work towards. Such a view has stigmatized and marginalized members from other family forms. The fathers from this study indicated that they feel neglected and ignored and have an urgent need to be acknowledged for their commitment to their children. Lamb, (1999) further stated that this exclusive focus on white middle class nuclear families has become increasingly

anachronistic in the face of demographic changes that have made traditional families less characteristic of the environments in which most children are raised.

Many of the fathers from this study showed an understanding with respect to the significance of the nuclear family; however, their current family form should not deem them invisible with respect to future research studies. Coontz, (1992) stated that the motivation behind the push for conformity of the nuclear family stems from the starry-eyed relationship that researcher's have with the traditional family. This starry-eyed relationship has created, for other family groups, an urgent need for recognition. Researchers must turn their attention to new family forms. What is problematic is that researchers have continued to focus on the failure of the nuclear family or on trying to revitalize the nuclear family. Instead, researchers must look at the failure of the nuclear families or the avoidance of the nuclear family form as an opportunity to expand their focus on emerging alternative family groups.

**Generational impacts.** The fathers from this study reflected on their relationships with their own fathers. The majority of the participants were unable to make sense of their own father's neglect and inability to father them. During this time of neglect many of the participants were forced to maneuver through life without guidance from their biological fathers and without an explanation for the neglect. When talking to the participating fathers about their own fathers, the field notes and interview transcript revealed an emotional group of men who were frustrated by their inability to change what their fathers did. In this case, the fathers experienced a sense of powerlessness in that they can not undo the neglect bestowed upon them by their fathers, the inability to benefit from the knowledge that their fathers had, and for the majority of the fathers from this

study, they acquired their sense of what a father should be without any support or aid from their biological fathers. Excluding what a mother and child are able to build together, without an involved father, the transfer of property from one generation to the next is reduced, and there is a dependence on the mother for valuable social and professional contacts within the educational world and the workforce. Moreover, in many cases a father's absence reduces the family income, the father's role as parent, caretaker, and role model (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1996). The fathers from this study were left with one choice. They could either duplicate their own father's neglectful behavior or use their father's neglectful behavior as an impetus for change and growth. The fathers from this study chose the latter of the two.

**The role of money.** The fathers from this study agreed that nonresident African American fathers continue to be judged by the amount of financial support that they give for their child. Researchers claimed that with respect to some African American fathers that this is problematic and cannot be the final determinant in measuring father involvement (Gavin et al., 2002; Hijjawi, 2005). The fathers who participated in this study stated that in addition to providing financial support, they provide their children with protection, discipline, support, motivation, love, knowledge and education, fun, confidence, friendship, vision, and a positive outlook for their future. The majority of the fathers who participated in the study believe that these components of fatherhood are often forgotten and that their financial obligations have become the salient factors in determining their worth as fathers. The majority also stated that they have experienced circumstances in which their financial situations have prevented them from being effectively involved fathers. They stated that the biological mothers of their children have

use financial child support issues as a penalizing tool that limits the amount of time they spend with their children or in some cases has prevented them from any contact at all. In addition, the majority of the fathers believe that in many cases, the family court system and the public's opinion with respect to the saliency of financial child support is aligned with the notion that financial child support supersedes other life supports.

It is within the dichotomy of financial support/other life support where the nonresident African American father has experienced a sense of powerlessness that stems from the confusion and societal contradictions associated with what researchers and fatherhood organizations recognize as components of fatherhood versus what biological mothers recognize as salient components of fatherhood. There are some researchers who claimed that a father's ability or inability to settle financial obligations are no longer viewed as a key ingredient of good fathering (Devault et al., 2008). In addition, many nonresident African American fathers, like the fathers from this study, feel that providing non-monetary support when financial support is problematic is a valuable contribution to their child's life (Amato, 1998; Cabrera et al., 2004; Wilson, 2003).

**Summary.** All of the fathers who participated in this study agreed that children who have contact with a father have an advantage over children without that same contact (Brott, 1999). Additionally, the fathers in this study also agreed with researchers that a father's social capital provides resources such as time, emotional and practical supports, academic achievement, career development, and peer relationships (Amato, 1998; Coley & Schindler, 2008). As articulated by one of the fathers from this study,

I am more than just a means of financial support. I go to PTA meetings, I'm interested in their after school activities, I make an effort to know how they are

doing physically. As an involved father, I am involved in their life. It's not just about financial support, it's about life support.

**The effects of racism.** When evaluating the nonresident African America father, there are prerequisites to be considered. The fathers from this study experienced a sense of powerlessness with respect to their inability to protect their child from the threat of racism. Each father agreed that racism is something that his child will have to deal with. The fathers talked about racism strictly from a White and Black perspective and felt that racism is something that White fathers do not have to deal with and that it is an issue that is exclusive to them as African Americans. To fully understand how racism affects this particular group of fathers, to fully understand their reasoning for being apprehensive about their discussions with their children, to understand why they feel as though their children are destined to experience racism, and finally to discover if racism is still a relevant concern in America, one could look at the benefits that racism provides and then take a look at who the beneficiaries are.

Wellman (1977) defined racism as a system of advantages based on race. The system operates to the advantage of Whites and to the disadvantage of people of color (Tatum, 1970). As discussed in Chapter 2, the inequalities of education, employment discrimination, bigotry, and favoritism still run rampant in contemporary America, and McIntosh's (1989) seminal article on White privilege provides insight on how racism affects the fathers from this study. In the article McIntosh (1989), a White feminist scholar, articulated 26 systematic advantages of being White. Conversely, these 26 advantages equate to 26 disadvantages of being Black. Nine of the advantages of being White as identified by McIntosh (1989) are listed below as they are particularly relevant

to the participants in this study. Each advantage available to Whites represents a disadvantage for African Americans and are something the nonresident African American fathers who participated in this study have to explain to their children and educate them on how to deal with.

- A White person can be sure that she will be able to rent or purchase housing in an area that she can afford.
- A White person can go shopping alone and be assured that she will not be followed or harassed.
- A White person can turn on her television or open the front page of a paper and see the people of her race widely represented.
- A White person can count on her skin color not to work against the appearance of her financial reliability.
- A White person can arrange to protect her children most of the time from people who might not like them.
- If a White person asks to speak to the person in charge of a business establishment, it will most likely be a member of her race.
- A White person can be sure that if she needs legal or medical help, her race will not work against her.
- A White person can take a job at an affirmative action employer without having co-workers stating that she got the job because of her race.
- If a White person is pulled over by a traffic cop, she can be sure that she is not being singled out because of her race.

There is not enough space to list the disadvantages that the nonresident African American father faces in the contemporary United States. The majority of the fathers from this study have faced some degree of racism; however, what is troubling to these fathers is that they are powerless to prevent the perils of racism that will undoubtedly fall upon their children. As one of the fathers from this study stated, “If racism didn’t come at you already, it is gonna come at you eventually. It’s gonna happen.”

### **Research Questions**

The following section is organized in terms of the research questions from Chapter 1 of this study. The research questions are as follows:

1. How do nonresident African American fathers practice their role as fathers?
2. How do nonresident African American fathers perceive their role as fathers?
3. How do nonresident African American fathers deal with the barriers and problems associated with fatherhood?
4. What are the values that underline the nonresident African American father’s approach to fatherhood?

**Research question 1.** How do nonresident African American fathers practice their role as fathers? The participants from this study confirmed that a father’s parenting style is complementary to what mothers do and is important in its own right to optimum child rearing (Popenoe, 1999). The participants acknowledged that their roles differ when practiced and compared to their female counterparts. One father stated that though a mother can pick up a ball and throw it to her child, it is not the same as when he throws a ball to his child. Collectively, the fathers from this study came up with numerous ways in which they practice their roles as fathers. Several of the fathers talked about using their

life experiences to forewarn their children of the challenges that they might face in the future. Some of the major topics identified are drug use, drinking, education, marriage, sex, peer relationships, race, and racism.

The majority of the fathers also stated that they see themselves as financial providers. Even those who were unemployed stated that providing for their child financially is an important part of their role as a father. A growing base of empirical research asserted that a father's social and economic resources, particularly parenting involvement and monetary contributions, is directly related to children's well-being (Cabrera et al., 2000; Marsiglio et al., 2000).

However, fathers also stated that the financial component is not a prominent component with respect to fathering. Fathers from this study practice their role as fathers by openly displaying their love for their children, by sharing their social history with them, by meeting with teachers, by calling and emailing when they can not physically see them, by putting their wants and needs to the side, by taking their children on trips, by protecting them, feeding them, studying with them and teaching them, by understanding who they are as individuals, by respecting them, by disciplining them, by attending the important event in their lives, and by making concessions for the good of their child.

**Research question 2.** How do nonresident African American fathers perceive their role as fathers? The fathers who participated in the study spoke passionately about the importance placed on the financial aspects of fatherhood. They agreed that it is an important component, however, they felt that financial support should not define who they are as fathers. Measuring paternal involvement by the amount of financial support is problematic. Many of the fathers felt that despite what researchers say, the overarching

view in the eye of the public and in the eye of their ex-girlfriends and ex-spouses is that one's financial situation determines who you are as a father. In spite of this view, the participants stated that financial support is simply one component of many and that in addition to providing financial support for their children they perceived their fatherly roles as follows:

- Protector of the family
- Disciplinarian
- Supporter
- Motivator
- Nurturer
- Educator
- Advisor
- Playmate
- Confidant
- Visionary
- Engaged father
- Involved father
- Good father
- Friend

**Research question 3:** How do nonresident African American fathers deal with the barriers and problems associated with fatherhood? The fathers from this study talked about obtaining complete knowledge of the family court system. They claimed that many of the obstacles and barriers that they face can be dealt with differently with an acute

knowledge of the inner workings of the court system. For example, one father talked about how he obtained knowledge with respect to the Family Court system, and now he feels empowered and is no longer afraid. Moreover, he now uses the system for the betterment of his relationship with his daughter. Another way these fathers dealt with the barriers and problems associated with fatherhood, as to join African American fathering organizations that focus specifically on educating nonresident African American men on how to be effective fathers. These organizations have helped men deal with issues such as:

- Child support issues
- Custody issues
- Relationship development with child
- Relationship development with mother of child
- Job placement (interviewing tips, development of resume)
- Dealing with new location of children
- Acceptance of new role/new relationship
- Repercussions of a separation or divorce
- Death of spouse
- Child behavior issues
- Spousal abuse
- Communication with mother and child
- Dealing with racism

Another salient issue to emerge with respect to the barriers and problems that nonresident African American fathers have to deal with is racism. The fathers from this

study dealt with racism by acknowledging its existence and its power and by educating their children to the point where they fully understand that it is a problem that they will face as they move through the various cycles of life. This thought process was also applied to the negative stereotypes aimed at African American men. All of the fathers acknowledged the existence of negative stereotypes; educated their children about those stereotypes while making attempts through their actions, through their relationships, and through their commitment to being responsible fathers, to dispel those stereotypes.

The majority of fathers also talked about how they have used the absences of their own father as a catalyst or a tool of motivation, how they speak highly of their family life in hope of changing the negative stereotypes, and how focusing on successful positive images of African American men keep them aligned with who they are and who their children will be.

**Research question 4:** What are the values that underline the nonresident African American fathers approach to fatherhood? The fathers from this study acknowledged that there are many obstacles and barriers that challenge their commitment in becoming effective, involved, and loving fathers. Though these fathers have acknowledged that these challenges have succeeded in destroying many families, and that being a nonresident African American father has been difficult and at times more of a challenge when compared to other groups of fathers, at no time did the participants give the impression that they were not up for the challenge of being effective, involved, and loving fathers. There were times when the participants expressed frustration and a sense of powerlessness with respect to the societal components discussed in this study. However, the participants gave the impression that the values that underline their

approach to fatherhood supersede any thoughts of giving in to those societal components. When asked, what are the values that underline the nonresident African American fathers approach to fatherhood, analysis revealed the following:

- Several of the fathers placed value on their approach to changing perception. They felt that this can be done by leading by example.
- Majority of the fathers placed value on their approach to informing their children about the racist attitudes that will have an affect on their lives.
- Majority of fathers placed value on their approach at attempting to develop a better relationship with their child's biological mother and realizing the importance of this relationship
- Majority of the fathers placed value on their approach in finding creative ways to deal with their children's new location and the decreased amount of time that they have to spend with their children.
- One father placed value on the term shared parenting as opposed to visitation. He stated that the term visitation is wrong and that nonresident African American fathers are not visitors, they are parents. He suggested changing the term visitation to shared parenting.
- One father placed value on his approach to utilize his own common knowledge and significance as a father. He challenged the notion that a child should be able to dictate his or her wants and needs. He stated that this is his job as a parent.
- Majority of the fathers placed value on their vow to be better fathers than their own fathers.

- Two of the fathers placed value on ensuring that their children have complete knowledge of their family's history.

### **Summary of Results**

The analysis of the transcripts and the digital audio files of interviews with 13 nonresident African American fathers resulted in five themes. The study revealed several instances where negative concrete stereotypes have impinged on how the nonresident African American fathers who participated in the study practice, perceive, and deal with the problems and obstacles associated with African American fatherhood and fatherhood in the general sense (Table 4.2). In addition, the study exposed the participant's own father's patterns of neglect. As a consequence of this neglect, the fathers from this study used their situations as an impetus for generational growth and change within their own family unit (Table 4.3). The study also discovered that the African American fathers from this study were very much in line with what many researchers have to say with respect to financial support. These fathers understood the importance of financial support; however, the majority agreed that the all-encompassing life supports that they offer to their children are essential and beneficial to their child's stability (Table 4.4). Another theme that emerged focused on the participants' need for positive acknowledgment of their commitment to fatherhood (Table 4.5). The majority of the fathers from this study agreed that the good deeds of nonresident African American fathers have been often overshadowed and unrecognized. These fathers believed that a universal change in the perception of the nonresident African American father is desperately needed.

The last theme discussed in this chapter focuses on the prerequisites to be considered and discussed before evaluating the nonresident African American father

(Table 4.6). The fathers talked about learning how to deal with the emotional issues that their children face after a breakup, and one father talked about his own emotions and how he misses his son to the point where he has cried. During the interview several of the fathers talked about their children's new geographical location and how this reduces the amount of time they are able to spend with their children. Several of the fathers talked extensively about racism and provided the researcher with important details about their struggles with figuring out what to say to their children about racism. The fathers noted that this is something that White fathers do not have to deal with.

Chapter 5 contains a more detailed summary and discussion of these findings. Chapter 5 also contains a discussion of the implications of this study for future research and policy as well as the limitations of the study.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

For this chapter, a review of the results are presented along with recommendations for future research. To give meaning to the data, the implications and findings will be discussed along with the limitations of the study. This chapter concludes with a summary of the study. The study examines how nonresident African American fathers practice their role as fathers, perceive their role as fathers, and deal with the barriers and problems associated with fatherhood. Moreover, this study focuses specifically on the values that underline the nonresident African American father's approach to fatherhood.

The 13 nonresident African American fathers that contribute to this study are enthusiastic about being given the opportunity to share their views on fatherhood. This enthusiasm might stem from the limited number of studies that focus exclusively on the issues affecting this population. This view is synonymous to the view held in Julion et al.'s (2007) study where 69 nonresident African American fathers, who participated in seven focus groups, expressed their appreciation for being given the opportunity to be heard. As with the current study, Julion et al., (2007) further states that the focus has recently shifted in the research from talking about African American fathers to listening to them.

The enthusiasm and appreciation that these fathers feel are important components that offer to these fathers a sense of pride along with feelings of importance. Though

researchers may agree that pride along with feelings of importance may increase the self-esteem and confidence of fathers, the question remains, are studies like this one necessary? Moreover, do nonresident African American fathers have different circumstances that may not be considered in other populations, and if so do these circumstances warrant an exclusive investigation?

Because African American men continue to be described as absent, missing, unmarried, irresponsible, and immature (Connors & White, 2006), qualitative studies where researchers conduct individual interviews and focus groups that explore and analyze the voices, views, experiences, and interpretations of this particular group of fathers offer value. For this particular study, the value comes in the form of increasing the success of interventions aimed at promoting paternal involvement, filling gaps, and perhaps reminding researchers that nonresident African American fathers experience feelings of anger, love, exhibit parental steadiness and devotion, feel excitement and frustration, are sensitive to pain and rejection, and express feelings of sorrow and joy (Hamer, 2001).

### **Implications of Findings**

In addition to the 13 individual interviews conducted for this study, the original design included a focus group with nonresident African American fathers. This did not occur, and the research was limited to the 13 nonresident African American fathers discussed in this dissertation. One of the primary causes for this change was the time limitation in the study was conducted. In addition, the fathering organization initially interested in the dissertation study turned its attention to a more inclusive study that was aligned with the organization's overall goals, which is to serve all fathers—not just

African American fathers. Given the focus of the dissertation study on African American fathers, the study is problematic in that the organization could be associated with research that might be viewed as exclusive. This is also problematic for the researcher, who is unwilling to compromise and conduct an all-encompassing study to include fathers of different ethnicities. Consequently, the researcher was forced to seek out another method in which to conduct the individual interviews and the focus group.

Upon finding another organization, difficulties arose when attempting to assemble a focus group. On several occasions, during a period of 2 months, participants selected for the focus group who were called to meet at a designated place and time were faced with outside barriers and obstacles that prevented them from assembling. After 4 attempts the researcher decided to change the data collection methodology. The change presented the researcher with the opportunity to:

- present the findings with respect to assembling focus groups that consist of nonresident African American fathers.
- contact potential focus group participants, which lead to several of the individual interviews for this study.
- continue the study at a later date, without the time constraints of a dissertation, and include individual interviews and focus groups of nonresident African American fathers.

This study begins with an inquiry about whether or not the responses from the participants selected for this study provide a broader perspective with respect to being an African American father and living away from their children. In addition, the research

examines whether there are circumstances that these fathers face as nonresident African American fathers.

The participants from this study provide a broader perspective with respect to the circumstances that they face as fathers. In addition, the results from this study offer new insights while confirming findings from previous studies that relate to the nonresident African American father.

Through the use of 13 individual interviews, the study focuses specifically on the values that support the nonresident African American father's approach to fatherhood while attempting to disprove or confirm the negative and unilateral perspective that continues to dominate the research, media, and minds of many Americans.

### Themes and Core Theory

This section is organized by the five themes and overarching core theory that emerged from the data. Figure 5.1 displays the themes and core theory.

Themes	Overarching Core Theory
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Stereotype Phobia</li><li>•Fathers in Default: An Impetus for Generational Growth and Change</li><li>•Money Matters: It's about Life Support, not Financial Support</li><li>•The Need for Acknowledgement and Change in Perception</li><li>•The Prerequisite for Evaluating the Nonresident African American Father</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Sense of Powerlessness</li></ul>

Figure 5. 1. Themes and core theory that emerged from data analysis.

**Stereotype phobia.** A majority of the fathers report that even though they are involved in their child's life, they are in constant fear of being stereotyped and perceived as uninvolved deadbeat dads. When issues of fathering arise, these fathers are the first to acknowledge and establish that they are involved in their children's lives, that they love

their children, and that they care. These fathers feel that these things should be obvious and that they should not have to repeatedly confirm their commitment to their children. Moreover, they feel that they should not feel obligated to always provide a relationship that is picture perfect. For example, when these fathers are questioned about their children, these fathers feel as if they have to provide responses with praises of their children and their relationships with their children. They feel obliged to report all of the good and none of the bad. For these fathers, this has become a tactic they use to combat the negative perceptions of nonresident African American fathers. These are perceptions they feel are overwhelmingly present in the minds of those they come in contact with. Three of the fathers state that this excessive measure to separate themselves from negative perceptions is exhausting. However, they agree that the consequence of failing to project a positive image with respect to their bond with their children will link them to, and associate them with, negative stereotypical depictions of deadbeat dads.

Stereotypes save human energy by allowing us to ignore the diverse and detailed information is associated with any given group (McGarty, Yzerbyt, & Spears, 2002). This explains why the fathers emphasize that at times they feel their efforts to avoid being stereotyped are moot. They believe and want others to believe in their commitment to their children; however, they also feel that the stereotypes regarding nonresident African American fathers are so dominatingly salient, that their commitment to their children is one that is always in doubt.

The question is how can they compete with or combat negative images and perceptions that have been reinforced in universities, on the sets of movies and television shows, and within the halls of Congress (Allen, 1995). This is especially the case when

the stereotypes are long lasting and concrete (McGraty, 2002). For the men who participated in the study, simply talking about their relationships with others, communicating with their child's biological mother, or showing up to open school night for a meeting with teachers can cause stereotype phobia, which in turn causes stress, anxiety, and worry about how they are being perceived and portrayed. As Black males continue to be stereotyped as a demographic, a sociological construct, a media caricature, or a crime statistic (Coles & Green, 2010), it is left up to the fathers to find ways to contend with not only the stereotypes bestowed upon them, but the various consequences that emerge once the stereotypes have taken its concrete form. For several of the fathers in this study, their coping devices come in the form of reassuring themselves that they are good fathers, ignoring what they consider to be obvious expressions of astonishment of their relationships with their kids, and as one father states, overcompensating, which translates to getting his child more than what is actually needed so that no one can stereotype him as a deadbeat dad.

The findings show several ways nonresident African American fathers have to deal with situations directly connected to stereotypes. Each situation is significant in that the fear of negative concrete stereotypes shapes the ways the fathers in the study approach fatherhood. This theme is important in that it sheds light on the study's research questions. For example, when asked, how do nonresident African American fathers practice their role as fathers, the answer appears that they practice their role in fear, and that the negative concrete stereotypes aimed directly at them puts them in a powerless state thus making them vulnerable to the belief systems of others that have been influenced by the negative concrete stereotypes of the African American father.

The fathers who attempt to ignore the obvious expressions of astonishment with respect to his relationships with his children are to some degree powerless within a belief system that can attack them in a multitude of arenas. For the African American father and child whose familiarity in one arena might calm and decrease these expressions of astonishment, this same African American father and child have to function in other arenas which again render them powerless until they once again become familiarized. What is even more problematic is that their familiarization within the various arenas they will come in contact with does not guarantee to calm or decrease the expressions of astonishment toward them. These fathers deal with the reality that until there is a universal change in the overall perception of the nonresident African American father, they will continue to live in fear of being stereotyped. Unfortunately for these fathers, a simple walk with their child to a park or a visit to see their child's teacher continues to render them powerless to the looks of astonishment and stares of surprise and amazement.

The powerless state is also evident with fathers who state that they over compensate out of fear of being stereotyped. In this case, the fathers are changing their core system of beliefs out of fear. This is problematic in that the negative stereotypes that are present in theory and present in the minds of these fathers lack the actual physical components we usually see. Missing are the looks of astonishment, the assumptions and comments by others, the stares of surprise and amazement. These components of stereotype phobia need not be present. Instead, it is the nonresident African American father's own account of the stereotypes that operate like a trigger thus causing him to make decisions with respect to his child's needs. These decisions, as stated by several of

the fathers, should be made out of love and out of the essence of their core beliefs. Instead, several of the fathers have allowed stereotypical phobias and the fear of negative concrete stereotypes aimed at nonresident African American fathers to interfere with their core systems of beliefs, thus shaping their decisions with respect to how they practice, perceive and deal with the barriers and problems associated with fatherhood. These fathers have in fact, added an additional layer to their process of thinking.

The reaction to the stereotype phobia is a component of fatherhood that is exclusive to the nonresident African American father. Unlike other groups of fathers, the African American father must fight against the universal perception of what a deadbeat dad is. However, in addition to fighting that fight, the African American father must also fight the universal perception of the African American father. So when the African American father makes a decision with respect to his child, the universal negative concrete stereotypes along with the overall perception of the African American father have an affect on the decisions he makes as a father. For these fathers, stereotype phobias challenge the core values that underline their approach to fatherhood.

**Fathers in default: An impetus for generational growth and change.** Seven of the 13 fathers interviewed expressed concern about their father's lack of involvement in their lives. However, as shown in Table 4.3, each of the participating fathers used their own father's weaknesses as an impetus for growth and change with respect to their relationships with their children. Hammond et al. (2011) states that by remembering the socio-emotional voids or losses in their relationships with their own fathers, men achieve a deeper expressive father role and identity salience and commitment. Fathers from the dissertation study state that they are better fathers because of voids such as having a

father who was more of a visitor than a father, losing a father in a motorcycle accident, or having a father who left the family unit and a mother who had to play the dual role of both mother and father.

Hammond et al. (2011) further states that by reflecting on the socio-emotional voids in the relationships with their fathers, men are able to solidify their intentions to forge strong emotional connections with their children. Each of the fathers from the dissertation study who experienced socio-emotional voids used the void as an impetus for generational growth and change. One of the fathers states that he would do much better for his child as a father, another states that his goal was to do the absolute opposite of what his father did, and another father states that his father simply gave up and that this is something that he would never do to his children. Table 4.3 shows how the fathers have intensified their commitment to fatherhood by enacting expressive father roles and changing the rules for socio-emotional engagement with their own children (Hammond et al., 2011).

The majority of fathers from the dissertation study had to deal with a negative point of reference with respect to their own fathers. However, none of the fathers actually blamed their own fathers for not being in their lives. Instead, they credit themselves for being better fathers than their fathers, and they acknowledge their own shortcomings with respect to their relationships. For example, their current relationships with their children emerged from their commitment to being responsible fathers. However, their failed relationships with their spouses or girlfriends are explained as errors in judgment.

Another point to note is that none of the fathers blamed their fathers for the negative stereotypical depictions of nonresident African American fathers. Instead, these

fathers talk about the negative images of African American men portrayed in the media, the saliency of the stereotypes and its effect on the public and on the African American fathers' self-esteem. They also talk about the child support laws and behavior of mothers who still believe that financial support matters most.

These fathers want the world to better understand their struggle, and they also want the world to see what they have become as a consequence of these struggles. They want to talk about their elevated growth, which is a direct challenge to what is seen in the research. These fathers want to offer a broader picture regarding the state of African American males in fathering roles (Conner & White, 2006). What was learned after interviewing these 13 men is that there is a major discrepancy between the negative absent father images of Black men described in the demographic studies and the depiction of Black men in fathering roles which emerge from structured interviews, narratives, and ethnographic investigations (Conner & White, 2006).

**Money matters: It's about life support, not financial support.** Several of the fathers state that their finances have at some point prevented them from seeing their children (Table 4.4). All 13 of the fathers in this study understand and agree that they must provide financial support for the well being of their children. However, the majority of the fathers are in line with researchers who believe that providing non-monetary support when financial support is problematic is a valuable contribution to their child's life (Amato, 1998; Cabrera et al., 2004; Wilson, 2003). This view seems to resonate with researchers and the fathers from this study. The fathers talk about going to PTA meetings, after school activities, picking them up from daycare, and being a problem solver. One father states that his role as father should not be compromised because he cannot provide

the mother with child support. As noted by Mincy and Sorensen (1998), many of these nonresident African American fathers are “dead broke dads, not dead beat dads.”

The fathers from this study agree with the research regarding the many elements that encompass fatherhood. However, these fathers also believe that this view has failed to resonate with biological mothers. As stated by Roberts (1998), for better or worse, women are less likely to marry or otherwise stick with men who offer little financial advantage. If this is true, there are two different ideologies that will continue to be problematic with respect to the family unit. As a solution, one father suggests that we need to get more Black mothers to the table because they are a big part of the solution to the problem, and we need to have a more open dialog with them.

**The need for acknowledgment and change in perception.** The fathers stress the need for positive and public acknowledgement of who they are as fathers (Table 4.5). In addition, the fathers feel the need for a universal change in perception. This proposed change is not limited to individuals of different ethnicities who have negative preconceived stereotypical views of nonresident African American fathers as stated by several of the participants from this study. It also includes nonresident African American fathers who have negative self-imposed stereotypical views of themselves.

In the minds of many Americans, African American men are still perceived as gangster rappers, hustlers, rapists, gang bangers, drug dealers, and crack heads. Over the past 50 years the media has emerged as a socializer, and Black culture within the media has been perceived as the benchmark of social degeneracy (Roberts, 1998). The media, by way of the television, movies, radio, and the Internet is a central influence in the lives of Americans. Therefore, what is seen on television, the Internet, and what is read in the

research, magazines, and newspapers, or what is heard on the radio creates perceptions that can thwart the idea that a African American man can be a suitable mentor to his child (Roberts, 1998). This is what the nonresident African American father is up against, and the need for positive acknowledgement that the nonresident African American father seeks will continue to be thwarted by a media that has been influenced by the remnants of slavery, the Jim Crow laws, the Black Codes, as well research studies with ties to the Moynihan report.

The fathers from this study look for a positive acknowledgement of their commitment to fatherhood. They seek to praise and acknowledge themselves as fathers who are doing good and are engaged with their children. They see themselves as fathers who are warm, loving, and caring towards their children. They are fathers who are doing right, and who are culturally stronger when it comes to fatherly involvement. They are fathers who should be cherished, loved, and appreciated. In other words, they are men who are no different than any other ethnic group of fathers who love their children. However, these fathers continue to consciously and in some cases unconsciously suffer from the atrocities of slavery's legacy, and they will continue to be penalized on the basis of accentuated stereotypes derived from the Jim Crow Laws and the Black Codes. With respect to public opinion, they will continue to be judged by limited research informed by limited perspectives with respect to the nonresident African American father.

What the current research shows is that an African American does not have to be a slave to experience the impact of slavery, and that one can feel the brunt of Jim Crow and the Black Codes straight out of the "mothers womb." Researchers and social scientists (Lamb 1999), who have focused largely on middle-class-white families, have

succeeded in shaping public perception to a point where the nonresident African American fathers from this study and perhaps others, feel the need to be acknowledged for their commitment to their children while seeking to change the overpowering negative perceptions. One of the participants said,

Positive images will bring on positive acknowledgement which will bring on the perception that it is possible to be involved in your child's life, that it is desirable to be in your child's life, and that this is the norm. I believe that you get what you aspire for. If all we're doing is talking about the negative aspects of Black fathers, we will end up with a new generation of young Black men and women who accept these negative perceptions.

**The prerequisite for evaluating the nonresident African American father.** All of the participants agree that their lives changed dramatically once they became fathers. When asked to talk about the challenges that they face, each provides their own narrative of challenges they have dealt with or are currently dealing with. One father states that his separation from his child's biological mother and the emotional issues that were placed on his daughter as a result were difficult to deal with. Another father talks about his emotional feelings of loss and how he misses his son to the point where he has cried. In addition, three of the fathers talk about dealing with their child's new home location and how this new location became problematic in that it reduced the amount of quality time that they have to spend with their child. Another father focuses on his relationship with this child's biological mother. He said that the biological mother's mood became a determinant for the amount of time that he gets to see his children.

With respect to this study, the emotional challenges associated with a separation, the change in one's location, and the issue of dealing with the biological mother's mood swings are generic in that they are issues that all nonresident fathers have to deal with. These issues are not exclusive to the nonresident African American father's experience.

However, a challenge unique to African American men, as identified in this study, is racism. The fathers interviewed for this study are angered by the fact that they have to inform their children about the perils of racism (Table 4.6). They feel it is undeserving and unfair that their children have to deal with this issue. The fathers indicate that though this issue is difficult to discuss, they owe it to their children to inform them of the difficulties that will surface from racism. One father states that he will prepare his children because if racism has not impinged on their life already, at some point, it will. "It's gonna happen," he said. The majority of the fathers concur with the statement that racism is something that their White counterparts do not have to deal with. To be Black within the American narrative is to be inextricably connected to the fundamental contradiction of freedom and equality (Waterhouse, 2011). Even with the legacy of a Black President who encompasses a supreme perception of positivity with respect to the Black family, one of the fathers from this study believes that racism is a problem that will never go away and that his son will at some point in his lifetime have to deal with the challenges of an unfair work place. As noted by Randall (2010), the contemporary African American has to deal with the inequalities of education, employment discrimination, bigotry, humiliation, self-esteem issues, and favoritism.

## **Limitations**

The research was carefully planned, however it is not without limitations. Limitations are factors or boundaries that beyond the control of the researcher that might impact the results of the research. However, these factors or boundaries are not significant enough to discontinue research activities (Cottrell & McKenzie, 2011).

The first limitation concerns the interpretation of what a good father is. Though there are numerous books and research articles with various definitions on what good fathering is, the underlying stance in this study is that each father possesses his own interpretation of what good fathering entails. Moreover, these interpretations are worthy of quantitative and qualitative inquiry. However, for the purpose of this study, some of the components of good fathering are defined as nurturance and provision of care, moral and ethical guidance, emotional, practical and psychosocial support of female partners, and economic provisioning as four main avenues of influential paternal behaviors (Marsiglio et al., 2000). Additionally, fathers must show commitment, discipline, communication, mentoring, forgiveness and be able to build self-esteem (Philips, 1992). McDowell and Day (1991) also suggest acceptance, appreciation, affection, availability, accountability, and authority to name a few.

A second limitation is the exclusive interviews with nonresident African American fathers. The research explores the participants' views on father involvement and what good fathering means. However, the research did not include interviews with other family members. Studies have found that different family members provide different reactions to issues surrounding family life. Morman and Floyd (2006) state that it is important to include other voices to avoid single source bias reporting. However, due

to the limited amount of research in which nonresident African American fathers are questioned about their perceptions of the importance of father involvement and their view on what a good father is, the research intentionally included only nonresident African American fathers. Doing so addresses the lack of research from the perspective of nonresident African American fathers, and thus contributes the voice and perspective of the nonresident African American father to the growing body of research on fatherhood.

The third limitation focuses on the number of fathers interviewed. A larger pool of participants would strengthen the assertions, themes, and core theory developed from the data analysis. Moreover, a larger group of participants could allow for the generalization of the findings.

Criticism can also be presented in regard to the researcher's own experiences and biases as a nonresident African American father, an expert speaker on fatherhood issues, producer of public service announcements on fatherhood, and a writer of books, articles, and blogs on the issue of parenthood. The researcher understands that his preconceived notions, views, and experiences could be viewed as a bias. However, the study's contributions to the limited amount of research on nonresident African American fathers prevails over researcher bias.

### **Recommendations**

One of the significant findings emerging from this study is that there is a need for more qualitative studies that offer the perspectives of nonresident African American fathers. This specific group of fathers must be given the opportunity to speak for themselves so that interventions aimed at promoting paternal involvement have a greater likelihood of being successful (Julion et al., 2007). Quantitative studies that rely solely on

numerical data run the risk of missing the truths the lie behind the data. Although there are far too many African American children who live in fatherless homes, in numerous situations Black men, like the nonresident African American fathers from this study, are present in the lives of their children. Unfortunately these fathers continue to be ignored and their contributions to their families are minimized (Conner & White, 2006).

Researchers must take advantage of opportunities to focus on the experience of nonresident African American fathers. Additional studies could perhaps change the negative unilateral perspective often seen in newspapers, radio, television, movies and the Internet.

The face-to-face interviews conducted with 13 nonresident African American fathers reveal that these fathers experience a sense of powerlessness with respect to negative stereotypes, their perceptions, racism, lack of recognition, money matters, and their relationships with their own fathers. Each of these issues has the potential of hindering paternal involvement. As a result, further inquiry on the physical, sociological and physiological effects regarding these issues is warranted.

Several of the fathers from this study give the impression that they have coping mechanisms to help them deal with issues of race, negatives stereotypes, money matters, the lack of recognition, and their own father's neglect. Several of the participants talked about attending fathering organizations, some talked about sharing information with friends and family members, and some simply acknowledged the existence of these issues and problems. What is evident is that the majority of fathers who participated in this study understand that they can not deal with these issues alone. The men who talk about their own fathers' neglect talk more about how the neglect helped them to be better

fathers, but they did not explore about how this neglect affected them internally. Furthermore, the fathers who talked about negative stereotypes and issues of racism did not talk in-depth about their own feelings in this regard. Future studies could look into what happens to these men when they are consistently treated like a “phenomenon.” Future studies could also discuss the physical, sociological, and physiological symptoms that might exist as a result of their fathers’ neglect, the stereotypes aimed at them, the racism they experience, and the lack of positive acknowledgement for the roles that they play as fathers. Counselors, social workers and fathering organizations can draw attention to the seriousness of these issues through brochures, public service announcements, and in the various media outlets.

## **Conclusion**

The qualitative inquiry conducted for this dissertation research succeeded in its goal to explore some of the cultural challenges that are specific to the experience of the nonresident African American father. In addition the research provides the academic community with a fresh perspective on nonresident African American fatherhood. The researcher accomplished this by directly talking to 13 nonresident African American fathers. The study differs from previous research that consists of predominately White fathers, thus ignoring the cultural differences, practices, perceptions, problems and obstacles of other populations. The dissertation study also offers a different perspective by presenting the voices of the participants rather than simply following the trend of talking about the particular group of fathers.

For the study, six open-ended questions were selected from Julion et al.’s (2007) research on African American nonresident fathers’ views on parental involvement. As

with Julion et al.'s study, the questions were effective in assisting in generating an in-depth discussion with each participant on his views and experiences as a nonresident African American father. Moreover, the answers to the questions, when analyzed through grounded theory, were effective in building five themes and one theory.

The goal of the study was to fill a void in the research by offering an authentic perspective on African American fatherhood. This goal was met as fathers from the study were engaged and provided their own voices, views, and experiences. In addition the fathers displayed a sense of admiration and appreciation for being given the opportunity to be heard and recognized.

The decision to utilize components of Grounded Theory motivated and inspired the meticulous and careful analysis of the raw data. As a consequence of this thorough analysis, the research not only generated patterns and themes derived from the raw data, the application of grounded theory built a core theory from the patterns, themes, and the raw data. Although several of the themes identified are not exclusive to the nonresident African American fathers' overall fathering experience, it is these themes that contribute to the core category or theory that the fathers experience a sense of powerlessness. This core theory might be useful in providing researchers, lawyers, politicians, social workers, and those working for fathering organizations with a better understanding with respect to how this particular group of fathers practice and perceive their role as fathers as they deal with the problems and obstacles associated with fatherhood.

During the interviews, the researcher listened to the participants' voices to hear what they had to say about being a nonresident African American father. The researcher acknowledged and noted their point of view with respect to their underlying approach to

being a nonresident African American father. In addition, the researcher recognized and acknowledged many of their experiences as exclusive to their culture.

The 13 men who participated in this study are surviving in a complex society where they are expected to conform to society's universal expectations of what a good father is supposed to be. What makes their experience different is that each participant attempts to adhere to these universal expectations while also dealing with issues that are exclusive to their own culture. These fathers not only have to deal with the negative stereotypes associated with fatherhood in the general sense, these fathers also have to deal with negative stereotypes where the color of their skin defines how they practice and perceive their role as fathers and how they deal with the obstacles and problems associated with their approach to fatherhood. Because of these stereotypes, the fathers from this study and many like them continue to be widely misrepresented in newspapers, research articles, on television, movies and the Internet. In addition, racism has and will continue to play a role in the lives of these fathers and their children. The fathers from this study have to explain racism to their children and deal with the humiliation of being followed around stores while they shop for food or clothes. They have to explain to their children why schools in certain neighborhoods have resources like computers, Internet services, and books while their schools do not. These fathers will have to find ways to protect themselves and their children from people who might not like them or hire them because of the color of their skin. In addition to issues of race, these fathers also have to find ways to deal with the surprise their presence conveys whenever they are in public with their child. In each of these cases these fathers are experiencing a sense of powerlessness in that they cannot prevent these events from occurring.

Some of the fathers from this study state that they have at times, changed their personalized approaches to fatherhood. These changes stem not from some need to enhance their skills as a father. Instead, these changes stem from their fear of being stereotyped as a bad father. In a sense, the fathers who participated this study are in a unique predicament. In the general sense, they are expected to carry out their fatherly duties as men. However, these men also must carry out their fatherly duties as Black men. The unfortunate reality is that these fathers are forced into a situation where if they are acknowledged as good men, or in this case good fathers, they also have to find ways to deal with and escape the negative stereotypes aimed at them as Black men, Black fathers, nonresident fathers, and nonresident African American fathers. In addition, they must also deal with the perils of racism aimed at them as Black men.

If these fathers succeed and are able to maintain their commitment as responsible involved fathers, they then must mentally prepare themselves to deal with their invisible presence as good responsible and involved nonresident African American fathers. Hence, any acknowledgement of their good works either will be ignored or will fall victim to a society that continues to see them as a phenomenon, one good father in a pool of many, or as a gangster rapper, drug dealer, or criminal. It is here that they experience a sense of powerlessness with respect to how they are perceived by the outside world. The fathers from this study are presumed guilty of being irresponsible, immature, unreliable, untrustworthy, erratic in behavior, uncaring, and missing. Unlike their White counterparts, the fathers from this study are presumed to be all of these things until they can prove they are innocent. Despite their commitment, love, attentiveness, caring, nurturing, involvement with, and respect for their children, the burden of proof along

with their sense of powerlessness, as it relates to negative stereotypes, negative perceptions, and the lack of acknowledgement for their commitment to their children, remains a constant reality of life for these men.

This study will not diminish the amount of negative stereotypes that nonresident African American fathers face, nor does it prevent nonresident African American fathers from having to deal with racism or the every day issues that all nonresident fathers deal with. What this study accomplishes is that it gives 13 nonresident African American fathers the opportunity to tell their stories in their own voices, to share their own views on nonresident African American fatherhood, and to reflect and add to their own personal experiences of being a nonresident African American father to the body of research on fatherhood. Through the voices, views, and experiences of these 13 men and others like them, researchers can expand the discussion on the topic and perhaps discover ways to better serve this population.

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## Appendix A

### Confidential Agreement

This Agreement is entered into this \_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 200\_\_ by and between \_\_\_\_\_ with offices at \_\_\_\_\_ (hereinafter "Recipient") and \_\_\_\_\_, with offices at \_\_\_\_\_ (hereinafter "Discloser").

WHEREAS Discloser possesses certain ideas and information relating to \_\_\_\_\_ that is confidential and proprietary to Discloser (hereinafter "Confidential Information"); and

WHEREAS the Recipient is willing to receive disclosure of the Confidential Information pursuant to the terms of this Agreement for the purpose of \_\_\_\_\_;

NOW THEREFORE, in consideration for the mutual undertakings of the Discloser and the Recipient under this Agreement, the parties agree as follows:

1. Disclosure. Discloser agrees to disclose, and Receiver agrees to receive the Confidential Information.
2. Confidentiality.
  - 2.1 No Use. Recipient agrees not to use the Confidential Information in any way, or to manufacture or test any product embodying Confidential Information, except for the purpose set forth above.
  - 2.2 No Disclosure. Recipient agrees to use its best efforts to prevent and protect the Confidential Information, or any part thereof, from disclosure to any person other than Recipient's employees having a need for disclosure in connection with Recipient's authorized use of the Confidential Information.
  - 2.3 Protection of Secrecy. Recipient agrees to take all steps reasonably necessary to protect the secrecy of the Confidential Information, and to prevent the Confidential Information from falling into the public domain or into the possession of unauthorized persons.
3. Limits on Confidential Information. Confidential Information shall not be deemed proprietary and the Recipient shall have no obligation with respect to such information where the information:
  - (a) was known to Recipient prior to receiving any of the Confidential Information from Discloser;
  - (b) has become publicly known through no wrongful act of Recipient;
  - (c) was received by Recipient without breach of this Agreement from a third party

without restriction as to the use and disclosure of the information;  
(d) was independently developed by Recipient without use of the Confidential Information; or  
(e) was ordered to be publicly released by the requirement of a government agency.

4. Ownership of Confidential Information. Recipient agrees that all Confidential Information shall remain the property of Discloser, and that Discloser may use such Confidential Information for any purpose without obligation to Recipient. Nothing contained herein shall be construed as granting or implying any transfer of rights to Recipient in the Confidential Information, or any patents or other intellectual property protecting or relating to the Confidential Information.

5. Term and Termination. The obligations of this Agreement shall be continuing until the Confidential Information disclosed to Recipient is no longer confidential.

6. Survival of Rights and Obligations. This Agreement shall be binding upon, inure to the benefit of, and be enforceable by (a) Discloser, its successors, and assigns; and (b) Recipient, its successors and assigns.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the parties have executed this agreement effective as of the date first written above.

DISCLOSER (\_\_\_\_\_)   
 Print Name: \_\_\_\_\_

RECIPIENT (\_\_\_\_\_)   
 Print Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B

### Informed Consent Form

I \_\_\_\_\_ (Print name) agree to participate in a study conducted by David Asbery in which my participation I will answer six question, along with probing questions that relate to fatherhood. I understand that this process will take approximately one hour. The research has agreed to pay me \$10.00 for my participation in the study. I have also been informed that I may refuse to participate at any time during the process without fear of retribution by any organizational or educational entity. In addition, I have been informed that I will be provided with a summary of the findings of the study if I so desire.

Signed (Signature) \_\_\_\_\_

Please print name \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail address \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone \_\_\_\_\_

School Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Cell Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Time and Date of Viewing Session \_\_\_\_\_

Place of Session \_\_\_\_\_

Please check box if you wish a summary of the study. It will be sent to you by e-mail when  the research is completed



## Appendix D

### Compendium of Data Collection Approaches in Qualitative Research

#### Observations

- Gather field notes by conducting an observation as a participant.
- Gather field notes by conducting an observation as an observer.
- Gather field notes by spending more time as a participant than as an observer.
- Gather field notes by spending more time as an observer than as a participant.
- Gather field notes first by observing as an "outsider" and then by moving into the setting and observing as an "insider"

#### Interviews

- Conduct an unstructured, open-ended interview and take interview notes.
- Conduct an unstructured, open-ended interview, audiotape the interview, and transcribe the interview.
- Conduct a semi-structured interview, audiotape the interview, and transcribe the interview.
- Conduct a focus group interview, audiotape the interview, and transcribe the interview.
- Conduct different types of interviews: e-mail, face-to-face, focus group, online focus group, telephone interviews.

#### Documents

- Keep a journal during the research study.
- Have a participant keep a journal or diary during the research study.
- Collect personal letters from participants.
- Analyze public documents (e.g., official memos, minutes, records, archival material).
- Examine autobiographies and biographies.
- Have informants take photographs or videotapes (i.e., photo elicitation).
- Conduct chart audits.
- Review medical records.

#### Audiovisual materials

- Examine physical trace evidence (e.g., footprints in the snow).
- Videotape or film a social situation or an individual or group.
- Examine photographs or videotapes.
- Collect sounds (e.g., musical sounds, a child's laughter, car horns honking).
- Collect e-mail or electronic messages.
- Gather phone text message

## Appendix E

Permission from Dr. Wrenetha Julion

**From:** Wrenetha A Julion [mailto:[Wrenetha\\_A\\_Julion@rush.edu](mailto:Wrenetha_A_Julion@rush.edu)]

**Sent:** Tuesday, March 08, 2011 2:38 PM

**To:** David Asbery

**Subject:** RE: Focus Group questions

Hi David,

I enjoyed speaking to you today about your proposed dissertation research. Please consider this email response my formal agreement that you can use the attached focus group questions from my "It's Not Just About Momma's" publication in your research. I am pleased that the focus group questions in this paper continue to have utility for emerging fatherhood researchers. I look forward to the completion of your studies and your dissertation, and please feel free to contact me if I can be of further assistance,  
Sincerely,

Wrenetha Julion, PhD, MPH, RN

Associate Professor,

Rush University College of Nursing

Department of Women, Children and Family Nursing

**Sent:** Tuesday, March 08, 2011 12:44pm

**From:** David Asbery [mailto:[Dasbery@malkinholdings.com](mailto:Dasbery@malkinholdings.com)]

**To:** Wrenetha A Julion **Subject:** Focus Group questions

Hello Dr. Julion.

Thanks for taking my call. As discussed, my name is David Asbery. I am a doctoral candidate at St John Fisher College. My dissertation will focus on father involvement as it pertains to African American fathers. While reading through the research on this topic I came across your article entitled: **It's Not Just about Mommas: African American Nonresident Fathers' Views of Parental Involvement**. The focus group questions that you used would be perfect for my study. I would like your permission to use the attached questions for my study.

David Asbery

Please consider the environment before printing this email.

\*\*\*\*\*

**David Asbery** Director of Records/Office Services Malkin Holdings LLC 60 East 42<sup>nd</sup> Street New York, NY 10165 212-850-2668 212-986-8795

This E-mail and any attachments are only for the named addressee(s) and may contain confidential information. If you are not a named addressee, you are hereby notified that any distribution or use by you is prohibited, and you should promptly delete all electronic and print copies and notify the sender at (212) 687-8700.

## Appendix F

### Interview Questions Used with Permission from Julion (2007)

Topic	Question	Probing Questions
The experience of being a father	Describe what it is like being a father	Is it what you thought it would be? What bring you joy in being a father? What is challenging about being a father?
Paternal involvement	We've all probably heard stories, or even know people who are very involved with their children. What does being an involved father mean?	Tell me about the ways you spend time with your child. How much of this time is spent in person?
Hindrances, facilitators of involvement	As I listened to you, what I heard is that being a father is a mix of joys and challenges. I'd like to hear more about what makes it easier or harder to be involved with your children.	What gets in the way of being involved with your children? What makes it easier to be involved with your children? Does your religious faith or housing arrangement influence your involvement? Bring up money and/or income if they don't.
The role of African American fathers	In what way is being an African American make your role different than other fathers? What do you think is the role of a father?	What is your primary responsibility? Is your role different based on your child's age or whether your child is a girl or boy?
Intergenerational aspects of fatherhood	How did your relationship with your (family of origin) own father or father figure influence your involvement with your children?	Describe your family of origin. What did you like/dislike? Would you change anything? Why do you think your dad was or wasn't involved?
The importance of fathers	If you had 5 minutes of fame, and you had your chance to tell the world about fathers. What would you tell them about African American father?	