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UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

AFRICAN AMERICAN FATHERS: FACTORS THAT
MOTIVATE THEIR COMMITMENT TO THEIR CHILDREN

A Dissertation

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

By

JOHN L. CARTER JR.

Norman, Oklahoma

2001

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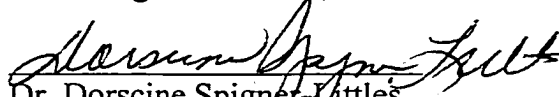
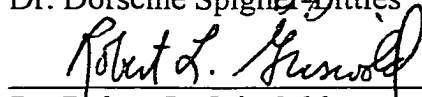
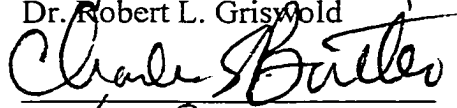
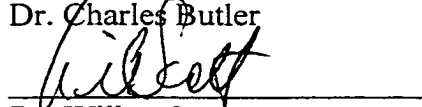
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AFRICAN AMERICAN FATHERS: FACTORS THAT MOTIVATE
THEIR COMMITMENT TO THEIR CHILDREN

A Dissertation APPROVED FOR THE
GRADUATE COLLEGE

BY


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Perhaps the greatest social service that can be rendered by anybody to the country and to mankind is to bring up a family. –George Bernard Shaw

To my deceased father, John L. Carter Sr., who provided me with so much love and support that it made me skeptical about the origins of the media perpetuated stereotype of the deadbeat or uninvolved African American father. Your devotion to the concept of family generally and to me specifically, inspired and compelled me to explore the more positive side of African American fathers and was the genesis of this dissertation. No mere words can fully express my gratitude to you.

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study, but unfortunately died before being interviewed. James, this dissertation is dedicated to you, my father and the many other African American fathers, who defy the stereotype by remaining unceasingly devoted to their children.

AFRICAN AMERICAN FATHERS: FACTORS THAT MOTIVATE THEIR COMMITMENT TO THEIR CHILDREN

ABSTRACT

African American fathers have traditionally been portrayed negatively in the media as “deadbeat, uninvolved and/or absentee”. This portrayal can be supported by some national statistics that detail the fact that over sixty per cent of African American children are born into or later become a part of a female headed, single parent family.

This stereotype has sociological, political and economic implications, since statutes have been imposed to insure that biological fathers provide financial support to their children and in some cases to the children’s mother.

Concomitantly there are values in the American psyche that encourage all fathers to be involved in raising and nurturing their children. The inference that African American fathers are less committed to their children than are fathers of other racial groups carries with it negative connotations that affront the sensibilities of most African Americans.

This dissertation used qualitative methods to study eight “successful” black fathers who belie the stereotype. The goal was to examine the motivation of these committed fathers.

The results of the research indicated that successful African American fathers are motivated by myriad factors that positively influence their commitment to their children. There does not seem to be a genetic predisposition in African Americans that makes them unfit or fit fathers. Rather, family-of-origin, socialization, economics,

religion/spirituality, personal philosophy and other factors coalesced to produce these successful African American fathers.

The participants in the study also provided a number of suggestions that might be implemented to help increase the number of committed African American fathers in future generations.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Newspaper headlines such as “Nearly half of black homes headed by single women” (Weber, 2000) and “Absence of Black Fathers decried” (Wetzstein, 1999) and media portrayals of African American mothers struggling to keep their families together without the aid of the children’s father (Garfinkel & McLanahan, 1989; Popenoe, 1996) are the impetus for this study. Public policy and sociological concerns (Gunn, 1995; Jewell, 1988) have been raised based on the perception that a disproportionate number of African American families are negatively impacted by absentee or “deadbeat” fathers who do not emotionally or financially support their children. National statistics seem to support this perception: more black children are born into single-parent families than are children of other racial groups (National Center for Health Statistics, 1997). These perceptions make this dissertation both timely and relevant.

Statistics compiled by the United States of America Census Bureau report that African American children are much more likely than white children to be raised in a home where their father’s financial contribution to the family is meager in many cases and nonexistent in others (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1997). Census data for 1999 show that African American households are more likely than white households to be headed by a woman, without a partner living in the home. African American married couples accounted for approximately 47 percent of the nation’s 8.4 million black households. However, approximately 45 percent of black families are headed by a mother with no father present in the household (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1999). This contrasts sharply

with the nation's white households, where a mother alone heads only 13 percent of them. The Census Bureau statistics project a significant increase in the African American population during the twenty-first century. Specifically, it predicts that there will be a 70 percent increase in the African American population-- a total of 59.2 million African Americans by the year 2050 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1999). Statistics also indicate that single-parent family households headed by women are more likely to fall below the poverty line and are more likely than other households to require public assistance (Garrison, 1994). The increase in population and the problem of absentee or deadbeat African American fathers who do not provide financial support for their children is therefore a significant political and public policy issue.

Numerous studies indicate that fathers are very important to the psychological growth of their children (Angel & Angel, 1996; Berman, 1995). This increases the urgency for gaining more information about absentee or deadbeat African American fathers. Black men are often portrayed in the media as sexually promiscuous and irresponsible (Bogle, 1973; Madhubuti, 1991; Pitts, 1999). In the minds of many Americans, this stereotype manifests itself in the form of depicting black men as being more closely akin to lower animals than Homo Sapiens. This negative stereotype implies that African American fathers are less committed to their children than are fathers of other racial groups.

Mass audience publications as well as radio, television and movie programs have all at some time perpetuated the perception of black males as wanton, animalistic, sexual predators who are only interested in achieving their own selfish pleasures without regard for the consequences. In the words of Bogle (1973): "The mass media, again, has been

instrumental in portraying Black men as studs, pimps, super-detectives or imitation white men.” Films such as *Superfly*, *The Mack*, *Shaft*, *Sweet Sweetback’s Badass Song*, *The Great White Hope*, *Blackula*, *Legend of Nigger Charley*, *Watermelon Man*, *A Soldier’s Story*, *The Color Purple*, *Native Son*, *Colors* and countless others offer profound but negative commentary on black males. Sadly, this is often accepted as social gospel (Madhubuti, 1991). However, as with any stereotype, it does not tell the entire story. Therefore a small but growing number of authors have begun to tell the other side of the story by concentrating on African American fathers who are positive role models for their children (Billingsley, 1992; Hare & Hare, 1984; Hill, 1972; McAdoo, 1988, 1997; McAdoo & McAdoo, 1985).

Ebony, the most popular African American magazine, discussed the resilient nature of this stereotypical portrayal in its November 1992, fiftieth year anniversary issue. An article titled “The 10 Biggest Myths about the Black Family,” written by Lerone Bennett, states that the effort to discredit African Americans is most clearly visible in attacks directed at parental responsibility and family interactions. Bennett cautions his readers that “raw and uncontrolled sex, according to the biggest and most pervasive myth, is at the root of the Black family problem” (p. 118). Lack of morals is often cited as the reason for the high number of African American babies born out of wedlock. However, it can be shown through census data that this is not just a “black problem.” Millions of whites, including some who are affluent, have children outside the bonds of matrimony.

Historically, African Americans have generally disapproved of having children outside the bonds of marriage. A common dictate within black communities is that the

privilege of having children should be reserved for mature and economically responsible parents. African Americans have long maintained that there are no illegitimate children, only irresponsible parents (McAdoo, 1997). This attitude is reflected in the common practice of community members assuming parental responsibility for out-of-wedlock children (Blassingame, 1972; Gutman 1976; Staples & Johnson, 1993). If the theory of low morality being a black community standard is unfounded, then there are other factors that contribute to irresponsible parenting.

Another rebuttal of the stereotype that historically African American fathers are less committed to their children and family is the fact that in Africa stable family systems are the norm. The slaves who were brought to America came from ancient cultures that embraced stable marriage patterns (Franklin, 1987). Studies conducted by Gutman (1975), Griswold (1993) and other scholars (Jewell, 1988; Perdue, Barden, & Phillips, 1980) have refuted the thesis that the black family was destroyed by slavery. These studies unequivocally show that the majority of slaves lived in monogamist relationships where families were headed by parents who took their marriage vows seriously. Some slave marriages lasted 25 years or more. Nor do research findings support the belief that the emancipation from slavery destroyed the black family. In fact, after the Emancipation Proclamation, countless black men and women traveled throughout the South trying to find their separated children, spouses and other relatives in order to re-establish families that were disrupted by the slave trade and the practice of selling individual slaves instead of familial groups (Griswold, 1993).

Another myth is that all African American families are historically matriarchal. Actually, female-headed black households are a recent phenomenon that may be a

reflection of economic factors, since the shift occurred during the Great Depression of the 1930's (Billingsley, 1992; Jewell, 1988). If African roots, slavery, emancipation, migration and genetic predisposition do not offer realistic rationales for the higher rates of out-of-wedlock births and absentee fathers within black communities, what are the systemic causes and how can the problem be prevented or abated? The research conducted for this dissertation is a possible new way of understanding fathers who do not fit the stereotype.

This study describes attitudes, beliefs and behaviors of a small number of African American fathers who are committed to and supportive of their children. Specifically, the study describes the backgrounds of the fathers and describes some positive aspects of their father-child relationships and the conditions under which such relationships were fostered. Economic, social, and spiritual factors that influence the nature of the relationship between African American fathers and their children are described. Conceivably, such factors are integrated into the psyche of successful African American fathers and predispose them to bond with and support their children.

A corollary of this research, but not my main objective, may be its potential to counter the media stories that give the impression of most African American fathers abandoning their children and leaving the mother as the sole functional parent. Another negative media portrayal is that African American fathers initially care for and nurture their children, but ultimately they leave the family and become detached from their children's lives.

Succinctly, this research consists of the stories of African American fathers who did not abandon their children. They nurture, guide and otherwise support their children.

The result of such behavior is to create an atmosphere that increases the chances for their children to become responsible, caring and socially productive adults.

Significance of the Study

Absentee or non-involved African American fathers have long been acknowledged as a “problem” by U.S. government agencies. A 1965 federal report called *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* is an example. Written by Daniel P. Moynihan, Assistant Secretary of Labor, the report contrasted the norms found in Caucasian and African American families and specifically discussed differences between Caucasian American and African American fathers. The central thesis is direct: the “fabric” of African American society was crumbling, due to the “deterioration” of the black family. According to Moynihan, the deterioration was evidenced by high rates of divorce, children born out of wedlock, increased dependence on welfare and increasing numbers of families headed by females—the alleged legacies of slavery and a failed Reconstruction period

Some people may argue that fathers are not very important in their children's life beyond the obvious biological component. However, this does not seem to be the case as determined by several studies conducted in the 1990s (Angel & Angel, 1996; Berman, 1995; Garnefski & Diekstra, 1997). These studies cite the critical role that fathers have in molding the healthy physical growth and psychological development of their children. Numerous studies have been conducted to determine the effects that uninvolved or absent fathers have on the psychic and intellectual development of their children (Clarke-Stewart, 1978; Deman & Leduc, 1995; Kiernan, 1992). While not conclusive, these studies seem to indicate that a father's involvement or lack thereof has

significant effects on his children's self-esteem, academic achievement and general well being. Fathers' absence and its effect on academic achievement is addressed by Collier and others (1973) in *The Effect of the Father-Absent Home on 'Lower Class' Black Adolescents*. Williams (1987) describes other negative conditions that accrue to father-absent families.

The residual effects of uninvolved or absent fathers on families have been a fruitful area of study for psychologists and other mental health professionals. The preponderance of such research studies point out the significance of father involvement as a major factor in children's socialization, moral development, intellectual achievement and sex role identification (Blankenhorn, 1995; Bowman, 1990; Campbell, 1995). Some of the studies state unequivocally that unhealthy, unhelpful things happen to children when their fathers are not actively involved in their lives. Children who have absent, uninvolved fathers seem to be at dramatically higher risk of social pathologies such as drug and alcohol abuse, mental illness, suicide, accidental injury, asthma, frequent headaches and speech defects (Dawson, 1991). In a speech at the University of Texas, Austin, on October 16, 1995, President Bill Clinton summarized the importance of involved fathers, stating that:

The single biggest social problem in our society may be the growing absence of fathers from their children's homes, because it contributes to so many other social problems... Without a father to help guide, without a father to teach boys to be men, and to teach girls to expect respect from men, it's harder.

Newt Gingrich, the Republican Speaker of the House, while announcing the congressional task force on fatherhood on 12 June 1997, echoed the president's sentiments with this statement:

When children and families suffer from an absent father, society as a whole suffers. Children without fathers are more likely to have trouble in school, become an unwed parent or involved with gangs or drugs. It is important not only that we create a climate in which committed fatherhood is valued and supported, loving fathers are encouraged... Fathers must be there for their sons and daughters" (cited in Horn, 1999, p. 11).

Carol Frantz, a Harvard University psychologist, and her colleagues conducted a 26-years longitudinal study on early childhood and parental warmth. They concluded that fathers, absent or present, have just as much influence as do mothers in their children's development. Nurturing, supportive and involved fathers are more likely to produce more intelligent, adaptable and joyful children (Koestner, Franz & Weinberger, 1990). A stable family structure is one of the cornerstones of a stable American society. The relatively high number of absentee or uninvolved fathers in the United States seems incongruous in a nation that values intact family structures. Indeed, an intact family is considered a precursor to a successful democracy.

Even so, the rate of divorce and the number of blended families have grown exponentially during the last thirty years. This phenomenon, however, seems to be much more readily accepted than the increase in the number of "deadbeat dads." And, as noted earlier, the mass media continually highlight African American fathers who are deadbeat dads. As an example, the May 4, 1998 issue of *Sports Illustrated* magazine featured a

special report titled “Where’s Daddy?” The cover features a picture of Khalid Minor, an out-of-wedlock son of Greg Minor, who is an African American guard on the Boston Celtics basketball team in the National Basketball Association. The following statement accompanies the picture: “Pro athletes have fathered startling numbers of out-of wedlock children. One NBA star has seven by six women. Paternity cases have disrupted teams. What’s happening, and what does it mean for the kids left behind?” (p. 62).

Equally alarming is the following assertion in the magazine:

It’s no secret that the NBA has a higher percentage of black players (80%) than football (67%) or baseball (17%). Nor is it news that out-of-wedlock births are a persistent problem in the African American community. According to the most recent study by the National Center for Health Statistics, 70% of black children nationwide are born to unmarried mothers, compared with 21% for whites and 41% for Hispanics. (p. 70)

If athletes whose average salary exceeds one million dollars a year do not want to support their children, it is not surprising that some African American fathers who earn considerably less will try to shirk their financial responsibilities. If financially supportive and emotionally nurturing fathers are a key factor in the development of our nation, then the significance of this study is obvious.

The relevance of this research crosses racial and ethnic boundaries. It has implications for all families. Since the growth percentage of minority populations in general and African Americans in particular is much greater than that of the Caucasian population, without effective intervention, the absentee or uninvolved father problem will

be magnified. Finally, this research focuses on positive factors that foster father-child relations as opposed to negative ones.

Workplace Relevance

It is a well-established fact that employees who go to work with few or no unresolved community-related conflicts are more stable and more productive than those who have such problems (Fine, 1995; Henderson, 1994; Jackson, 1992). It is also true that countless non-minority group employees harbor myths and stereotypes pertaining to black males that frequently causes intergroup conflicts. Therefore studies like this one can shed light on a generally sub rosa factor that negatively affects employment and promotion opportunities for black males from low-income communities: the belief that they are all irresponsible and socially irreverent. That is, they are neither good citizens nor good parents.

When employers are at least able to suspend, if not discard, negative stereotypes about black male workers, they are also able to give them a fair opportunity to succeed in the workplace. Utilizing the optimum skills each employee has, regardless of race, is not social engineering or psychobabble. Rather, it is good business (Amott & Matthaei, 1991; Thomas, 1991). Relatedly, it is good business to employ black fathers who nurture and support their children, who in turn are able to grow up and become productive workers, too.

Definitions of Terms

African American fathers are black male fathers who were born and raised in the United States and who are currently residing in Germany through some affiliation with

the U.S. armed forces in Europe. The fathers in this study each had at least one biological, step or adopted child.

Commitment to a child refers to financial, social, emotional and psychological connections between fathers and their child or children, with the goal being to meet the needs of the child or children.

“Successful African American fathers” were individuals designated by school teachers and counselors, based on criteria such as the father’s participation in their child’s (or children’s) school activities and experiences, responsiveness to the child’s needs, the student’s academic and social adjustment, and observed positive interactions between father and child.

“Absentee fathers” are biological or stepfathers who, for whatever reason, do not reside in the home with the mother and his child or children. These fathers seldom interact with or provide material or emotional support for their child or children.

“Deadbeat Fathers” are biological or stepfathers who do not provide any financial assistance for the welfare of their children.

Other terms used in the study are generic and are believed to be self-explanatory.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this study include the sample. The participants were volunteers, not randomly selected. Also, they may have felt compelled to provide information that they thought would please the researcher, instead of providing completely honest and/or factual data. The researcher tried to minimize this latter response by constantly telling the participants that there were no right or wrong answers.

The fact that all of the participants were affiliated with the U.S. military is an additional limitation regarding the generalizability of the results. Another limitation is that the researcher did not compare and contrast the responses of these participants with those of absentee or deadbeat African American fathers. The research results would have been more relevant if comparative data were compiled using a sample of African Americans who were supportive parents and also those who were not. These limitations notwithstanding, the research is still viable and valuable because it adds information to the literature pertaining to African American fathers and their children.

CHAPTER TWO

SELECTIVE REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This literature review concerning African American fathers was initiated from the broader perspective of the African American family or, more precisely, families.

McAdoo (1997) affirmed that the diversity in the experiences of families of African descent in America makes it impossible to discuss one reality and establish a definitive prototype. Accordingly, the review involves many different types of studies on different types of African American families.

During the review, the neglect in this area of research became obvious. In general, most of the research on families focused on mothers and their children. The limited studies that did direct their attention to fathers mostly concentrated on the Caucasian middle class in traditional, intact, two-parent families. Black fathers, if studied at all, were lumped into the middle class category or were limited to discussions of poor, unwed fathers who were viewed negatively by mainstream American society. They were viewed as a burden to taxpayers and to their children's mothers, who were forced to bear the fiscal and social obligation of raising the children, without support from these "irresponsible fathers."

This review is divided into five sections. The first section consists of a brief history of the African American family. In the second section, the nature of the research that has been done on the African American family is discussed. The third section concerns strengths of the African American family. The final two sections focus on recent concerns about fathering in the U.S. and the negative perception of African American fathers.

A Brief History of the African American Family

Attention to history is critical when one searches for the underpinnings of modern-day African American families. A cursory review of studies regarding African American families reveals that many researchers have attempted to connect African family values to the values found in African American families. Since most of the slaves brought to America were taken from West Africa, countries in that locale are a logical starting point for a discussion of the history of the African American family.

Research focusing on African American families has always been complex and fraught with potentially controversial issues. In an effort to understand the phenomenon known as “the African American family,” most researchers have started with a definite conceptual framework. Early studies of the African American family were generally biased by the assumption that black culture and its family practices were innately inferior to white culture and family practices. These ethnocentric and somewhat racist views influenced the focus of this research. A basic common premise was that any group that wanted citizenship in America would desire and willingly accept the family values that were favored by white Anglo-Saxon Protestants (WASPs). It was believed that WASPs best represented the American way of life and all other groups would necessarily subscribe to those views. Since African American cultures never completely fit the norm, they were deemed pathological and dysfunctional (Moynihan, 1965). Research of this genre was problem-oriented and intimated that the African American family system was disorganized, chaotic and fraught with inadequacies that needed correcting.

From the early seventeenth century, when Africans were first brought to this country as slaves, until the later twentieth century, most white researchers generally

described African American families as being inferior to WASP families. Such noted scholars as Terman (1916), Thorndike (1940) and Galton (1969) consistently presented “evidence” that supported this notion. None of those scholars accepted the premise that the African American culture and its family systems were just different, not necessarily inferior. It was assumed that western European cultures were the hallmarks of civilization. That ethnocentric concept was so predominant that most of the subsequent research on the African American family for decades came to the same conclusion – that the family of African descent in America is dysfunctional. Many sociologists, including Frazier (1932), Bernard (1966), Willie (1970) and Scanzoni (1971), affirmed this negative conclusion with their own research.

Many of the maladies attributed to black families gradually pointed to female-headed households. Historically, even though they were a minority, female-headed households were accepted and functional in the black community. However, the general acceptance of these households during slavery and thereafter was transformed by some researchers into a belief that it was typical for black households to be headed by a female. Although some black families were characterized as matriarchal (Frizzier, 1939), many researchers took a gargantuan leap and generalized it to describe most black families.

Few researchers did more than Moynihan (1965) to label the black matriarchy a national problem. He called for national action to reduce (1) divorce rates, (2) the number of illegitimate children and (3) welfare dependence among African American families. Moynihan concluded that slavery was the major cause of the deterioration of the African American family structure. Moynihan postulated that one of the effects of slavery and segregation on African American men was to create a submissive pathology that

precluded them from taking their place as the heads of their families. Further, African American men. Moynihan reasoned, had been disempowered within their families by the experience of urban migration, accompanied by under- and unemployment. He concluded that the African American family was involved in a pathology that was incongruous with the majority society. These conditions were cited as factors that delayed the overall progress of African Americans, while imposing a great burden on African American men. Moynihan opined that a national initiative should be launched to strengthen the African American family to enable it to raise and support its members, implying that the African American family is unlike other families in this regard. The report further predicted devastating consequences for African American children without supportive fathers, maintaining that many such children are destined to flounder in school and ultimately to fail in the workplace. In response to Moynihan's and other reports on the state of the American family, legislation was imposed to insure that fathers stay involved in their children's lives, at least financially – and hopefully emotionally – whether they are married to the mothers or not. Moynihan's theories of the pathological nature of the malaise that surrounded African American families and the emasculation of African American men swayed the public for two decades before a critical mass of scholars began to challenge his findings.

In what follows a brief history of the African American family is presented. This history begins with a discussion of the traditional West African concept of family.

Traditional West African Families

Authors such as Herskovits (1941), Nobles et al. (1976) and Sudarkasa (1980) theorized that the West African influence on African American families was significant.

From those seminal studies has emerged a large body of evidence that the concept of family in Africa incorporates values very different from the traditional Western European values and behaviors adopted by mainstream Americans. For example, in West Africa, a stable family constellation typically consisted of an extended family with multigenerational groups of relatives living in one residential compound. These groupings were of great benefit in that they fostered the widely accepted practice of a "whole village raising a child" and the belief that all members of a compound were inexorably intertwined under the heading of "family."

Though the compound was inhabited by blood relatives and relatives by marriage and other more tenuous connections, everyone was accepted in the context of family, with relationships similar to such European titles as "older sibling," "younger sibling," "brother," "sister," "uncle" and "aunt." But a term as distancing as "cousin" did not exist in some of the languages and dialects in West Africa. There was no clear definition of lineage based on pure nuclear family associations or bloodlines. Children in the same age group grew up treated as brothers and sisters in the compound, even though there may not have been blood connections. These mutually beneficial family groupings meant that there were no fatherless children, since other male figures in "the family" assumed the roles and responsibilities of father, even if the biological father chose not to or could not fulfill the parenting role.

Summarizing this traditional West African family concept as it was transferred to America with the slaves, Sudarkasa (1981) stated:

The extended family networks that were formed during slavery by Africans and their descendants were based on the institutional heritage which the Africans had

brought with them to this continent, and the specific forms (these families) took reflected the influence of European-derived institutions as well as the political and economic circumstances in which the enslaved population found itself. (p. 45)

This influence of the African extended family concept was also noted by Billingsley (1968, 1992). However, he limited the extended-family concept to situations in which grandparents and/or great grandparents lived in the same household with the parents and children and thus it was different from the Western European family.

The African American Family During the Time of Slavery

Though a strong West African extended family tradition was brought to America with the slaves, the traditional African concept of family was modified due to the conditions imposed by slave owners and plantation living. Confined to smaller land areas and cramped households, the African American family became multigenerational, composed of married couples, their children, grandchildren, other relatives and even non-blood related members. Even more surprising to historians were the family connections that remained in place, even across plantations in different states (Sudarkasa, 1997). The European norm of monogamy became the accepted practice on plantations, even though polygamy had been an accepted tradition in some of the African tribes from which the slaves came. Blassingame (1972), Gutman (1977) and other researchers found plantation situations in which wives lived in separate houses as part of polygamous marriages, though this was rare. Overall, polygamy was the exception, and the rule of monogamy was reflected in slave marriages that lasted 25 and more years.

The strength of the bonds of consanguine relatives, where blood relationships and the obligations thereto were supreme, were severely strained during slavery. But it should

be noted that the strains of slavery and new concepts of family did not seem to impact African American families nearly as drastically as portrayed by Moynihan (1965) in his treatise. It is very unlikely that these strains portended the pathology to which he constantly referred.

While the marriage bond was important, it did not fully supplant the idea of the larger family that could extend to other households and include other dyads (mother-daughter, mother-son, etc.) that in some slave situations had primacy. The critical issue here is that African Americans have a viable cultural heritage that embraces family as a strong and important component of the black community. It is also important to note that those early traditions were functional, even in times of extreme poverty, discrimination and the general malaise that circumscribe any people who are enslaved. That the family was critical to the survival of slaves is not contestable. There was no other institution to which slaves could commit themselves without fear of retaliation from slave owners. Family members provided the quiet strength and mutual support that was essential to survival in the cruel and abusive world within which the slaves were confined. In fact, most slave owners encouraged early marriage and the production of many children from a purely economic perspective of the slave owner (Franklin, 1987).

The African American Family after Emancipation.

When the Civil War ended and the slaves were freed, the freed blacks searched throughout the South for family members who had been sold to other plantations. This sometimes entailed walking hundreds of miles to reconnect with loved ones, many of whom had married to please their owners. Marriage legitimized their bonds of matrimony and by so doing made their children legal heirs to whatever goods parents had acquired.

Herbert Gutman (1976) discussed North Carolina records that showed that over 9,000 former slaves each paid 25 cents (a considerable sum for newly freed slaves) to have their marriages recorded on court records in seventeen Southern counties. These acts of incredible perseverance and concern substantiated the importance of family in the early African American communities. Slavery did not destroy African family values.

Reconstruction Period statistics also confirm the importance of family in the economic fabric of the African American community. In the late 1800s, most African Americans in the South lived in father-present, husband-led households. However, this period also marked an increase in female-headed households for families that included middle-aged (over 40 years of age) parents. This fact may have given rise to the belief that African American families have always been matriarchal (Mack, 1971). In many cases, female-headed households were due to the early death of a husband or the economic necessity of a husband's going away to find work in the North, West or Midwest, where jobs and opportunities were more plentiful. In such situations, the extended family members often served as important supporters and sustainers for such mothers, since they and their children were often allowed to live with their parents or other adults, who shared in the child-rearing responsibilities. This support system obviated the need for separate households headed by single-parent mothers (Hayes & Mendel, 1973).

The movement of blacks out of the South to seek jobs during the period from 1880 to 1925 did not seem to negatively impact the unity of the black family. Against all odds, the number of male-absent households did not increase significantly because the majority of families were reunited after the males found jobs. Thus, for the most part,

families remained intact. According to Gutman (1976), six of every seven African American households had a husband or father in the house in 1925:

At all moments in time between 1880 and 1925—that is, from an adult generation born in slavery to an adult generation about to be devastated by the Great Depression of the 1930s and the modernization of southern agriculture afterward—the typical Afro-American family was lower class in status and headed by two parents. This was so in the urban and rural South in 1880 and in 1900 and in New York City in 1905 and 1925. It was just as common among farm laborers, sharecroppers, tenants, and northern and southern urban unskilled laborers and service workers. It accompanied the southern blacks in the great migration to the North that has so reshaped the United States in the twentieth century. (p. 8)

The family was a sturdy foundation in the lives of African Americans as they successfully negotiated their lives after slavery and quickly found themselves socially circumscribed by de jure and de facto segregation, racial abuse, discrimination and poverty. In the latter part of the late 1960s, the statistics supporting adherence to whole units began to change drastically. Prior to that time, three-fourths of all African American households included a husband, wife and any children who were born in that union (Franklin, 1987).

Other Seminal Research

In the late 1960s and 1970s, a small shift in the tide occurred, when a few researchers assumed a more objective approach to studying the African American family. In an even-handed way, these researchers were able to more clearly perceive the many

positive aspects of African American family traditions. As noted earlier, one view that was promulgated by a majority of writers but recent researchers have shown to be erroneous is the idea that African American families have been historically headed by females. Reports by Gutman (1977), Jewell (1988) and Billingsley (1992) all countered this view with statistics that showed that from 1700 to 1925, less than one-fourth of African American households were female-headed. Even in the early 1960s, female-headed households among African Americans totaled only 22 percent. Admittedly this is high compared to the 6 percent of Caucasian families that were female-headed, but it does not meet the criterion of *most* African American households being matriarchal.

Moreover, a number of cultural, demographic and economic factors have interacted to produce a higher percentage of African American female-headed households. Like their African predecessors, African American women place a high value on giving birth to children, even if they are rearing adopted or other children. Very few African American women want to be childless. A second condition that seems to affect this statistic is the unequal gender ratio. Black males have high rates of premature death, high rates of incarceration, and more frequent migration in search of jobs than black females, with these characteristics being further compounded by high unemployment among marriageable African American males and a lower birthrate and a shorter lifespan than African American females. These conditions sometimes cause havoc for marriageable females who are unable to find husbands during their prime childbearing years. These factors combined with the high value placed on having children make it more understandable, but not acceptable, that one-fourth of African American families are headed by single female parents (Sudarkasa, 1993). The overall situation is

compounded by a high rate of divorce, separation and widowhood among African American women. Within the preceding context, it is clear that having children out of wedlock is not the only significant factor leading to the existence of female-headed households. In many cases, these households consist of mature and previously married women.

Another view that has been countered by the results of recent research is that slavery was the precursor to problems of the African American family and that it created an uncaring attitude toward family life in African American males. Griswold (1993) provided ample evidence to the contrary, and he noted that in many cases the opposite reaction occurred. Countless African American fathers bore the pain of seeing their sons and daughters sold or traded and in some cases taken to distant states, but they did not give up on restoring their family unit. When the Civil War ended and freedom from slavery was achieved, the vast majority of African American fathers tried to find their children and reestablish intact families. Moreover, Griswold reports that immediately following the Civil War, two-parents black families were the norm rather than the exception. Additional conclusive evidence in this regard is the fact that former slaves were more likely to end up in two-parents family units instead of the stereotypical single-parent household (Gutman, 1975).

Another area in which a sizeable number of recent researchers have been more even-handed is in describing the strengths of black families. Billingsley (1968), Hill (1971) and Staples (1976) all pointed out the great strengths of the African American family as a social institution. Their research documents how these strengths were instrumental in helping blacks survive the terrible conditions of racism and oppression. It

was done through resourcefulness, resiliency and the raw will of various family members. Without such incredible strength and resolve, there might not be any traditional African American families left to study. Instead, there would only be black versions of European family models, or black Anglo-Saxons.

Because the strengths of African American families is such an important factor in the context of the present study, it warrants special treatment. The following section will thus focus on this issue and provide an overview of what several recent researchers have maintained about it.

Strengths of the African American Family

One of the contributions of Hill's (1971) seminal work focusing on the black family is his discussion of interpersonal relationships within African American families. He focused much of his attention on the bond between parents and their children. His study gave attention to a previously neglected area of research focusing on African American families. Prior to Hill's study, researchers concentrated on dissecting the ways in which parents influence their children's behavior, attitudes and beliefs through training and child rearing practices and socialization. Hill went further by exploring the implicit and explicit relationships that emerge from specific black parent-child bonding relationships.

Shimkin, Louie and Frate (1978) expanded on Hill's research by looking at strengths of black families through the prism of traits of African American families that are seldom found in Western European ethnic families. They pointed out that the traditional African American family has a culture that relies on its own internal resources, which often consist of several different households with authority and power lines

reaching far beyond a single household. That is, the whole black family is truly greater than its individual units. Another major finding was that the extended family is most prominent and viable during crises and religious ceremonies, providing emotional and material support to its members. The black family has myriad tasks, including educating the younger generation and adjudicating conflicts between family members. These traits and many others have been traced to West African cultures.

Nobles (1976) and Billingsley (1992) pointed out that some qualities of the African American family are adaptations to larger familial systems that are found in the majority white society. Nobles (1976) concluded that a unique quality of traditional African American families is to teach their children about life in general, preparing children how to survive a racist society that could destroy them not only psychologically but also physically. Most African American children, unlike most white children, are prepared for three, not just two roles. As are white children, they are taught sex and age roles. Additionally, they are taught appropriate racial roles, with such preparation confined mostly within families.

Nobles (1979) listed five additional strengths of African American families not noted in Shimkin et al.'s (1978) work. The first is called "the legitimization of beingness." Family provides each member with a sense of connection, belonging and attachment as well as a sense of self-worth and respect. The second strength is provision for a family code. This involves devising and providing to family members guidelines for handling new and/or confusing situations. Third, elasticity of boundaries allows individual members to develop their own sense of uniqueness without fear of being sanctioned or disowned by the other family members. This elasticity accommodates

family members' specialness, while providing almost unconditional positive regard and love. The fourth strength is orally sharing information and knowledge. This involves transgenerational exchange of acquired knowledge and insights in an effort to prepare the younger generation for the realities of community life. Finally, the fifth strength of African American families is mediation of concrete conditions. That is, family members are taught conflict-management tools, problem-solving skills and other support mechanisms needed to sustain interpersonal relationships.

In discussing strengths of African American family values, Sudarkasa (1997) identified seven values and defined them as being guiding principles for interpersonal relations within American families of African descent. These values are what she called "the seven Rs": respect, responsibility, reciprocity, restraint, reverence, reason and reconciliation. She concluded that refocusing these values might be a way to help African American families cope with problems associated with violence, crime, poverty, substance abuse, homelessness and unemployment.

Respect is a critical value in the family compounds of West Africa. Children's behavior is governed by this principle in relation to their parents and all other adults with whom they interact. Respect is shown through titles (Mister or Miss, Uncle or Aunt) and deferential treatment of adults with gestures such as bows and curtsies. Sudarkasa (1997) opined that "if our children are once again taught the importance of respecting others, they will be in better position to demand and command respect for themselves" (p. 33).

Responsibility is the value in Africa that requires extended family members to take care of their brothers and sisters. This responsibility goes far beyond the narrow

concept embraced by Europeans that includes primarily nuclear family members: spouses, parents and children. Sudarkasa (1993) highlights the difference:

By contrast African Americans have typically housed and fed distant relatives who migrated into their area looking for work, helped their sisters and brothers provide for their children and cared for parents and other aging relatives who did not have children to look after them (p. 34).

Embracing this value and accepting responsibility for less fortunate black community residents might just be a key ingredient in reclaiming those communities.

Reciprocity involves the principle of “giving back.” Africans and African Americans were expected to give back to their communities and families as payback for what they received. This principle is an essential value if self-reliance and self-help are to become once again a primary means for sociocultural success and ultimately for survival.

Restraint is probably one of the most difficult values to understand, because it is very different than values accepted in materialistic and highly individualistic white cultures. In African and early African American families, personal decisions that impacted the family group were often made only after consultation with one’s elders. Examples of restraint included parents going without food or clothing so that children might have them; siblings sacrificing their own education and working so that a brother or sister could go to college; and other sacrifices that are group decisions. Emphasis on this concept might require extra effort because of the widespread acceptance of individualistic values among today’s black youth.

Reverence involves strong spiritual and religious orientations. In Western Africa, this value includes reverence not only for one supreme being but also reverence for

ancestors and many other things found in nature. Among traditional African Americans, religion is second only to family as an institution of strong influence.

Reason is often invoked by Africans to settle disputes, even though Africans and African Americans are stereotypically depicted as being emotional, irresponsible people. The use of reasonableness by elders as a guideline for settling disputes is very common in Africa. And it is still prevalent in traditional black communities.

Reconciliation is essential in maintaining social order within African and African American communities. Forgiveness and reconciliation are important because they minimize hostilities and de-escalate quarrels without the necessity of resorting to violence or other strong forms of retribution.

Much of the literature of the late seventies, eighties and nineties emphasizes these African American values and strengths. While desegregation and racial assimilation have marked changes in African American communities, including decreasing numbers of two-parent households and a growing number of single-parent, female-headed households, re-emphasizing these values in those communities may be a key to helping reverse this trend.

Economic, Social and Spiritual Factors that Influence African American Father-Child Relationships

Economic Factors

A review of the relevant literature indicates that economic circumstance, rather than irresponsible attitudes, may have been a precursor to many of the "maladies" of the African American father-child relationship. Griswold (1993), Gutman (1977), and Genovese (1976) discussed the economic circumstances facing African American fathers during slavery and thereafter. Griswold concluded that

. . . black fathers invariably encountered greater hardships than white. Denied factory jobs, excluded from unions, routinely paid lower wages than whites, black fathers had extraordinary difficulty supporting their families.... Many, it appears, were simply unable to support their families at all and had to leave them to find work. (p. 23)

Griswold went on to point out,

What seems apparent is that racism coupled with the structure of the urban economy placed great strains on black marriages. Excluded from most clerical, sales, and factory jobs and relegated to menial work when they could find it, black men found it extremely difficult to support their wives and children in the wage economy of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. (p. 54).

Sometimes when African American fathers left the farms to move to Southern or Northern cities to improve their economic plight, they were met with bitter disappointment. "Such men went from being the heads of their household to being either permanently absent from or itinerant guests within their own homes" (Griswold, 1993, p. 55).

Madhubuti (1991) stated, "the percentage of people living in households below the poverty line has risen for both Blacks and whites in the past decade. Black poverty rates have been two to three times higher than those of whites at all times" (p. vii), confirming that African Americans continue to be on lower economic rungs of American society. This fact must be considered when discussing the impact of economics on African American father-child relationships. As Madhubuti maintained, "a people cannot develop into a serious 'autonomous' community without a financial base that initiates and

provides for the community's creativity and resources" (p. iv). Just as a community needs such resources, so does a family. In most cases, African American fathers have not had the economic resources to provide an environment that engendered creativity and resourcefulness among their children.

At the same time, the special economic difficulties faced by African American fathers have produced positive effects for many father-child relationships. These men, realizing the special difficulties faced by black Americans, have encouraged their children to be self-sufficient and personally resourceful. While providing what sustenance and economic support they could to their children, they have also taught them that without the aid of substantial economic resources from their family, their future must be largely made with their own hands.

It should be noted that African American fathers also have often encouraged their children to pursue educational goals in order to escape some of the economic hardships and racism that these fathers had endured. Thus, though economics may have a significant negative influence on the African American father/child relationship, it may also foster positive reactions such as fathers encouraging their children to do positive things in regard to education and job preparation.

Henderson (1999) pointedly discussed the economic plight of African American lower class families. He noted that African American children born into low-income families

are more likely to die in infancy than white babies...The black baby is usually born into a family that lives in the inner city, a family that tends to be larger than its white counterpart and crowded into dilapidated housing that is structurally

unsound or unable to keep out cold, rain, snow, rats and insects...With more mouths to feed, more babies to clothe, and more needs to satisfy, the average black family is forced to exist on a median family income that is barely half the median white family income. Almost half of America's black children under the age of six live in poverty as compared with less than 15 percent of white children.

Such terrible conditions would seem to help foster the high incidence of failure that Moynihan (1965) predicted. However, many successful African Americans have beaten the odds, and many of them give credit to family influences including father support and influence.

These accolades for supportive fathers can be found even in the dire poverty that came with slave status. Genovese (1976) noted that many slave fathers overcame their dire circumstances and still interacted positively with their children. He cites passages in slave journals where slaves praised their fathers for diverse reasons such as "I loved my father. He was such a good man. He was a carpenter and could do anything," to "My old daddy partly raised his chiluns on game. He caught rabbits, coons and possums. He would work all day and hunt at night (p. 492)." Genovese also reported that "archaeological excavations of old slave quarters reveal that fish and game supplemented the slaves' protein-deficient diets. More than likely, fathers supplied the great majority of this food (p. 487).

These examples from the time of slavery can also be matched in later times as African American fathers often supplement their low salaries with second jobs and additional income-producing ventures in order to give their children better opportunities for success. Henderson (1999) notes that:

Unable to acquire the education needed for higher paying jobs, most black adults---including my parents---could only dream about working as something other than unskilled and semiskilled laborers in factories. After hours at the factories, my father cleaned white people's houses and my mother nursed white children. Even blacks with college degrees were frequently underemployed and worked for lower wages than white high school dropouts (p. 5).

In summary, it should be noted that economics have had a significant impact on the psyche of African American men. Fine (1995) noted that "African American women have always had to work to support their families." Sometimes this put a strain on African American marriages and left fathers feeling less than adequate in fulfilling the important role of supporting one's family. However, just as in many other aspects of African American life, these negatives spawned a resiliency and resourcefulness in African American fathers that was positive and actually caused their children to strive harder for the economic, educational and social success that had eluded their fathers.

Most African American families have endured the pain of racism, political indifference and limited resources, and this has affected the way that fathers and children have interacted. However, it is important to understand that although there are negative consequences of being poor and black, economic deprivation does not necessarily result in unhealthy relationship between fathers and their children. In fact, much of the literature implies that through resiliency and resourcefulness many African American fathers have turned this negative circumstance into a positive tool for raising independent, goal-oriented children.

Social Influences

Social factors also have an important impact on the relationship between African American fathers and their children. The social circumstances of many African American families include economic deprivation, residential segregation, lower educational achievement with poor high school and college completion rates, little political power, high crime rates, over-representation in the criminal justice system and poor health care with high rates of mortality and morbidity (Madhubuti, 1991). The interaction of these factors has separated black Americans from their white counterparts. This separation is caused by the chasm between the higher social status of white Americans and the fact that many African Americans “occupy the lowest rungs in the social hierarchy, where they suffer the deleterious health consequences of poverty and political powerlessness (Cuellar & Paniagua, 2000). These social factors directly affect the way many African American fathers raise their children not only to face these horrible conditions but also to survive them and to flourish in spite of such obstacles (Nobles 1976).

The socialization of most black children invariably includes lessons about overcoming the lower social station ascribed to African Americans by white society. Madhubuti (1991) dedicated his book to the idea of raising the consciousness and social status of African American men in much the same way the African American fathers often challenged their children:

. . . this book is a call for serious Afrikan American men to stand tall and dare to be great, dare to move beyond the limited ideas of others, dare to think for yourselves, for the future, dare to conceive a world where you are more than a consumer, a buyer, a clown in purple wearing odd clothes finding glory in not

being black. Dare to stretch your imagination to where beauty is the norm rather than an ignorant accident stomped upon in the stupor of quick highs and lies masquerading as truth. Dare to be beauty, dare to be creative fire, dare to be father, husbands, dare to be quiet fighters with a smile, dare. (p.viii).

This type of beautiful poetry typifies the message passed on to many African American children by their fathers, who wished with all their souls and being that their children could attain higher social status than that from which they came.

In sum, the literature review reveals that lack of social status has been an important influence on the relationship between African American fathers and their children. Moreover, as was found in the case of the economic difficulties faced by many African Americans, this influence has had both negative and positive aspects.

Spiritual Factors

According to Mattis (2001), "Religion is a central force in the lives of the overwhelming majority of African Americans." (p. 263). As such, the impact of spiritual forces on African American father-child relationships is significant. In Africa, through the time of slavery and into modern times, religious faith has always been a major factor in helping black people cope with and overcome adversity. This adversity has come in many forms for African Americans, as detailed by Henderson (1999):

Being a black person in the United States means living with the great probability of experiencing the outcomes of racial prejudice: personal insults from whites; poorer quality care or service than whites receive from physicians, criminal justice officials, teachers and school administrators, and other professionals; employment and housing discrimination; and threats, intimidation, and violence.

Not every black person experiences all of these, but each has experienced some of them. (p. xv).

Henderson emphasized the way in which religion eased the pain and travails of severe poverty and made it more tolerable.

The church was the hub around which our community life revolved. For me there was something magical about the Baptist churches I attended. The choirs and preachers all seemed to make segregation and other oppression less harsh. They also made violence a less desirable alternative. In retrospect, I was brainwashed into believing that suffering had redemptive power. (p. 5)

While Henderson (1999) discussed the healing effects of religion and spirituality, he also notes its educational, inspirational and liberating qualities and effects:

As a whole, black American are deeply religious (Costen 1993; J. R. Washington Jr. 1994). Their spirituality is reinforced through common history and life experiences and Afrocentric ideals centering on family unity. Richard Wright (1941) noted that the church is the door through which black Americans first walked into Western civilization. Religious services for slaves in America are where they were first allowed to express their personalities. The black Protestant church became not merely the means through which Western thought from ancient Greeks to twentieth-century existentialists entered directly into the intellectual experience of black people, but it also offered common spiritual, economic and political experience. Consequently, the black church has historically been a major source of education, inspiration and liberation. (p. 21).

In sum, it is clear that because the church was such a central part of the African American community, it helped shape values, styles of discipline and many other facets of child rearing. African American father-child relationships, which are a key feature of African American communities, have also been strongly influenced by spirituality, and much research indicates that this has largely been a positive influence.

Concerns about Black Fathers

The literature indicates that generally, black fathers have a decreasing presence in American families and that this may be one of the root causes of the deterioration of the quality of life in the United States. Three U.S. presidents have raised the issue of disintegration of the family and loss of family values as reasons for national alarm. Presidents Reagan, Bush and Clinton have chided Americans about the need to return to traditional family values (McAdoo, 1993). While they used a broad brush to paint the picture, a closer look reveals a disproportionate number of blacks involved in crime, sexual promiscuity, and a general malaise among today's youth. The commonly accepted view is that absent fathers and their noninvolvement in their children's lives results in dire consequences for the children, their communities and ultimately the nation. The urgency of trying to reestablish responsible fathering as the norm is echoed among academics and professionals, as evidenced by Levine and Pitt (1995), who wrote:

A man who behaves responsibly towards his child does the following: He waits to make a baby until he is prepared emotionally and financially to support his child. He establishes his legal paternity if and when he does make a baby. He actively shares with the child's mother in the continuing emotional and physical care of

their child from pregnancy onwards. He shares with the child's mother in the continuing financial support of their child, from pregnancy onwards. (p. 49)

The 1990s produced a plethora of books and journal articles that purported to "train" men in parenting by strengthening their emotional skills so that they could relate positively to their children and the children's mothers. Examples are Glennon (1995), Cooksey and Fondell (1996), Bryan (1997), and Levine and Pittinsky (1997). During that period, and continuing into the twenty-first century, impassioned and heartfelt pleas have been voiced requesting more black fathers to be positive role models. The 1995 "Million Man March" highlighted this need in the proclamations that mirrored messages of the "Promise Keepers"—a group of mainly men promulgating a conservative, Christian-based fathering program. Thus men on both sides of ideological and racial divides are being challenged to get involved with their children. The following quote from Blankenhorn's (1995) book *Fatherless America: Confronting Our Most Urgent Social Problem*, summarizes many theories about the nature of men and fathers:

Because fatherhood is universally problematic in human societies, cultures must mobilize to devise and enforce the father role for encouraging, coaxing and guiding them into fatherhood through a set of legal and extralegal pressures that require them to maintain a close alliance with their children's mother and to invest in their children. Because men do not volunteer for fatherhood as much as they are conscripted into it by the surrounding culture, only an authoritative cultural story of fatherhood can fuse biological and social paternity into a coherent male identity. (p. 3)

This kind of thinking indicates that too few men are taught to be responsible and caring fathers and that they must somehow be coerced into becoming involved and committed to their children. One of the goals of my research was to determine whether there is evidence to counter such a view in relation to African American fathers. The study presents, through examples and analysis, a positive look at African American fathers who volunteer for fatherhood.

The majority of the literature reviewed that focused on African American fathers described deadbeat and absentee fathers. The paucity of research that focuses on positive, committed African American fathers may partly be a reflection of what sells in bookstores or biases of researchers. It is worth noting that publications that highlight positive aspects of African American fathers are often about people who are statistical outliers, exceptions rather than the norm, usually extremely wealthy athletes, performing artists and business executives. It is easy to dismiss their stories as being too far removed from the average African American father in terms of income and community environment.

Willis (1996) is a contemporary researcher who discusses positive interactions between black fathers and their children. But the population he describes is atypical, composed of African American fathers who are Harvard University professors. Their reflections, while interesting, seem far removed from those of the average African American father. The number of Harvard professors is relatively small, and the number of African American Harvard professors is extremely small. As a result, Willis' findings may have been unfairly discounted by his critics as an anomaly

Hawkins and Dollahite (1997) posit that all fathers, including African Americans, can become more involved in raising their children. They also note that counselors and other professionals need to be involved in the process. And these persons must learn to tap into the hidden, genetic resource inherent in men that predisposes them to want to create productive children as their contribution to the next generation. This instinct also influences fathers to want to stay involved with their children for a lifetime commitment. Doing so not only helps their children, but also fulfills a developmental need in men. While the views of Hawkins and Dollahite are vulnerable to being labeled “psychobabble,” there is much substance in their thesis.

In *Becoming Dad: Black Men and the Journey to Fatherhood*, Pitts (1999) describes the negative perception of the African American father:

We don't seem to think much of black dads. Theirs is a face we have chosen as an emblem for the failure of fathers, for absence and abuse and a general inability to come to terms with the obligations of paternity. It is a portrait supported to some degree by grim statistics and perhaps to a greater degree by myth and misconception. (p. 3)

These perceptions and the supporting literature prompted the initiation of this dissertation. The stories of African American fathers who are successfully raising their children, utilizing loving and supportive techniques that they exercise without the aid of professionals, need to be told. It is also important to note that these techniques can be taught and replicated, utilizing successful African American fathers as examples and mentors. Perhaps by so doing, positive family values can replace negative ones. Using a sports analogy, if you do not play the game, you have no chance of winning. This

dissertation describes the thoughts, conditioning and behaviors of black fathers who are successful “winners.”

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN

Statement of the Problem

There is a media-perpetuated stereotypical belief that African American fathers are generally irresponsible and do not commit to and take care of their children. Further, this stereotype implies that there are basic differences between African American fathers and fathers in other racial groups and that these differences result in a higher percentage of illegitimate black babies, single-parent households, mother-led households, and absentee or deadbeat fathers.

Negative portrayals of African American fathers are at least insidious and at most they are racist. Such portrayals seldom acknowledge the many African American fathers who are strongly committed to their children and who provide them abundant financial, psychological and spiritual support. Instead of focusing on what is supposed to be “wrong” with African American fathers and tracing the alleged sources of the problem to genetic or historical causes, it may be more helpful to focus instead on successful African American fathers and to ask what factors led to their success.

Very little research has been conducted that specifically focuses on successful African American fathers in an attempt to determine the roots for their caring attitudes and nurturing behaviors. Such research is needed because it might provide useful information for practitioners in social organizations and governmental agencies concerned with reducing the number of absentee and deadbeat fathers. This research is a step toward that direction. The study’s limitations are discussed in chapter one.

Qualitative Methodology

As discussed in the literature review, previous research concerning African American fathers has been limited and has often reflected orientations that concentrate on negative aspects of African American fatherhood. Because this research intended to capture positive aspects of African American fatherhood and to view those aspects from the participants' perspectives, qualitative methods, which were developed to aid researchers in the study of social and cultural phenomena, were utilized. Specifically, the phenomenological approach is used as the method to capture the beliefs and feelings of a small group of African American fathers who had been designated as successful parents by high school counselors and teachers. "The phenomenological approach emphasizes that the meaning of reality is, in essence, 'in the eyes and minds of the beholders,' the way the individuals being studied perceive their experiences" (Wiermsa, 1995, p. 250). This exploratory study is consonant with Sanders and Pinhey's (1983) recommendation:

There are often occasions when a social scientist will conduct a study simply to explore a topic or question he or she is unfamiliar with. The goal of this type of research project is to examine an area new to the researcher or to "break new ground" when the topic has been unstudied by others.... However, there are other reasons for conducting an exploratory study. We may simply become curious about a phenomenon and study it to gain a better understanding of its occurrence.... Exploratory studies are also useful for generating hypotheses for future research. (p. 37).

This study is certainly within the purviews described by Sanders and Pinhey: (1) The researcher explored a topic he had little systematic information about. (2) The

researcher broke new ground, albeit in a small way, pertaining to African American fathers. (3) As a result of the study, the researcher was able to suggest additional areas for future research.

Information on motivation, philosophies of parenting, and circumstances in the lives of participants was collected to ascertain what may have influenced their commitment to their children. Individual, open-ended, detailed, taped interviews were utilized to gather the data. The resulting texts were then analyzed to determine common themes and patterns. This enabled the researcher to glean common attributes of the majority of the participants that may have positively influenced their behaviors as fathers.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this exploratory study was to discern factors that positively influence the commitment African American fathers make to their children. Information was sought that (1) might establish the foundation for understanding successful fathers and (2) might provide insight into nurturing behaviors of African American fathers to satisfy the researcher's curiosity. Both reasons are consonant with Sanders and Pinhey's description of exploratory studies.

Factors that were considered as possibly being relevant to the success of African American fathers included their social, economic, spiritual and psychological experiences. Of special interest was whether the relationship of successful fathers to their own families of origin and their own fathers could be identified as having played a role in their success.

Research Questions

This dissertation focused on the following questions:

- (1) Are there unique factors that positively influence the commitment of African American fathers to their children?
- (2) If there are such factors, do they include or are they intertwined with the father's family of origin and his relationship with his own father?
- (3) If there are such factors, can they be taught or can knowledge of them be used to help guide potential African American fathers so as to increase their chances of successful fatherhood?

Identification and Selection of Participants

There are many intact African American families among the population of the Heidelberg/Mannheim U.S. military community in Germany. In his occupation as an adolescent substance abuse counselor in the Mannheim/Heidelberg community for five years, the researcher had observed several individuals who he believed were effective parents. They were fathers who remained committed to their children while trying to stop alcohol and drug abuse. Their behavior belied the stereotype that African American fathers are less involved in their children's lives than fathers from other ethnic groups. The obvious discrepancy between the stereotype and the behavior that the researcher observed raised the questions that precipitated this study. However, agency policy and professional ethics precluded me from using my clients for the study. Therefore, I sought other members of the Mannheim/Heidelberg U.S. military community in Germany for participants in the study.

To help identify successful African American fathers, two counselors from each of four schools were first contacted. The schools were Mannheim American High School, Mannheim American Middle School, Heidelberg American High School, and Heidelberg

American Middle School. The counselors were contacted personally by the researcher. the nature of the study was explained to them, and they were asked to identify successful African American fathers that they knew personally through school activities. The criteria for successful African American fathers included (1) they provided a stable family environment for their child or children. (2) they lived in the same household with their children and spouse. (3) they were positively involved in their child or children's lives, as evidenced by their participation in and support of school activities and children's school performances. and (4) they had generally positive interactions with their child or children and those interactions had been observed by the counselor.

Fifteen such fathers were initially identified by the counselors, and the researcher contacted each of them. The purpose and nature of the study were explained to each of the fathers, and they were asked to participate in the study. Nine of the men agreed to participate, but unfortunately, one of them died before the interview began. Thus eight of the identified successful fathers were interviewed, and they composed the study sample. Though diversity was not a criterion for the study, the subjects had a wide range of life histories. Some of the participants were from large families and others were from small families. Some had many biological children and others had only one or two. Further, some participants had only biological children, while others had step and/or adopted children. This broad spectrum of participants added breadth to the study.

The Participants

As noted earlier, the participants in the study were all married African American fathers who resided in the Mannheim/Heidelberg U.S. military community in Germany. Their child or children attended or had graduated from Department of Defense Dependent

Schools (DODDS) in the Heidelberg School District. School counselors and teachers designated these men as successful fathers based on researcher generated criteria regarding their relationship with their children.

In order to better understand the perspective of the eight participants in this study, some pertinent information on their backgrounds is provided. Specifically, each participant was asked to give demographic data on his nuclear family and the composition of his family of origin and to describe his father and their relationship. They provided aliases of their choosing in order to maintain confidentiality and privacy.

“Mike” was a 57-year old retired military officer who remained in Germany after retirement and became a civilian government employee. He was the oldest of the participants and had two sons, both of whom were in college. His sons had graduated from the local American high school in Heidelberg, Germany, with the oldest son holding the distinction of being the first African American president of the student body at Heidelberg American High School. Mike had been raised in rural Florida and characterized his family of origin as being a poor, large, intact family consisting of biological parents and eight children, four boys and four girls. His father was a mechanic who made a decent living, but the family was never middle class. Mike noted that his father was a “Christian hearted, very religious man, good provider, strict disciplinarian,” who used the Bible to teach Mike and the other children about morals, values, and responsibility. He further defined his family as a close-knit unit, where the mother was respected, and the siblings were loving and supportive of each other.

“Marvin” was a 49-year-old retired Air Force non-commissioned officer who worked as a Non-Appropriated Fund (NAF) employee in the commissary system at the

time of the interview. He was the second oldest of the participants and was the biological father of a 30-year-old daughter from his first marriage. In his current marriage, he was the stepfather of a 20-year-old son and the biological father of an 8-year-old son. His stepson had graduated from Mannheim American High School and was attending college in Idaho. His younger son was attending the Mannheim American Elementary School. Marvin had been raised in Waco, Texas. He described his family of origin as intact, consisting of his biological parents and six children, four boys and two girls. His father, who had been an "excellent provider," according to Marvin, had earned a relatively low wage on his job, but had supplemented his income by restoring cars and selling them. His father was a deacon in the church, and the entire family attended church every Sunday because "that was what was expected within the southern tradition." However, Marvin did not remember his father quoting scripture to the family or using Bible stories to illustrate a point. He also noted that his father was a strict disciplinarian who would be accused of child abuse today because he liberally embraced the rule about not "sparing the rod and spoiling the child." Marvin stated that his father seemed incapable of showing affection, never hugging, kissing, or demonstrating affection to either Marvin or his siblings. Marvin further described his family as close-knit, headed by the father, who was acknowledged by all as the "ruler of the house," and with a nurturing but passive mother and respectful children who basically followed the rules and stayed out of trouble.

"John" was a 48-year-old active duty sergeant major in the U.S. Army. He is the father of two children, a 21-year-old son in the U.S. Navy and an 18-year-old daughter who had recently graduated from Mannheim American High School and was in her first

year of college. John came from a “separated home” (his description), where his father had left his mother when John was three years old, his brother was five, and his sister was one. They had lived in a small rural town on the Gulf Coast of Mississippi. His father deserted the family, moved to Illinois and “started a new life for himself without us.” Because of financial hardship, John and his siblings lived with their maternal grandparents until he was eight. At that time, his mother, seeking a better job, moved to Ohio with John and his siblings. She found a job as a nurse’s aide, and they lived in government-subsidized housing (Kimmelbrook projects) for the next five years. Later, his mother rented a house in Youngstown, Ohio, and that was where John lived until he went into the Army. He did not remember his biological father as an influence in his life and felt that his grandfather assumed the role of “daddy” during John’s formative years. His grandfather died when John was ten years old, and John remembered that event as the first time it had really dawned on him that his grandfather was Caucasian. His maternal grandparents were an interracial couple who lived in the segregated South, when miscegenation was both unacceptable and life threatening. John said that his family was poor but he did not realize they were because his grandfather had grown all the food they needed. Therefore the family was well-fed. John said that his grandfather had fostered some major values in him, especially tolerance for racial differences and accepting “people just as they were.” Additionally his grandfather taught him the concept that a good father provides for both the physical and emotional needs of his children.

“J.C.” was a 45-year-old Department of the Army contractor who has two biological children from earlier relationships and four stepchildren in his current marriage. Of the four stepchildren, only the youngest girl, who was twelve years old and

attended Patrick Henry Village Middle School in Heidelberg, Germany, lived with J.C. and his wife. He characterized his family of origin as large, poor, and intact, consisting of biological parents, nine biological children, and one adopted child. He had three brothers and six sisters. The family home was in Springfield, Kentucky. His family was very religious – “staunch, very proud Catholics” who went to church often and said prayers daily. According to J.C., his father was a hard worker, but an individual who took time to talk to his children if they needed him. “He was always there” if you needed to talk to him. His father had initially been a farmer but gave up farming to become a truck driver. J.C. remembered his father giving all the children a “responsibility” talk.

“Bobby” was a 44-year-old retired U.S. Army commissioned officer who had stayed in Germany after his retirement and who worked as a Department of the Army contractor. He is the father of two children, a son and a daughter, both of whom graduated from Heidelberg American High School. His daughter was valedictorian of her class and is currently in her first year of college. Bobby was raised in rural Kansas as a part of an intact family of four until he was three years old. His father had died when he was three and his brother died when Bobby was twelve, so most of his formative years his family consisted of his mother, his brother, and a foster sister who entered the family as an infant. He described his family as poor, but he had not known they were poor because his mother adequately fed and clothed her children. The families in his childhood neighborhood were also poor. He described his family as religious. He was raised as a Catholic. After adopting the Baptist faith as his new religion, he left the church completely for a few years, mainly because he believed some of the leading church members were hypocrites.

“Nathan” was a 40-year-old medically retired noncommissioned officer who currently works as a Government Service (GS-9) communications specialist. He has three children, a 21-year-old son and two younger daughters, one of whom is twenty years old and in the U.S. Army and the other who is seventeen years old and recently graduated from Mannheim American High School. His son, who is in his senior year at Rochester University, was the valedictorian of his Mannheim graduating class. Nathan described his family of origin as intact, poor, hard-working, religious, and close-knit, consisting of biological parents and five children, two sisters older than him and two who are younger. He was the only boy and the middle child. Overall, Nathan had a good relationship with his father, who was a fair disciplinarian. However, his mother administered most of the discipline. Nathan was raised in rural Virginia and remembered most of the families in his neighborhood as being intact.

“Dwayne” was a 38-year-old noncommissioned officer in the U.S. Army who is the father of two sons, one of whom is fourteen years old and the other four. The older son is a ninth grader at Mannheim American High School. Dwayne described his family as intact, poor, hard-working, religious, and somewhat “hypocritical.” The hypocritical label was given because the father had set standards for the children about truth and honesty, and yet he had fathered children outside of Dwayne’s nuclear family. Dwayne’s family consisted of his biological parents, Dwayne, who was the eldest child and only boy, and two sisters. He characterized his father as a good provider and a hard worker who was either too tired or too busy to nurture his children. He was raised in rural North Carolina and had lived there until joining the U.S. Army after graduating from high school and trying college for less than a year.

“Jimmy” was a 37-year-old noncommissioned officer in the U.S. Army and the father of a sixteen-year-old daughter. He described his family of origin as initially intact, with his biological parents and him as an only child until he was two, when his father was deployed to Vietnam. After that he had basically lost contact with his father until eighteen years later. His mother had raised the family alone for about six years, until she married Jimmy’s stepfather, and this union had resulted in two half-sisters and two half-brothers. Jimmy described the restructured family as basically poor (but not ever hungry or destitute), religious, and close-knit. He said that all members of his family had great work ethics. Jimmy’s relationship with his biological father had been nonexistent until they reconnected. During his childhood, his family had resided in Atlanta, Georgia, and Jimmy lived there until enlisting in the U.S. Army.

Interview Procedure

The researcher used an in-depth semi-standardized ninety-minute interview format to gather information about each participant’s family of origin, his established family, his opinions about commitment to family values, and any other factors that appeared to be relevant to his attitude toward fathering. Although a questionnaire was used as a guide for the interviews (see Appendix 2), additional questions were asked to clarify and expand answers given by participants.

The interviews were conducted during the period August 1999 to June 2000. Interviews were held either at the individual’s office or the researcher’s office. Each interview consisted of one session with the participant and lasted approximately 90 minutes. The interviews began with the interviewer again explaining the nature of the study and each participant signing an informed consent form. All interviews were

audiotape recorded with the participant's knowledge. Following each interview, the auditory tape was transcribed verbatim. And to insure confirmation of the responses, the transcripts were then submitted to the participants at a later date for verification and any additional input.

Analysis of Data

Information provided by the eight fathers was reviewed to determine if common themes emerged. Identification of a major theme required that it appear in at least five of the interviews as a quality or characteristic deemed important by the participant or a factor that the participant believed had been a positive motivator in his success as a father. A less important theme was identified if at least three of the participants acknowledged it as being a positive motivator.

Special attention was paid to whether there were common factors in the participants' upbringing that might have positively affected their success as fathers. Any other economic, social, psychological or spiritual factors that might have been relevant to African American fathers' success were also noted.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

This chapter is divided into three main sections. The first section presents reactions of the participants to being chosen as successful African American fathers. The second section presents the themes that were found in the interviews with the fathers. The last section briefly summarizes the chapter. Verbatim comments of the participants are included to illustrate their ideas about and recommendations for being effective fathers. These comments helped the researcher to ferret out significant reactions to being selected as a successful father. Each of the African American fathers interviewed expressed concerns about raising children, discussed their motivation for being a good father, and gave some recommendations on ways to increase the number of successful African American fathers.

Reactions to Being Selected As a Successful Father

Initially, all of the participants seemed genuinely surprised at being designated a “successful African American father.” It was their belief that they were only doing what was required. When asked why they thought counselors designated them, they seemed pleased but had to search for an answer regarding their selection. One of the fathers, Nathan, said,

Maybe because . . . whenever one of the kids – we had three kids graduate from this school – and whenever there was a student program or athletic event that they were participating in, anything that involved the kids, we – my wife and I – tried to be there. If not both of us, at least one would be there, usually with the camcorder or camera or something or other.

Another of the fathers interviewed, Mike, expressed the following thought about being selected:

. . . it's quite an honor for anyone to put a label on a person as being successful. . . . I have been around. I have been visible at the school. I was nominated one year as president of . . . the Student Assistance Committee. I have taught – I taught enrichment mathematics for four continuous years. I stand as a father. You know when you have kids that have come through life and weathered the storm in terms of being drug-free. They have not been caught up with all these diseases – AIDS. They have been ideal students. They have been the top part of the class. . . . So I think that says, it says a lot for, not only the parents, but it says a lot for the community total concept, where we have people like yourself who have molded, from mentoring, just from a distance. People see you, and they want to emulate some of the things that you do.

Marvin postulated that perhaps a school counselor may have designated him as a successful African American father because of,

how often they see me with my son. . . . I spend a lot of time with him. I've been told by many people that that would pay off in the future, whether it be a soccer game, whether it be in church, whether it be just walking through a mall or somewhere. . . . So I think that they might come to that conclusion basically from just seeing me, acting out and doing what most fathers don't do – showing affection in public, showing affection and at the same time administering discipline, when discipline is needed, correcting.

J.C. opined that his designation may have been because school counselors saw that he and his wife were involved in their daughter's education. He said.

One of the things that I think is support, the family element that we bring to my stepchild – my wife and I are there as a supportive family element, be there through hardships and questions that would come up on a daily basis.

Dwayne believed that counselors noticed his availability and accessibility to his sons and that this resulted in his designation as a successful African American father. He stated. "I like to be there for my sons, so that whenever my sons say the word 'daddy' or 'father' I try to be there for them. Even though, you know, I work extensive hours, I try to be available for my sons."

John thought his designation was because of "involvement at the school: the involvement of my wife at the school: and also the activities of my children." He further said.

Well, I was the – for two years, the president of the High School Booster club.

We were both members of the AVID (Advancement Through Individual Determination) program when our son was in the program for two years. My wife was the president of that and then various activities in the school that we always assisted with whether it was photography day or helping organize that or helping with the barbecues around the school.

Yet another of the interviewed fathers, Bobby, felt that his designation came from the fact that:

I was actively into her school years. I came up to the schools for PTA (Parent-Teachers Association) or PTSA (Parent-Teacher-Student Association). I made a

point that I wanted to be a part of my kid's life. . . . That was a priority, and even with my commitment of being in the military, especially when people say that as a military officer you don't have time for doing this, you can make time for what you want to make time for and I did. I made time to be active in my children's schooling.

In talking about his designation as a successful father, Jimmy iterated his belief that he was merely doing what he thought other fathers did:

Well, from my own perspective, I don't think there is anything that I am doing that I don't think any other father isn't doing that has a child in high school. He is trying to mentor that child and make sure that she chooses the right path that is beneficial to her as a productive member of society and is respectable and has some goals, has some things she wants to strive for in life. . . . Why they chose me – I don't consider myself successful. I don't know what criteria they used. . . . I am involved with her education.

Themes

Theme One: Mentoring

One of the themes that recurred in the interviews was the importance of mentoring. Lee Salk (1992, p. 20), in his book *Familyhood*, speaks of the “drives all we living creatures have to reproduce ourselves, bolster one another and teach our young what we know.” The participants acknowledged that the adults in their lives who followed this concept of “teaching our young what we know” had considerable influence on their decision to be successful African American fathers. While specific mentoring by a father or a stepfather was mentioned by five of the participants, mentoring by other

family members and even non-relatives was also a great influence in the lives of six of the participants.

Being mentored by his biological father was a definite influence for Mike. He stated clearly and enthusiastically his admiration and respect for his father. And he cited that mentoring as a major influence in his determination to be a successful father. He said:

I think the most, the strongest contributor to my success would be my family; my parental upbringing as the folks would say; the way I was reared, so to speak, as a kid. My father was . . . a disciplinarian. He . . . taught us values and he instilled in us the attitudes, and we were able to mold ourselves over a time frame. It was not just a collection of things that you make up . . . my father, during that time there was not the bold phrases we have now, mentoring and nourishing. Nourishing was a word. But mentoring, you know, we didn't know it in that term, but that is exactly what he did. He taught us basically right from wrong, he taught us how to be reliable. He taught us values. He said, "Mike, you don't do this and this is why."

Mike described the mentoring that he received from his father as being neither didactic nor grounded in formal education:

I must admit, my father was not an educated man, you know. It was not a formal education, but he was one of the smartest guys around. . . . I respected my father. . . wanted to be like my father. My father taught me to be responsible . . . my father's philosophy was that his kids did not run around. We didn't run around as

teenagers, as teenagers do today. . . . we didn't have sex at 13 and 12 or 14 or 15 years old.

This mentoring was given to all the children in his family:

There were eight of us; four boys and four girls, and all of my sisters have successful marriages, and I would like to think that doing the entire time coming up, they were pretty clean girls, straight girls. I think it was more of we were going to be the way we were going to be, regardless of what was going on because we had it in us. Dad had taught us, he had molded us.

J.C. was just as effusive with his praise of his father's contribution to making him a caring and responsible parent. The fathering traits that he exhibited he attributed directly to his father. He did not always follow his father's guidelines, as evidenced by the two out-of-wedlock children that he had had prior to his current marriage. However, he felt that it was his father's influence that had made him so determined to be a good husband and father in his present circumstance. In response to the question of whether he could point to any one thing that made him make a commitment to his children, J.C. said,

Yes. One of the things that I was fortunate to have was a loving family, all the way through my adult years, and it took priority. My father has always been there for us. He took an active involvement in our upbringing. He tried to mold us and make us responsible adults.

He continued, "even to this day, we view my dad as the central focal point for the information from him to be delivered or dispersed among the other family members."

J.C. also credits his mother with giving him some of the positive values that have shaped his childrearing practices:

I did pick up a lot of this from my father, who was always there. He worked hard and if you needed to talk to him, he was always there – as well as my mother: who was basically the – our educator and former of values. in addition to my dad. My dad worked hard, but my mom, we saw her most of the day.

Jimmy cited being mentored by his stepfather as a significant influence. After his biological father left the family, went to Vietnam, and divorced Jimmy's mother upon his return, his mother remarried. Jimmy said,

My dad was in the Army. . . . He went away to Vietnam and that was pretty much the end of it for him. We didn't really have much contact with him when he came back from Vietnam. But I had a stepfather who came along when I was about the age of probably eight or nine, who was there with me and is still there to this day. He is still married to my mother, and he was very supportive coming into this situation.

Jimmy said that although his stepfather had no formal education above high school, he had a great deal of wisdom about life and "doing the right thing." He said, "I think he was an excellent dad. . . . He was a country guy, you know, real mild mannered smart guy and knew a lot about life, knew a lot about how to get things done."

When specifically queried about whether his stepfather did a lot of teaching, such as saying, "Son, if you have a baby, you need to take care of him," Jimmy responded positively:

Yeah, yeah. . . . He knew how to get through life and how to . . . be successful. He was a hardworking guy. I mean from the first thing in the morning and I guess that is from being raised on the farm and everything. So he knew the value of

work and he had a great work ethic. Me and my brothers all benefited from that.

He lived that being a great father more than he talked about it. . . . I think that is what helped me today to be a better father. You always want to be better than your dad was. And if I had a son, I would want him to be better than me.

The researcher summarized this portion of the interview with the statement, “I think it sounds like your stepfather gave you a lot of the values that you have about family and taking care of them.” Jimmy affirmed this with the following answer:

Right. . . . I think that just my father being there and the guidance and the love that he brought into the house was enough to show me that, hey this is important. I have to be committed and I have to stick around for the long haul and those types of things.

Jimmy not only credited his stepfather for giving him family values but he also gave homage to two other men in his life:

One was my uncle. I just admired him for some reason. He seems like he always had things in perspective. . . . I used to watch him. I used to always ask his opinion about certain things, just to hear his response, because his responses were always interesting.

The other mentor was a counselor for a high school program called “Upward Bound”:

He was always . . . telling me, “Hey, you know, you need to do this, do that, prepare for life.” He would say you need to go above where you think you can go. . . . don’t be satisfied with the way things are, if they are not right, you got to be the kind of person that tries to change things for the better for everybody else.

John's mentoring came from his maternal grandfather. His biological father had deserted the family when John was three years old. John referred to his maternal grandfather as "daddy" and felt that his grandfather was more of a father than his biological father. John did not remember his grandfather talking to him about a father's responsibility. Instead, he was a living example:

He just lived it and provided not only for our physical needs and also our emotional needs. His lap was always there for us to crawl on after we had gotten a whipping from either my grandmother or mother, and he was always there to make us laugh and to comfort us and to just show us the right way of doing things.

John's relationship with his grandfather was a bit unique, as he noted with the following comment:

It was interesting though, because I didn't realize it until I was ten years old and he died and I was looking at him and just finally at that time it just dawned. "hey my grandfather is a white man". . . . I was thinking of the hell they had to go through, he and my grandmother at that time in the deep South.

In addition to his grandfather, John also cited one of his teachers, Mr. Atkins, as being a mentor:

Mr. Atkins had a job downtown. So he was kind of at that time the affluent one in the neighborhood, and his brother had a barber shop that we used to go over to his house and get our hair cut, and the older men were sitting there, and I can remember just listening to them talk about life and watching them play checkers.

These barbershop talks were instructive and gave him and his peers some values about family and responsibility that stayed with them and positively influenced their own parenting.

Nathan did not subscribe to the notion that biological or stepfathers or family members were necessarily the best mentors. He expressed the view that any caring, loving, and concerned adult could assume the role and provide values to children that they might not otherwise get:

Now, the definition of family may be what's in question. I mean a family doesn't have to consist of a mother and father . . . [but] some elder person that that child looks [up] to. . . . a role model should be the person, the grown-up that cares for that child. . . . You got to care for them all the time. It's – they are talking about it takes a village to raise a child – in a sense, it does.

In response to the statement that somebody has to give children some values,

Nathan said:

Sure. Sure. And something that is not just a catch phrase. . . . You got to know the child. You got to know what they listen to, and what they retain. . . . I know my girls especially. . . . I am not from the old school, meaning like my parents, right? I mean, I spoke with my kids about sex and everything like this.

He got lessons about being a responsible father from his mother:

. . . My mother comes from a really religious family. She is real religious, and my uncle is a minister. . . . I have always been taught to be responsible for what I did, period. I got taught that, but not necessarily verbally. . . . you learn responsibility; because it is like, look you did it. This is what it costs you.

Though Marvin described his father as a good provider, but not a nurturer, he cited his father as the person who taught him about being responsible and taking care of his family. In response to the researcher's question of whether his father verbalized his thoughts about responsible parenting or whether Marvin just watched and learned, Marvin responded, "Just watched him. [He] never said, 'boys come here, this is what I want you to do now,' . . . nothing like that, it was all by example. We saw he went to work every day for a measly \$27.00 a week."

When asked if there were other persons who had mentored him, Marvin said, "I can look back on it now and say it was mostly my father. . . . I saw boys and they were troublemakers . . . the boys got in trouble that only had mothers at home." Marvin also credits his mother with some strong messages and preaching about having out-of-wedlock kids. He quoted her as saying, "I'm not taking care of your babies, you better keep that thing [your penis] in your pants." None of her six children had had children out of wedlock.

Dwayne reported that his father was a philanderer, but he still found time to teach him to be responsible – not to have children out of wedlock and to be a good father:

. . . Even though my father wasn't living that example or whatever, he put fear in my heart. And I don't mean a harmful fear; it was a healthy fear, that if you do this, this is the repercussion that is going to happen if you do this. So I still, even though I saw him doing things that wasn't of God or a father, I still had much respect for my father, and I still believed in what he said, just because he was a good provider and the way he took care of his family or whatever.

Bobby credits his mother with much of the mentoring that he received. His father died when he was three, and seeing his mother work hard to make ends meet caused him to vow to be there for his wife and family: “. . . I pretty much saw my mom work hard after my father died, without a husband, and I said, I will not let that happen.” In response to the researcher’s question about whether his mother had said anything to him about being a responsible father, he stated that she had not, but that she had been a strict disciplinarian who held Bobby and his brother accountable for their actions, and he held that this might have been a foremost reason for his decision to be a responsible father. His mother told Bobby to not let happen to her (being a single mother without a husband) ever occur again in his realm of influence. He said, “I felt that she was strict, and I still can hear the ringing in my ear, that you need to be home before the light’s gone. And mom put the fear of God in me.”

Also, a lot of the things he learned about responsibility and being a nurturing father may have come from his religious background, specifically the ministers and other persons in the church:

So, I actually had a long leave of absence from the church, but that teaching that I actually felt or saw stayed with me, and I didn’t need a building or a minister to make sure that it was enforced. . . . Maybe the church did build that foundation and I never let go of it.

He also attributed some of his values about not having children out of wedlock to a girlfriend who had worked in the medical profession and took him to a family planning center where he was shown aborted fetuses. He said that he then realized, “If we engaged [had sexual intercourse] this is what could happen, and that opened my eyes!” This shock

treatment influenced his decision to insure that he did not have any unwanted or unplanned children.

More so than the others, Bobby saw mentoring as a possible solution to helping the alarmingly high number of African American children who are in single-parent homes. He said, "I think mentoring would be good ... [but] you have to commit yourself to be a mentor. You can't be in and out. You have to actually be out there and pursue that image, and live that image."

Theme Two: Respect for Women

Respect for women was a unanimously thought to be a key to effective parenting. Whether it started with their own mothers, these successful African American fathers cited respect for women as an important component of their value systems. Participants who did not specifically talk about their own respect for women cited the lack of respect for women as a part of the problem with deadbeat and absentee dads.

Mike was emphatic, stating that respect for women was emphasized and taught by both his parents:

Oh, absolutely. You know, you never went in a door ahead of a woman: be it your mom, be it your sister, be it somebody you didn't know. . . . everywhere we went,

Dad . . . was "you open that door." And you know, you reach and you open that door for the lady. . . . you wouldn't dare go until the lady went in there.

He described how he and his brothers were taught that you never allow a lady to do heavy lifting:

And my sisters did not do heavy things. When we washed we caught the water.

We moved the tubs. The homemade blankets that you put in this wash pot and

they just got awfully heavy. We were the guys that bring those out, not the girls.

The girls couldn't do that. . . . what we have now is . . . there are young men who just don't respect women.

When describing his wife, Mike's pride and respect were evident: "I married. I think, the top of the line, and I have been very pleased with my marriage. I have been pleased with my wife, and I think she's smart. She is intelligent, and she is everything a man says about his wife."

Mike and the researcher discussed the fact that some wealthy National Basketball Association players do not emotionally or financially support their out-of-wedlock children. He attributed this behavior to their lack of respect for women:

I think it goes back to respect for your lady, respect for women. . . . [not] seeing people as tools to satisfy you. These guys probably . . . don't see this as they don't respect. . . . if they had a lot of respect for that young lady, they wouldn't be doing that [not supporting their children].

Dwayne's experiences that led to his respect for women did not involve his father directly telling him how to show respect for women and demanding that he do it. He said, "I think the mother is . . . the one personality that raises a son. . . .you'll see the mother will say, 'Son, this is how you are supposed to treat your wife.'" Even though his father had other women in his life, Dwayne felt that his father gave his mother respect and put her as number one in his life, even though she did not demand it:

I ain't going to say she was demanding respect, but my father gave her respect. . . . He cherished her. Even though he was – out there. But she was the highlight of

his life and still is today. . . . I don't think she had to demand that type of respect. She got it.

He later added comments about the importance of mutual respect between a husband and his wife and between unwed parents, saying, "A child should see a healthy relationship between their mother and father."

Bobby's sense of respect for women was very evident in the way he described his wife or, as he called her, his "soul mate":

You can't just go out there and look for a cosmetic woman. There are a lot of pretty females out there, but their inner soul may not click with yours. So their inner beauty may not be the beauty that coincides with your soul. Fortunately, I was able to click with the inner soul of my wife, the foundation that we put together and actually grow upon that. And to this very day, we are still on our honeymoon – and that happened to us coming together to raise our kids."

He hoped his role in showing respect and love for his wife might inspire other males, especially young ones, to mimic the relationship that he has with his wife:

I am most proud today . . . that so often people in the church, people in my community admire our relationship. . . . We love each other and we've been together for a long time and we raised our kids and we don't fight . . . to me that's a positive image, that people look at us and say, that's what I want to be like.

Marvin blamed the media for encouraging disrespect for women and felt that his generation was taught to respect women and to see sex as something very special to be experienced by two loving, committed people. He stated that on MTV, women are just

play toys, tools, yo-yos. Roll you up, roll you down. Some of them will take you around the world [note: these are excerpts from a popular rap song]. They're just pawns to play with. It's just disrespect to women and then when you see that, power. Now you are dealing with abuse, hitting women and stuff like this here. I flip it on and I see a woman like this here, shaking her behind, pants down below her navel. A man is going to be a man, when you don't have any control. I believe we had control in those days, but these kids now. Why they don't have control, why they just so easily can get in bed, sad to say, even women don't think of sex as something special – I'm going to save it for a special person or whatever. . . . Maybe this is from my upbringing again. I've always put women on a pedestal high, women are special.'

Marvin said that he respected his wife, daughter, and other females even during his youth:

... the wild years, [I] was committed, faithful husband, uh didn't even have an inkling of infidelity, was just committed to my child and wife. Even at 19 years old, I look back on it now, I just, it's inborn, where it came from I just don't know, I look back now, it wasn't pretending or anything, I was committed to a family, I was a father.

Jimmy stated that his stepfather never told him anything about how women should be treated, but he taught him through his behaviors:

Well, he never really talked about it, but I watched the way he treated my mom. And that is what I gained from him, another thing. He always treated her with respect and he did it. I don't think I ever – I have heard them disagree a few times,

but I never heard them argue, and just downright resort to some type of violence or something like that.

Jimmy went on to explain”

[He] didn’t smack mom around. . . . he treated her as though – as a woman should be treated. And I used to watch him, and I think I learned from that. Yeah, he lived that more than he talked about it. I still do that to this day. . . . I have the utmost respect for women. And I am still the guy that pulls the chair for them when they sit down at a restaurant. I am still the guy that holds the door for them regardless of my feeling about her, the person. But, I just hold women in high regard. . . . I have a lot of admiration for them and lot of admiration for my mother, and my father and their relationship.

Nathan was quite animated while giving his response about the need for men to respect women. He said that if men respected women, they would not see them as just an object to be used for sexual pleasure. Speaking of the national statistic that seven of ten black children are born into a single parent home, Nathan guessed that most of those fathers did not respect women:

I would say, 60, 70, maybe closer to 90% don’t respect women. They look at a woman and they don’t see a woman. It’s a bitch. It’s a ho’, you know? It’s not a lady. . . . the words don’t mean nothing. It’s the context and directness of the words. You know? And it’s—I tell you what, if I hear about that referred to any of them – my girls and wife as bitch or a ho’ I don’t care if they are as big as you. . . . I take issue with that. . . . It’s just demeaning, and degrading, and all the other ‘the’s.

He attributed the attitude of disrespect largely to the environment in which these fathers were raised. In his view, the way to counter this attitude is to teach young boys core values, one of which would be to respect women.

J.C. stated that it was his mother who insisted that he respect women and that her very strong influence shaped his adult views about the importance of such behavior:

My mother was the one who said, "I don't care what you do in life, but the day that I see you disrespecting a woman, is the day that I try to take life from you." It was my mother, truly. She was the discipliner when it comes to feminine issues, because she was a staunch feminist. . . . And she said, "If you ever hit a woman, I'll break your neck."

He felt that the dramatic way his mother emphasized respect for women during his childhood influenced him very strongly in adulthood: "And you talk about putting the fear of God in you, that has stuck to me to this day."

John also cited respect for women as a key way to produce successful African American fathers. When asked why he thought that some rich athletes balk at paying even a small amount of money to take care of their out-of-wedlock kids, John cited lack of respect for women as a probable cause:

I think it's a thing of respect for the woman, that is somewhat of a generalized statement – and I am probably wrong for doing that – but somehow within maybe the mind of a black male, if you look at the athletes, I would say a majority of them – I would say over 70% of them – came from . . . a poor background. And think of the mentality that . . . we were indoctrinated with at that time of going out and sowing your oats. . . . And child-rearing is up to the woman."

Theme Three: Generativity

Freudian psychologist Erik H. Erikson coined the word “generativity” and defined it thusly: “Generativity, then, is primarily the concern for establishing and guiding the next generation” (Erikson, 1968, p. 2). In 1982, he stated that generativity “encompasses procreativity, productivity, and creativity, and thus the generation of new beings as well as of new products and new ideas” (p. 2). This theme is demonstrated in the participants in my study who wanted to pass on a positive legacy to the next and subsequent generations. They expressed the desire to make the world a better place than it was when they were born. This seemed to be a motivator that may have influenced the participants’ behaviors that led to being designated successful African American fathers.

Mike expressed his concept of generativity by discussing his efforts to help not only his sons, but also the entire African American community to become more financially stable. With his sons, it is directed toward their future and the fact that he will leave them values that they should share with their children:

I always sit down [with my kids] and I get some little program for them. . . . We did a drill last night on the multiplicative effect of stock split . . . down to 20 years. . . . I think we came to something like three million dollars [from keeping one hundred shares for twenty years and having it split every year]. I got their attention. I said, “That can be you.”

Mike gives financial tips to other people, too, in an effort to help them with their financial future:

I have taught so many guys how to buy [stocks]. I have relatives, I have cousins, I have friends I have taught. One guy, a master sergeant retired, he said, “You are

into this real estate. Tell me how to do it.” I taught that guy how to go to the States, showed him a neighborhood where he can go. He bought this house and he is getting a hell of an income off this house right now.

Mike also demonstrates his belief about passing on other kinds of knowledge and concepts to children through his volunteer efforts focusing on teaching math to them:

And I am so successful with small kids and mathematics. . . . I challenged those kids’ minds, and I would get them involved with a lot of compound mathematics at that level. . . . I know how far to go with him. When I break him, I back down. I say, Oh it’s getting too tough for him. His brain is steaming. I can see his hair come up on his head and his eyes start to go back in his head. And I bring him back alive; I give him something totally different, and then I wrap him up again. If you have a teacher willing to do that, to go around, a math teacher, our kids would be – we wouldn’t be behind the Japanese. We wouldn’t be behind the Chinese. We wouldn’t be behind the Russians. And we would have more people, more Bill Gates. We would have people designing computers.

On a more general note, Mike emphasized the importance of passing on values to future generations and discussed a program that he thought might be useful in school situations:

You can talk about those kinds of things, values. . . . You can read stories about [values]. . . . Sammy’s daddy has gone away to the war or whatever. Then . . . Sammy’s daddy died and mama has to raise him all by her lonely self... So you have this series of little excerpts that marginal values are hitting, where you are cutting across all the possibilities. . . . It’s a message for that kid who they isolated

as being a minority kid, a black kid, who is going to eventually grow up. . . .

[so] he could remember from his first, second or third grade, or whatever. . . . And each year, you go and you dwell less on certain objects, and you dwell more on responsibility, loyalty, honesty, trust, because all of these pillars are invariably tied into that.

John's legacy and belief in generativity were implied in his devotion to the institution of marriage. Having seen many divorces in his family, he decided as a young man that he would leave his kids a legacy of an intact family:

My grandmother was divorced before she remarried again. My brother divorced two times. My sister divorced two times. And I had it made up in my mind that if I ever got married, it was going to be until death do us part or that I would do everything in my power to make it work.

His devotion to generativity was also expressed in his commitment to help people and to unconditionally accept people of all races and colors. He said that he seldom missed an opportunity to give this message to his son, daughter, and other youth with whom he interacts: "At that early age I had made up my mind that I would do everything in my power to do the same [as his grandfather and grandmother, who had been an interracial couple in the south, before it was legal] and to help people and accept people just as they are."

John even discussed generativity directly as he recalled his school days and how the Catholic priests and nuns had focused his attention on his legacy and passing something on to the next generation:

And that was in grade school and high school, just several priests and nuns who really got involved with me and caused me to just sit back and think about a purpose in life and what one should be looking at to accomplish something and leave something behind. . . . What are people going to say that you accomplished? They made me begin to think about that.

John became philosophical in describing his belief about doing “the greater good” and passing on this value to others:

I keep thinking back to my grandfather – and just people like – like Gandhi. Just looking at the injustices that they went through and what they were doing it for. It wasn’t for themselves. It was for a large group of people, but they just lived daily, just going out and doing it . . . you will be able to touch someone. There is going to be a print out there that someone may put a foot into and something may jump off of it.

He stated that his imprint on society and the next generation would be a legacy of doing the right thing for the right reason:

I think back to just an old prayer of St. Francis of Assisi. . . . “Lord, where there is hatred, let me sow love.” . . . the only way I can do that is just by a daily basis; just going out and doing the right thing.

J.C. was very emphatic in his desire to pass on a legacy and fulfill his duty to give something positive back to society and the younger generation by passing on positive values: “. . . I told my wife . . . ‘I don’t care if not a drop of my blood runs through my stepchildren’s veins, it’s what I can instill in them, the values.’” He alluded to

generativity when using his dad and other economically poor fathers as examples to contrast with the image of deadbeat fathers:

My father has always been there for us. He took an active involvement in our upbringing. He tried to mold us and make us a model for a responsible adult. . . . then, I turn around, and I see people that are poor, can barely feed the family they have, but yet, the fathers are still there, just like my dad, supporting their children: helping them grow; trying to instill some values that can be reproduced in a positive sense.

Nathan espoused a philosophy that encompasses the concept of generativity. In describing how he raised his children he stated, "You know you go to protect them first, then to prepare them and then you just let them go." In answer to a researcher's follow-on question and statement that, "You took it as a serious mission, that you must prepare your children to go out into the world and do good?" Nathan responded:

Sure, now that idea, I do – I did consciously. Oh yes . . . their education wasn't just for them. It's not something that is just theirs, in a sense. They are being educated so that they can go out and be responsible adults and survive.

Nathan attributed the fact that his sister had lost a child in a car accident as being a defining incident for him that had led him to dedicate his life to taking care of children, his own and others. His sister's second baby being born after her husband had been killed in an accident deepened his dedication to the second child and to children in general. Nathan described how his children were his legacy and that he felt compelled to produce responsible adults: "I am not going to send any duds, not bearing my name." He went on

to explain that one of the reasons for raising responsible children is to pass something on to the next generation that is positive and for the greater good.

Jimmy tied his generativity to his daughter:

I am not saying that I am the best father, but I am trying to be a better father. You always want to be a better father than your dad was, you know? And if I had a son, I would want him to be better than me, but since I have a daughter, I want her to be equally as good. I don't want her to think that she is anything less than, and she should never hold her head down. She should always be proud of who she is and where she comes from and what she has to offer to our society.

He then stated that he wanted his daughter to be successful, but that is her decision to make:

I always tell my daughter, I say, just like when you were a baby, daddy always asked you to take the first step. That shows me that you have the initiative and the desire. Once you take the first step, then I'll be behind you to make sure you don't fall. When you were little, you couldn't make those decisions, of course me and your mom, we did that for you. But now that you are older, you have to find what interests you. And we just want to let you know, that whatever it is, as long as it's not illegal or immoral, we'll support you.

Jimmy traced his generativity to a mentor who told him: "You got to be the kind of person that tries to change things for the better for everybody else." Jimmy stated that he took that advice to heart and now he tries to pass it on: "I try to do that with my daughter. . . . I want to make sure that she has those root values; honesty, integrity and stuff like that. . . . She can sort of grow her own value system from that."

Dwayne's acknowledgement of his generativity was much more subtle and seemed to culminate in the belief that his destiny is to pass on a legacy to his two sons regarding their responsibilities as a father:

I saw my father do things that I didn't think a man was supposed to do, and I just kept those things to myself. Later in life, those same things happened to me, but it took Christ to come in my life to say these things aren't right, and to try to set the example and walk the example so that my boys can know this is how you are supposed to treat your wife. This is how you supposed to treat a lady, and this is how you are supposed to live in a community.

Marvin expressed his belief in generativity through his relationship with his stepson: "I would tell him things, you must work for a living or you must be neat, must be clean, you must study, education is the key, get your education and you can be somebody . . . respect your mother." He also pointed out that he wanted to pass on to his son the belief acceptable and desirable for a father to be nourishing and affectionate with his children. He did not get those things from his own father. He does not want to perpetuate the macho belief that being affectionate is not acceptable. Unfortunately, neither his father nor grandfather modeled such behaviors:

Holding hands, not being afraid to hold my son's hand, taking away the belief of this masculinity thing that we, that I grew up with. . . . I made the decision that the buck's going to stop with me. That is something you feel inside, I feel inside, I just want to reach out and hug my son. I'm sure that maybe he [his own father] felt that but why he didn't do it, I don't know.

Bobby wanted to pass on his sense of commitment to building a wholesome community that focuses on the younger generation:

So it's really . . . a form of commitment; . . . actually being out there in the community and putting out that positive example. . . . I am most proud that a couple of years ago I was a finalist for the Volunteer of the Year for the community, which involved more dealing with kids. . . . Funshine Olympics [for special needs children]. I did that for nine years until they moved it up to Darmstadt, and I actually had my daughter out there with me on that. That was another way of bonding her to do some of the things that I liked doing. . . . So, volunteer efforts actually got the family in there . . . but it was my way of putting something back in the community and it turned up as a positive role model. It's not about being the richest man in the world or the poorest man in the world. It's about being people and keeping the positive image and doing the right thing.

Theme Four: Religion and Spirituality

Religion is defined in *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, Third Edition (1996) as a "belief in and reverence for a supernatural power or powers regarded as creator and governor of the universe." Generally, religion is associated with church attendance, donating to the church, accepting the values, morals, and mythology of the church, and following the rules and tenets of one's professed faith. Spirituality, on the other hand, is defined in *Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary* (1998) as "the quality or state of being spiritual, incorporeality; heavenly-mindedness." So spirituality embraces some of the concepts of religion but is a bit broader and less formal, encompassing the whole gamut of belief in a higher power or the order of things

in the world. This difference is critical in understanding the participants in this study.

All of the participants expressed a degree of spirituality, but not all of them could be defined as being religious.

Jimmy's spirituality was very evident in his proposals for trying to reduce the number of absentee and/or deadbeat fathers among African American males: "I think it rests within the individual, and they have to have faith in something. . . . in a higher calling. They would have to believe in something more than themselves." He also talked about religious roots as being a motivator in his life: "All the way back. Everybody was in church. That was our thing. That was part of our family make up, was to spend a lot of time in church." He surmised that the time he spent in church significantly influenced his sense of values:

I am sure it did, because all the pastors and all the ministers that I knew, they were always talking to us and you always had youth church. You had the sisters come over and talk to kids, and everybody had a little bit of advice to offer.

Jimmy acknowledged that religion had been an important element in his moral development. He concluded that spending so much time in the church and hearing biblical lessons taught there had been a significant positive influence on his behaviors as a husband and father.

Dwayne credited his religion and spirituality for many of the positive attributes of his parenting. In his rural North Carolina community, most people went to church and stayed there for long periods of time. In response to the question about how long they had stayed in church, Dwayne recalled that it was all day Sunday: ". . . this is where my mother took the role as far as making sure that her children were in church." He felt that

his early exposure to the teachings in the Bible could be a key in helping young boys and men to avoid unwanted pregnancies and the possibility of becoming a deadbeat or absentee father. He said, "I still think that the Bible is the key, even at a young child's age. . . . to keep them in some type of religious activity so that they would try to remain celibate or abstinent until they get married or whatever."

Bobby also credited his religious roots as the foundation that had helped him form his positive values:

I was actually a full-fledged Catholic and I went through confirmation from baptism and the whole thing, and I went Baptist as well, so I was well rooted into to church, Catholic and Baptist. . . . Maybe the church did build that foundation and I never let go of it.

He differentiated his spirituality from his religion by pointing out that he stopped attending church services for quite awhile:

I had a long leave of absence from the church, but that teaching that I actually felt or saw stayed with me, and I didn't need a building or a minister to make sure it was enforced. . . . I drifted from the church, so I just kept the teachings of it.

However, he still felt that religion could be an important factor in reducing the number of absentee and deadbeat African American fathers:

You got to push them to church; because I did get something out of church. That was really, like I said, back in my subconscious mind anyhow, and I started church at an early age. . . . Because, God is a wonderful God, and he puts things in a manner that it builds upon each other. And you have to understand, if you go out in life, you have to look for that foundation and build on that foundation.

Bobby expressed the view that we all have purpose and that is to help make the world a better place. He is convinced that this sense of spirituality can be fostered and focused and that it can help young black men to avoid the pitfalls of procreating out-of-wedlock children and, if that is unavoidable, being irresponsible parents.

Marvin described the church as important in his father's life and his own formative years:

Daddy, he was a godly man. . . . It [church and religion] was very important. Even as a young child, I could see how it was important. Coming from the South, churches were very influential in the South. Whatever you did, you went to church whether you wanted to or not. And seeing Dad as a deacon, as an usher, I saw the authority figure.

Marvin also credited the church with reducing the incidence of teenage sexual intercourse among his peers. The boys did not expect to have intercourse with the girls: "No, all you did was neck and maybe fondle a little bit . . . Why were the kids that way? Well, I guess I would have to say the church was a big part of it."

Mike acknowledged the importance of religion in his life with the following statements:

Religion was important in my family. I went to church. I went to Sunday school in the morning, every Sunday. . . . had to know the catechism. I had to recite the – I can tell you now all the 66 verses of the Bible in their chronological order.

He said that there were several pillars that contributed to his becoming a successful father. Foremost among them was his family and specifically the mentoring of his father. The second most important pillar was religion. His father quoted Scripture to support his

beliefs and thoughts as he guided Mike and his other children to become Christians dedicated go hard work and being productive citizens: "My father is the type person that whenever something comes up, he can go to it [the Bible] and quote a Scripture. He can say Job 3 and 4 says this or whatever. So there was this religious base."

J.C. described his family as being "very staunch, very proud Catholics." He said, "Yes, we were very religious. We had religious obligations every day of the week.... we said the Rosary, and we went to church very often, and . . . we prayed every day." Constant church attendance resulted in religious overload, causing him to stray from the church during his early adulthood, but he returned to the teachings of the church in his late twenties. J.C. said that his father's values, which he never relinquished, were deeply influenced by religious teachings: "My dad used common sense and a fear of God really to instill in me the values that I hold today."

When describing how he had been socialized and his interactions with his peers as an adolescent, J.C. smiled:

Interesting that you bring up a fact like that. It's just boys hanging out with boys. All of us . . . the gang, as I call it, . . . whether Baptist, Catholic, Methodist, in our small town came up in the church. So, we had very strong religious undertones [as] we grew and matured into adults.

John's religious experiences were so important to him that he had considered becoming a priest after high school:

I had a foot in the Seminary. I had visions of being the first black pope. But a priest friend told me, "Wait. Give yourself a year and than make that decision." And then between there the draft came up; number four in the lottery, and that

was the end of priesthood and eventually a break off from the Catholic church.

But, then still, moved here and there with different religions until at the present time, [we attend] the basic nondenominational type of a Christian service.

John reminisced that he had started in church early in life and had accepted the values of the church during childhood:

Yes, it started at the time with my grandfather, and living with my grandparents. He was Methodist and my grandmother was a Baptist, and going to both of those churches. And then moving up to Ohio at eight years old, the cousin we stayed with, she was a matron in the church. And she was always there on Sundays in her white dress and her badge on, gloves, taking care of the sisters who were filled with the Spirit, and went to the Baptist church there. We went to the projects, and in fact our cousin drove out to the projects, which was maybe about a 20-minute drive and picked us up just about every Sunday and we again attended the church there.

His affiliation with the Catholic church had come about as the result of another family move:

Then we moved in the vicinity of a Catholic church, and that was the first time that basically the racial structure of my friends changed. Because now, we moved out of a basically completely black neighborhood into a neighborhood that was a multi-racial, multi-ethnic neighborhood, and about 80% of the people that lived there attended the Catholic church . . . and then I ventured on over to the Catholic church and attended mass there . . . then went to high school and continued within the parochial school system there, and got involved in the eighth grade with being

an altar boy. There were – I came in contact with some priest/religious figures, males, that really had an impact upon me.

John credits those associations, along with his grandfather's teachings, as most influential in molding him and helping to form and develop the values that resulted in his designation as a successful African American father.

Nathan discussed rebelling against church attendance from a religious perspective, but that he maintained his spirituality and hung on to the core values of his church. Religion was a big part of his family members' lives. They attended church all day Sunday:

You got the fellowships and the dinners and the little plays, and things like that. Everybody had to get up every Sunday. We had to get up and at the end of Sunday school and everybody had to say a bible verse. And as soon as I could get away from that, I did.

Though he stopped going to church, Nathan said he maintained the core church values that he learned there:

. . . it [the values] stayed with me. . . . I think that gave me a core, that you know, I draw on it daily. . . . I am not going to say fanatic or you know ground-pounder, drum beater and all this stuff, but I think that is something that is mine. . . . my mother comes from a really religious family. She is real religious and my uncle is a minister.

Overall, Nathan felt that he was inundated with religious teachings and despite rebelling against church attendance, he internalized religious values, which he attributed to helping him become a successful African American father.

Theme Five: Money – Not a Significant Factor

Although all the participants agreed that economics are an important aspect of almost all human endeavors, they did not think that money or the lack of it was the defining issue in determining whether one was a successful father. They acknowledged the fact that many African Americans live in low-income communities and that such communities are very stressful for the inhabitants. The stress of working in low-paying jobs with very little job security, the stress of barely making ends meet financially, the stress of living in substandard housing, and the stress of living with the constant fear of crime and violence were all understood by the participants. Yet they still felt that those factors do not necessarily mitigate against the possibility of men becoming successful, responsible fathers. In fact, most of the participants had come from backgrounds where their families of origin were below the poverty line. However, the lessons they learned in such an environment about being a good father had been consistent and they had fostered within the participants positive attitudes about being a good father.

The participants' responses to the researcher's question about some African American NBA stars who had fathered children out of wedlock but did not provide financial support for those children were illuminating. Most of the participants said that it was not about money per se. The denial of money had more to do with disrespecting the mothers and the lack of positive parental values among those athletes.

Mike espoused the necessity for African Americans to get into the stock market and to become entrepreneurs and start their own businesses, but he still concluded that financial success is not a prerequisite for becoming a successful African American father. He cited his own family of origin as an example of a poverty-stricken family where

money was scarce but where the father remained in the family and provided financial, emotional, and spiritual support to his children. Mike saw economics as a part of the family stability issue, but not the defining factor in determining whether one becomes a successful or unsuccessful African American father:

It [money] is a contributing factor, but it's not the overriding factor in my view; because you can come back; you can overcome. . . . There are some qualitative factors that come into play versus the quantitative factors. The quantitative being the money, the economics. But I have seen people who have come from high echelon, middle [class] blacks, where their parents have had plenty of money. They have had material things, and the kids still didn't turn out [well].

When Mike responded to the question regarding NBA players who do not support their out-of-wedlock children, he became animated and displayed angry affect:

I have no irons in the fire or anything . . . against ballplayers; but this guy is a ballplayer, making big money. It's his mentality. Some of these guys . . . still have low mentality . . . [but] he's got money and he thinks that because he's got money he is powerful and he ought to be a Mike Tyson. Oh I shouldn't be calling any names, but he shouldn't be able to just grab a lady, and just you know, "You are my squeeze, Baby, and you are going to go with me tonight, and there ain't nothing you can do about it. Because I am who I am."

Nathan described his own background as being relatively poor but in a loving family with a father who had stayed with and supported the other family members. There had been no shortage of food, but money had been scarce. He ascribed some of his own fatherly qualities and behaviors to individual determination, but Nathan acknowledged

that intact families were the norm in his poor childhood community and that influenced him. He, too, did not think that money was a dominant factor in determining who would become a successful African American father. When discussing the group of NBA players who were not financially supporting their children, Nathan initially proposed that it was a phenomenon that occurred because of a bad relationship with the mothers:

I think that the main problem that they may have is that they don't want to give the woman any money. They can't get the money to the kids without giving the money to the woman. And, I think maybe that – if there was some way that – where it's like "okay, this is a pipeline straight to the child." I don't think you would have that problem. But . . . they may be thinking, that well, I'll support my child, but I won't support my child's mother. . . . I bet you, if those kids were staying with their [the ballplayer's] mother, who they bought that house for as soon as they signed that contract, I don't think there would be a problem.

However, he later digressed from that explanation and became a bit harsh in his assessment of the athletes who were not taking care of their children: "You might have some guys that are just stupid. . . . They are just uncaring and they are just self-centered enough to say, 'well, my money is my money, and nobody else is getting it'." In the end, he surmised, money per se does not determine parenting skills. Nathan cited poor but intact families in his childhood community as evidence that, at least from his perspective, money is a secondary factor.

J.C.'s family of origin included nine children and it was definitely poor according to yearly income standards, but the family was emotionally rich, remained intact, and his father had remained an integral part of it:

I was an adult. I was twenty-ish, upper 20's and just jokingly one day I said,

"Dad we were poor, weren't we?" And he said, "Yes, but tell me one day that you went without a full belly". . . . Some things are not measured by the car or the house, or the lifestyle, the environment you live in. Correction. Your lifestyle is what your family makes of it. It's the bonding, the togetherness that we share, that we will take to our graves.

J.C. equated the situation with the NBA players to his own observations of out-of-wedlock children and blamed the failure to support them on immaturity: "Now, we are getting back to the sports players and their dilemmas. I really believe it's just maturity." In questioning the statistics provided by the researcher on African American fathers, J.C. summarized his position about the connection between poverty and successful parenting:

I turn around and I see people that are poor, can barely feed the family that they have, but yet the fathers are still there, just like my dad: supporting their children; helping them grow: trying to instill some values that can be reproduced in a positive sense.

Marvin also had grown up in poverty, but he too maintained that low income, in and of itself, was not a determining factor that precluded African Americans fathers from being successful. He used his own father and family as an example to prove his point. Marvin described his father as humble and perhaps filled with unresolved anger over the money situation and the lack of education that limited his financial success:

I saw how hard my dad worked, and I knew the reason that he had to work that hard . . . lack of education. . . . Daddy was very humble. . . . as I look at it now, he had a lot of anger in him that he didn't know how to deal with it... the frustration

of not being able to advance, maybe not being able to do more for his family . . .

he wanted to do more. . . . I look back now and appreciate him so much now.

Even with great difficulty making ends meet and otherwise providing for his family, Marvin's father remained committed to his family and his responsibility as a father of six children. In the early sixties, he earned just \$27.00 a week. Clearly, money was not a motivating factor which led Marvin's father to be successful in fathering. Through his determination and creativity, he managed to keep the family solvent. Marvin gave his father credit for being a great provider under very trying circumstances:

Oh! \$27.00 a week Daddy made for six days of hard work. There were times . . . all of our cars were hand-me-downs. Daddy would bring a car from the junkyard, and we would be out in the yard with sledgehammers beating the dents out the fenders. Daddy would bring a car home that he saw there was nothing wrong with the engine, so we could live with that. A lot of cars we got, which weren't many, that's how we did it. Some of the food we got on our dinner table was shot out back in the woods. He would bring home a rabbit and gut the rabbit and that was dinner. Rabbit and gravy and mashed potatoes and cornbread or whatever. . . . He came from a little country town and migrated to Waco and started working there and worked on cars and he would make ends meet when things would get tight, I guess. I was a child, I really don't know. I could look back on it now and see. . . . I can see all the men that would pull up in the driveway to have their cars fixed. He was an excellent mechanic. Excellent mechanic. He knew how to repair cars and a lot of the people that came there, that's how he made his extra money.

Referring to the issue of the NBA stars who do not take care of their out-of-wedlock children, Marvin felt that it was not a financial issue but a moral one. About those individuals, Marvin said:

You have a problem somewhere with sex. You have to always have sex with women, without thinking, without protection. . . . I can guarantee you, none of them are . . . going to church. . . . I don't want to judge any of them. Maybe they do know Him, but not know Him like they should know Him. But at the same time, they're walking around, I betcha headphones, explicit lyrics, rap. . . . Money cannot be an issue. Michael Irving [Dallas Cowboy football player] accused of filming sex, him having a problem, him having his rendezvous. Having a wife and kids at home. . . . Just dig into this a little deeper to find out what the problem is. Once again, I think it's explicit lyrics. Sexually explicit lyrics.

Marvin thus felt that it was outside influences, such as explicit lyrics, lack of respect for women, and general lack of character that caused these NBA stars to not support their children. It was not the issue of money itself. Sure, Marvin reasoned, more money would have made his life easier.

When he was growing up, Bobby did not have a father to show him how to be a good father while living in poverty. However, based on his own experience of overcoming a poverty-stricken childhood, he wholeheartedly agreed that money was not what marked a father good or bad. He saw the issue with the NBA stars who do not support their children centering on morality:

To me, to glorify these guys, what are we doing? We have lost our morals to the point where if you are a star athlete, we are not going to push the button on you

too bad. We are going to condone it, because we need the talent. . . . talent is money, and these guys are the ones bringing in the money. Somewhere along the line they lost a lot of family values, but you have got to be realistic. It's only about 10% of them, and this 10% always comes to the top and overshadow the other 90%.

Bobby went on to explain that maybe the problem of out-of- wedlock children among star athletes was systemic and a reflection of society's adulation of stars:

Let's face it, we aren't going to hurt the super athletes. We are going to put them on a pedestal, and they can do just about whatever they want to do. . . . And he can go out and fornicate all he wants, because he is going to be protected and stuff.

When reviewing the transcript of his interview, Bobby reiterated his belief that money is not the issue in being a successful African American father and that it has more to do with values and commitment.

John, who had lived in extreme poverty in housing projects, said that money was not needed to become a successful father. He believed that it had to do with values and beliefs. He specifically detailed his beliefs regarding the high number of out-of-wedlock births among African Americans:

. . . Think of the mentality that . . . we were indoctrinated with at that time of going out and sowing your oats. And being told that, on one side, "Boy, you got some responsibilities here if you bring kids out." Then, on the other ear, "hey don't worry about that." And the person that is telling you that, here they have four or five kids . . . out of wedlock and not taking care of them. I think the most

important thing to them was the peewee bottle of Richards [note: a type of alcoholic beverage] or some vodka or some type of alcohol. . . . And child rearing is up to the woman. [Some men may say] “Yeah. I can father as many children as I can. . . . I have been given the gift to do that, and if I do it that is fine. You take care of them.”

He believes wholeheartedly that poverty and lack of money had not adversely affected his commitment to his children and family.

Dwayne emphatically stated that he did not think that economics was an issue in determining whether one is a successful father:

Not at this day and age. I don't. Maybe back in the time I could agree with that: but not at this day and time. To me there is too many opportunities: too many ways to support a family for that to be taking place.

He went on to explain that he could not understand the mentality of NBA players who did not support their out-of-wedlock children:

Obviously . . . that is crazy. You know? If you know you make – a man making 200 – I mean two or three million dollars a year, if it were me, I would try to make sure that my son had the best of everything that he surely could have.

Nor did Jimmy believe that money was a defining factor for being a successful African American father. He came to that conclusion by observing his stepfather, who had remained committed to his family in spite of economic hardship:

Financially, you know, we weren't that well off, but emotionally, I think we were wealthy and I think our family had a tight bond. . . . my father, he took that fear away from us. We never had to worry about that type of thing [where the next

meal was coming from], although we knew it loomed right around the corner.

But he always was positive in saying that, hey you know, we are doing better. we are going to make it; and we are going to do this and we are going to do that. He always had goals.

When discussing the NBA stars who do not financially support their out-of-wedlock children, Jimmy was livid:

There is no excuse in my mind for that. Like I said, it's a different set of values. . . . So you know it could be a lot of factors in there, why these guys are fighting, and maybe they feel like they were trapped. Maybe they feel that these women – with the child, you [the woman] are going to use the child as a leveraging tool to get me to succumb to whatever your wishes are. Regardless of what her wishes are, that is still your child. That's it. That is the bottom line; that is still your child. Whether it was intentional or not, whether it was planned or not, that is still your child . . . that child is yours, biologically, and you are responsible to make sure that that child has the very best that you can offer as a father. I strongly believe that.

Jimmy also felt that this was not a money issue, but that it was and is a values issue.

Theme Six: Resiliency – Reaction to Narcissistic Injury

Resiliency is the ability to bounce or spring back into shape or position after being pressed or stretched. Another definition is to recover qualities such as strength, spirits, and good humor quickly; or buoyancy. The participants in this study all described some of those qualities as they discussed their formative years and how they became successful fathers. Narcissistic injury involves having one's ego hurt through rejection or through

not having one's needs met (Horner, 1989). One can basically react in one of two ways to such injuries. One can become bitter and make the decision to pass the pain on by repeating the behavior and hurting others, or one can say that the pain was too severe and desire to make sure that others do not have to experience similar pain.

The clearest examples of narcissistic injury in this study evolve around abandonment, as experienced by three of the participants whose fathers either voluntarily or involuntarily left them at a critical stage in their development. The first five years of life are considered critical in developing attachments and for building ego strength. The narcissistic injuries for these participants occurred when they were two or three years old.

John's resiliency and response to narcissistic injury was very apparent and so transparent to John that he acknowledges its motivational qualities. He described the event of his father leaving the home in the following way:

I came from a separated home at an early age, three years of age. I was three, and my brother was five, and my sister was one at that time. My father decided to leave my mother, and he left Mississippi and went to Illinois to start a new life for himself.

This is a clear case of the narcissistic injury: abandonment. John had also been injured in other relationships, and this formed the basis of his resiliency to resist succumbing to repetitions of similar types of behavior:

My grandmother was divorced before she remarried again. My mother was divorced and was never remarried. My brother divorced two times. And I had it made up in my mind that if I ever got married it was going to be until death do us part or that I would do everything in my powers to make it work.

He also talked about this resiliency in terms of mutual respect:

Not only treat someone with respect, but somehow people will treat you with respect. But then sometimes even though you may treat people with respect, they may not in return treat you that way. But . . . that doesn't give you the right to turn around and just be disrespectful to people and say "screw it. I am just going to treat people as the people treat me."

John's resiliency is evident in the success he has enjoyed in his military career. He has been promoted to the highest enlisted grade in the U.S. Army. That is quite a remarkable achievement after spending five years of his youth in poverty, living in government subsidized housing.

Jimmy also experienced the narcissistic injury of abandonment. When he was two, his father left the family for service in Vietnam, and he never returned home. Jimmy did not interact with his father for eighteen years. Instead of becoming bitter and furthering the cycle of abandonment, Jimmy chose to not emulate his father. The depth of his pain caused by abandonment was an undertone in Jimmy's discussion about meeting his father, even though a very loving stepfather helped raise him:

But I had not established a bond with him [his biological father], while I would remember him when he came back, but since the time period was so long between me meeting him. . . . My mom never hid him from me. She always told me about him. We had pictures of him. I always asked her when I could see him and where does he live, and things of that nature. She would always tell me, "When you get older, you can go see him. He has his own family now." So it was a little bit

awkward for me. I don't think I was really ready to meet him when I met him.
but it had to happen.

Resiliency was obvious in Jimmy's life as he talked about his aunt setting up the meeting with him and his father. The researcher could almost feel the wound and its pain:

Well, it was kind of odd, how it happened. My aunt, my mom's sister, works for General Motors in Atlanta, and she kept telling me "You know, your biological dad works for General Motors." I said, "Oh really?" She said, "Yeah, when are you going to take time to meet him." And I said, "Well you know, when is he going to make time to meet me?" She said, "Well, he talks about you all the time. He really wants to see you. He's got your pictures. He wants to meet you, but he is afraid. He is afraid that since he wasn't there for you when you were growing up, that you may have some ill feelings about him."

Jimmy described the meeting and the fact that he met his father's new family and that his father met Jimmy's family. He said that he felt a sense of loss for those twenty years of not knowing his father, but that his stepfather's nurturing behavior had helped him to establish his values about the importance of family and being there for his children: "I think just my stepfather's being there, and the guidance, and the love that he brought to the house was enough to show me that, hey, this is important."

Bobby's narcissistic injury was the death of his father when he was only three years old. Observing how his mother coped with the loss of her husband, he learned resiliency and how to overcome poverty and become occupationally successful. It also made him determined to be a faithful husband and a dedicated father. He said,

You have to commit. . . . Life is a commitment. And when I say life is a

commitment, you have to understand that it's – even though a lot of people say 'life is a game' – it's a game of commitment too. You can't go forth and make promises to people and just arbitrarily break them. You can't go in and play with people's emotions, because it can have catastrophic impact on people for a long time.

In reviewing the transcript of the interview, Bobby acknowledged to the researcher that perhaps during the interview he had expressed some anger at his father for dying early and not honoring his implied commitment to be there for Bobby and his mother.

The act of responding to narcissistic injury by becoming the opposite of what one experiences was shown clearly in Dwayne's reaction to his father's extramarital relationships:

I guess my father had two different standards. He wanted us, his children, to live by one standard, but he wasn't living by that standard he wanted us to live by. I mean, I saw my father, as I was growing older, a teenager, I saw my father do things that I didn't think a man was supposed to do, and I just kept those things to myself. Later in life, those same things happened to me, but it took Christ to come in my life to say that these things aren't right, and to try to set the example and walk the example so that my boys can know this is how you are supposed to treat your wife, this is how you are supposed to treat a lady, and this is how you are supposed to live in a community.

In summarizing his views, Dwayne inferred that his father's hypocrisy influenced him to adopt different values and actually molded him to become a very responsible and nurturing father. Relatedly, Dwayne said that some of his father's other actions, which

had also hurt his ego, created an opposite response in him. In answer to the question about the influence of his family of origin, Dwayne stated,

Well, I think I try to treat my sons the way that I wasn't when I was raised up. My father was never there a lot. He was always working. So I like to be there for my sons. Even though, you know, I work extensive hours, I try to be available for my sons, so when my sons say the word, "daddy" or "father," I try to be there for them.

This was obviously a core issue with Dwayne as he continued with the following statement:

My father came from a family of twelve children, and I think why he tried to work so hard to make sure that we had the desires of our heart, is because he didn't have the desires of his heart. But, at the same time, he was there, but he never took the extensive quality time with me, as like father to son. He never took the time out to say, "Well, son, I love you, or son let's do this." When he came home from work he was always tired. . . . He was an excellent provider, but it was a difference between being a good provider and a father. There was not – we, as growing up as children, there wasn't a want that any of us had. But, there is a difference between actually being a provider and a father.

Marvin was cogent in his reactions to having a father who was a good provider but not a nurturer. He discussed this aspect of the father-son relationship on at least three separate occasions. In response to the question about whether anything in his family of origin channeled him toward being a successful father, Marvin stated:

Yes, but it might be a tactic from an opposite point of . . . me coming to the conclusion “I won’t do what my daddy did.” Not that what he did was bad, but some of the things he did or did not do in my childhood I saw affected me in adulthood. For example, I can’t remember my daddy giving me a hug. I can’t remember my daddy giving me an “Atta boy!” or picking me up from band practice or taking me to a track meet. . . . he was a godly man, hardworking man, good provider, but I think that whatever he got from his father, he continued that trait. I made the decision that the buck’s going to stop with me. That is something you feel inside, I feel inside, I just want to reach out and hug my son. I’m sure that maybe he felt that, but why he didn’t do it, I don’t know. Because to me that urge isn’t unique to me. But that’s why I said the buck’s gonna stop with me, and I could see now as my son grows up, I can see that it affects him.

The resiliency exhibited by J.C. was much more dramatic. He had wanted to marry the pregnant mother of his child, but had been unable to do so. This not only was a narcissistic injury to his ego, but also carried social and racial overtones in that her parents would not let her marry J.C. because he is African American and she is Caucasian. He could have had two very negative reactions to the incident. First, he could have eschewed the institution of marriage and rationalized not taking care of children born out of wedlock. Second, he could have become very antagonistic toward Caucasians because of the prejudicial attitude displayed by the woman’s parents. He did neither. Instead, he responded in a resilient way:

I loved this young lady very much. I was – when we did break up by force, I went through a very depressed period of time. Short in relative terms, but yet again it

was a depressing time, and I even considered at one time suicide. And I didn't – I snapped out of it saying that this is not worth it [my life]. So, when I was notified that I had a child, I asked her what does she want from me. . . . And she said, "nothing. I can get in touch if there is something that happened. Or if I need you." And then from that day until today, I have yet to see that child or its mother again.

Recovering from the brink of suicide over a failed relationship and loss of contact with both his child and its mother, J.C. had then decided that he would be a caring, nurturing father and husband. The fact that he had been designated to participate in this study of successful African American fathers suggests at least partial recovery and a great deal of resiliency.

Nathan's resiliency revolved around the birth of his oldest child and only son. When Nathan was nineteen years old, he fathered a son out of wedlock, and though he later married the mother, this required some resiliency. An easier path would have been to abandon both the mother and his child. But that was not a viable option for Nathan. He said:

Well, I am going to tell you something that is probably going to make your socks just curl up and fall into your shoes. Because our son, Lamont, was born before we got married. However, I have never, at any point, not known – and this is the truth – not known that I wouldn't take care of my son.

He went on to say that he knew what his responsibilities were from the day his son was conceived:

Had we not gotten married . . . I would have done everything in my power . . .

to be there for my son: financially, emotionally, friends. Like I say, the main thing that a kid needs when they are first born – they don't need a parent, they need friends. You know, you can be a parent. You start being a parent when they are like five. . . . Up until that point you are just a friend, guiding them. . . . I would have had the same philosophy if we would have had twenty kids and not gotten married. You know I would have had the same philosophy for each and every one of those kids.

Mike's resiliency was reflected in his entire life experience of overcoming extreme poverty to become a commissioned officer in the U.S. Army and to retire and become a successful federal employee. He told of coming from a large family, his parents and their eight children, and living on a very small family income. The family made their own soap, washed their homemade blankets in rainwater, sometime did not have enough food for all the kids to eat and lived well below the poverty line. It was poverty that had resulted in Mike getting a 50 cents allowance from his mother while in college and having only three pairs of pants, two pairs of shoes, and three shirts as his entire college wardrobe. However, his resiliency was reflected in the following statement about people who are not achievers and who are not willing to overcome the shortcomings in their lives:

I think it has to be instilled within you. You've got to have the desire to be an achiever. You go to learn to overcome, and you cannot just sit back and say, . . .
"If the welfare program don't take care of me, I am not going out there. I am just waiting for the welfare checks."

Theme Seven: Countering the Stereotype

A minor finding, which was not voiced until the fourth interview, involved the concept of overcoming the stereotype of most African American males being unsuccessful fathers. However, when the participants reviewed their transcripts, four of the eight agreed that this had played a part in their conscious decision to be successful parents.

Bobby was the first participant who voiced the idea that one of the motivators for him to become a successful father was his objection to being a stereotype. He said,

I pretty much saw my mom work hard after my father died, without a husband, and I said, "I will not let that happen." And as I was coming up, when I got to be a teenager, I saw lots of families, broken families, who had the mom and no dad. And I took it upon myself not to fall into that mode. I hate a stereotype. I don't like stereotypes, and I was determined not to fall into a stereotype mode.

When asked if his dislike of stereotypes had directly influenced his decision to avoid being an absentee or deadbeat dad, Bobby replied,

Exactly. Exactly. . . . I felt that if I had a wife or girlfriend, and I had a child out of wedlock or in marriage, I was going to be there and I was going to make it work: because I just felt deeply committed to doing that. There was no other recourse. That was embedded in me by myself.

After concluding the taped interview, Bobby parenthetically added that he does not eat chicken or watermelon in front of white people, because of his aversion to stereotypes.

Nathan enthusiastically supported the idea of avoiding being stereotyped. When the researcher told him that one of the respondents had said that this was a motivator for

him. Nathan said, “To prove them wrong, that’s damn right. That is a good reason.”

When told that a respondent had said that he would not prove them right by having children and leaving them. Nathan responded:

Tell it brother. . . . That is all right. If the ends – the means justify. Yes, hell, yeah. Whatever works. If that is what it took for him to destroy the stereotype, pass it on. Hell yeah. I ain’t got no problem with that. . . . I think that is great.

Nathan also discussed how stereotypes can influence budgeting and government funding:

People. If they realize that they use this for budgeting and all these economic pluses and perks, they will start realizing that you got to do like the dude said: you got to start busting them [stereotypes] every chance you get. You need to bust one. . . . if anything, start a stereotype that you break stereotypes. That’s fine too – an anti-stereotyper.”

Summary

The eight interviews had six major themes and one minor theme. The major themes were mentoring, respect for women, generativity, religion and spirituality, and resiliency. Also, in the opinion of the participants, money was not a significant factor in determining success in fathering. The minor theme centered on countering stereotypes

In the next chapter, I discuss the findings within the context of the literature reviewed in chapter two. And, finally, I offer recommendations for future study.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Summary

One of the prevalent themes mentioned by all of the participants was the concept of mentoring as a great motivator for establishing a climate that positively affects the likelihood of creating a successful African American father. Each participant discussed how mentoring had occurred in his own life and noted that either observing a successful African American father or being taught the concept by a trusted adult had influenced their decision to become committed African American fathers.

It did not seem to matter whether the mentor was the biological father, stepfather, or grandfather of the participant – the results were the same. Even non-relative mentors who had established a bond with the participants were cited as having had a significant positive effect on the desire to be a successful African American father. The good news about this finding is that many institutions have already established mentoring programs that might be helpful in this regard.

The second theme found was that the participants all had a healthy respect for women and considered them as human beings who deserved to be treated with dignity and even reverence. Whether taught formally or informally by both parents or one parent to respect women, or by observing the phenomenon of respectful treatment of women in other men, the participants seemed to grasp the concept and had adopted it as a lifestyle in their interactions with their wives, daughters, and women in general.

The adoption of this posture of respect seemed to help predispose the participants to committed fatherhood. They also expressed the opinion that the behaviors of

unsuccessful African American fathers either meant that these fathers did not share this concept or chose to ignore its precepts.

The third theme involved generativity, the concept of passing on a positive legacy and knowledge to future generations. This theme incorporated the concept of commitment to children since they represent the next generation. Once again, each of the participants advanced this theme as a motivator for their actions as committed fathers.

The fourth theme involved religion and spirituality. These terms are sometimes incorrectly viewed as synonymous; however, they are different. Religion is typically institution-based, with its roots in an established church. Spirituality is more individual-based and tends to be less formal and may be more inclined to a concept of other-worldliness.

All of the participants were spiritual, but all were not necessarily religious. Most had spent their youth heavily ensconced in religion, but some had pulled away from the formality of church life, yet still embraced the concept of spirituality. They wanted to live a life that was in keeping with their spiritual beliefs, and part of that involved being a good father. Religious orientation and spirituality have always been one of the greatest strengths of African American people and communities, and these two concepts seem to have been a definite influence in the lives of the participants. Their religious or spiritual side seemed to predispose them to be successful African American fathers.

The fifth theme that emerged was that money or the lack thereof, in and of itself, did not seem to be a motivator in producing successful African American fathers. Most of the fathers in the study came from very humble and relatively poor families of origin.

However, this did not seem to be a factor in determining whether one became a successful or unsuccessful father.

The sixth theme dwelled on the strength and resiliency of the participants. Though faced with narcissistic pain that could easily negatively influence one's actions regarding others, the participants all showed remarkable resiliency and continued to strive toward positive rather than negative goals. One of those goals was a determination by participants to either emulate their own father's behaviors, or in some cases purposefully not to emulate the father's behavior if it was perceived as negative. In the latter case, the participant showed resilience as he strove to become an idealized father figure that he himself may not have experienced in his own upbringing.

The seventh theme, countering stereotypes, was a minor finding, since all participants did not acknowledge this as a factor influencing their decision to become successful African American fathers. Upon reflection, it was acknowledged by four of the participants as a possible factor that had influenced their success as fathers.

All of these findings were significant and offer insight into the psyche of the participants. Some of the findings might be suitable for implementation as programs to reduce the number of absentee and deadbeat African American fathers. Mentoring programs on a national basis might be one way to achieve positive results. Implementing programs that encourage spirituality, teach resiliency and respect for women, and discuss the concept of generativity could be valuable tools in the fight against the phenomenon of single-parent, female-headed households that result from absentee and deadbeat fathers.

The participants themselves were given the opportunity to review their transcripts and were informed about the general findings. Several commented that some of the

findings could be supported through programs but that some were things that could not be implemented externally but had to come from within the person. They opined that mentoring could be implemented and is being implemented in various ways by such projects as the Big Brother, Big Sister programs and some more specific programs geared to prevent unwanted pregnancies among African American adolescents. They felt that respect for women, resilience and generativity are teachable skills. Religion and spirituality were also seen as values that could be influenced externally.

On the other hand, the concept of countering stereotypes was seen as a quality that a person either has or does not have and as not being impartable through educational programs. The concept of economics as not being a barrier to becoming a successful African American father was seen as a non-impartable factor also due to the importance placed on economics today.

Discussion-Research Questions

The study posed three research questions. Answers to these are summarized and discussed under separate headings in the following three sections.

Question 1: Are there unique factors that positively influence the commitment of African American fathers to their children?

The first research question of this study sought to determine whether there were any unique factors that could be seen as positively influencing the commitment of African American fathers to their children. Based on the responses of the eight successful African American fathers interviewed, the answer to this question is an unequivocal Yes. The answers of the African American fathers were consistent and showed that they clearly understood their success in light of such factors.

The first unique factor was that each of the participants credited mentoring as a significant motivator in their decision to become responsible, nurturing fathers. This is in agreement with findings from the literature. The importance of mentoring and the concept of passing collected knowledge and thoughts from one generation to the next through mentoring is highlighted in both Salk (1992) and Erikson (1982). Pitts(1999) described how difficult it is for a son who has not been mentored and who does not have the benefit of the guidance and wisdom of a knowing and loving father to know what fatherhood really means and to become a successful father himself.

The second unique factor, respect for women, was emphasized by all the interviewees as a key factor that affected their fathering. Some received this knowledge from both parents by observing their fathers give respect to their mothers. Others had very assertive mothers who insisted that their sons respect other women. In either case these eight fathers designated this quality as important to being a successful father. Two of the fathers specifically blamed the media, especially "rap" music videos, as contradictory to the concept of respecting women. The lack of respect for women was often designated by these fathers as a reason for high rates of out-of-wedlock births and high numbers of absentee and deadbeat dads among African Americans.

Other researchers agree that respect for women is an important factor for helping to insure the success of black communities. Madhubuti (1991) discussed the need for improved relations between African American men and women as a prerequisite if the black community is to survive and flourish. Moreover, Pitts (1999) agreed that lack of respect for women is a problem for black youth, stating, "The problem is that so many black boys are not raised around black men, and so they form their impressions from

media and other unreliable sources” (p. 25). This study found that respect for women is also a key to successful fathering in black communities.

The third unique factor, generativity, was also seen as an important and essential quality by both the researcher and the participants. If one does not have the desire to leave a legacy that is positive, then the reasons for doing the “right things” are diminished considerably. The fathers in this study all seemed to feel that their children were their greatest legacy and therefore that it was important that they nurture, guide and influence their children to be productive citizens and successful adults.

Erikson (1982) coined the phrase “generativity” and discussed its implications. These implications were evident in the statements of interviewees as they described their belief in generativity and gave examples of how it had affected the way they parented their children. One of the participants, Nathan, stated it clearly and emphatically with his words. “I am not going to send any duds (into the outside world) – not bearing my name.” Barbosa and Patterson (1998) noted the connection between commitment and generativity, and Snarey (1993) discusses the sense of passing on a positive legacy to the next generation. Statements by the individuals in this study strongly suggest that they, too, feel the importance of passing along such a legacy.

Religion and spirituality was also a unique factor among the eight participants. They epitomized the importance of the church and spirituality in African American families as discussed by Henderson (1994, 1999). Religion and spirituality seemed to be a core issue with all of the fathers. Though some of them acknowledged disavowing formal church dogma for some period of their lives, they all had remained spiritual and credited the influence of that spirituality as a factor in their success in fatherhood.

McAdoo (1997) and Sudarkasa (1997) both acknowledged the importance of religion and spirituality in African American family life. The research confirms their opinions and affirms that religion and spirituality were important components in the lives of the participants and important factors that helped to mold them into being successful fathers.

That money was found not to be a factor in this study may appear to contradict an earlier discussion in this dissertation about the importance of economics and the influence that economics had on these fathers. However, the conclusion from analysis of the interviews is that money or the lack thereof is not a significant indicator in whether African American fathers will or will not be successful in their fathering efforts. For the most part, the interviewees came from humble backgrounds with meager resources, but in spite of this obvious shortcoming, they became successful fathers. The participants also generally believed that it was a lack of values, not the presence or absence of money, that was critical in leading wealthy NBA basketball players to be absentee and/or deadbeat dads. Moreover, many of the participants cited their fathers as good providers, though the family was poor by common standards of poverty.

Madhubuti (1991) discussed the fact that money alone cannot buy black people freedom and liberty and that though economics is important, it cannot create good or bad communities. The participants confirmed this view as they discussed their own fathers who were extremely poor but made sacrifices for their children and families. Staples and Johnson (1993), in discussing “black families at the crossroads,” allude to the fact that not just money but values are needed for black families to progress.

The next unique factor, resiliency as a reaction to narcissistic injury, highlights the coping skills of the interviewees in that most overcame significant obstacles to become successful fathers. Bloir (1997) discussed parenting techniques that promote resilient urban African American families, and his concepts are confirmed by the interviewees. Their coping skills in the face of adversity seemed to have been grounded in early childhood when the fathers were molded to believe that they could be successful in spite of the odds against them. Brooks and Goldstein (2001) discussed raising resilient children, and the interviewees confirmed those views as they discussed overcoming adversity in their lives and envisioning a better tomorrow as a result of their efforts.

The minor finding was probably the most unique factor found in the study. Though countering the stereotype as a motivator for being a successful African American father might seem trivial at first glance, upon reflection, and after hearing the opinion of other interviewees about this motivator, it became apparent that this finding deserves serious consideration. The factor seems to be rooted in the concept of defining one's own identity and not subscribing to anyone else's definition or preconceptions. Henderson (1999) defined stereotypes as, "overgeneralized and often false images of outgroups: "Jews are pushy," "Blacks are lazy," "Japs are sneaky," "Poor whites are dumb" (p. xv). The fact that the stereotype of black fathers as irresponsible, absentee or deadbeat individuals was a motivator for the study participants to avoid such behavior is both profound and unique.

Question 2: If there are such factors, do they include or are they intertwined with the father's family of origin and his relationship with his own father?

The second research question asked whether any factors that positively influenced African American fathers' commitment to their children were intertwined with the father's family of origin and his relationship with his own father. On the basis of the study findings, the answer to this question was Yes. Several factors were circumscribed by family of origin and the relationship that the interviewees had with their own fathers. For one thing, mentoring, though it was sometimes provided by other relatives or community members, was affiliated with family of origin and/or relationship with the interviewees' own father in six of the eight interviews.

Respect for women was also attached to family of origin and/or the relationship with the interviewee's own father. In some of the cases, very strong mothers insisted on respect. The participants observed that their fathers and other men gave their mothers the respect they demanded, and they inculcated this type of behavior into their own behaviors and beliefs.

The connection between generativity, family of origin and/or relationship with the interviewees' own father was more tenuous. Interviewees did not directly attribute their generativity to these factors, though three of them did credit their father, grandfather or stepfather as a motivator to adopt the concept of leaving a positive legacy.

Spirituality and religion as a unique factor was intimately connected to family of origin, if not necessarily to relationship to the father of the participants. All interviewees cited regular church attendance at an early age as a family value, and each believed that

either consciously or unconsciously they accepted church precepts regarding a father and his family.

The unique factor of lack of money not precluding one from being a good father was also intertwined with family of origin and relationship with father for all participants. All of the interviewees came from poor or lower-middle-class backgrounds. Observing their parents or grandparents or their single mother struggle to make life better for the children was an important influence for the participants. Money was scarce in most of the participants' households. However, through resourcefulness and adroitness, their families were able to always have food on the table and interact as a family, and this fact helped give the eight participants the view that money was not a significant factor in relation to being a successful father.

Resiliency seems also to be directly tied to family of origin. In most cases, the participants responded to adversity early in life with resilient coping skills, and this helped set their life script as resilient people. Seeing such devastating factors as lack of resources, divorce, and death early in their family of origin and being able to overcome such situations seemed to encourage the participants to embrace resiliency.

Countering the stereotype as a unique factor cannot be shown to be directly attributable to family of origin for all of the participants, but in the case of the first participant to mention it, there does seem to be a connection. He saw his mother struggling after his father died and decided then that he would not leave a woman in that type of situation. In doing so, he seems to have decided to avoid a kind of stereotype – namely, the stereotype of African American fathers who leave their families without support or interaction.

Question 3: If there are such factors, can they be taught or can knowledge of them be used to help guide potential African American fathers so as to increase their chances of successful fatherhood?

The third research question asked whether any factors that positively influenced African American fathers' commitment to their children could be taught or otherwise used to help guide potential African American fathers to successful fatherhood. The answer to this research question is Yes. In fact, the majority of the identified factors seem to be teachable and fit to help guide potential African American fathers.

The concept of mentoring is one of these factors. Mentoring already takes place among African American and other youth through programs such as Big Brother/Big Sister. The development of more formal programs specifically designed to further responsible fathering was a concept that study participants advocated. They believed that mentoring is a teachable skill and that successful African American fathers have an obligation to reach back and help young men understand and embrace the concept of being a responsible, nurturing, supportive father. According to May (1996),

An ethic of responsibility has strong social dimension and there is an...entifiable ethic of social responsibility that emphasizes (as does the popular version of social responsibility) sensitivity, attentiveness, and responsiveness to the larger community within which one acts and lives. An ethic of responsibility tries to be responsive to otherness and to inspire people to act collectively to combat harm in their communities. (pp.78-79).

This ethic is the driving force for the mentoring potential African American fathers by already successful African American fathers. Participants expressed the view that

mentoring could help counter the harm done to African American communities by irresponsible, absentee, and deadbeat fathers.

Respect for women is also a teachable quality, and the participants felt that it must start with African American men showing respect for African American women. Media portrayals in many cases demean women as sexual objects, but participants believed that this trend can be countered if African American men were to assert their respect for their female partners publicly and privately. Another idea proposed by some of the participants was that the topic of respect for people, generally, but for women specifically could be added subtly to elementary, middle and high school curriculums. Themes such as, “We acknowledge human dignity not only by promoting welfare and not violating rights but also by honoring and respecting persons as rational moral agents” (Hill, 1991 p. 78) could be used in such programs.

Generativity, while a bit more nebulous, is also something that can be taught, according to the participants. They expressed the view that youngsters should be taught the concept of the universality of man. Included in this teaching would be the idea that a person should leave the world a little bit better than when he or she entered it. The participants felt that such teachings would result in an understanding of generativity and that this could serve as a foundation to increase the chance of increasing the number of successful African American fathers.

Spirituality and religion are teachable elements, and the participants felt that they should be taught. While teaching religion might create some legal issues in public schools, the participants felt that teaching spiritual concepts could avoid legal barriers and yet accomplish the same goal of increasing the chances that African American male

youngsters would become more responsible fathers.

The concept of money not being a significant factor in successful parenting did not lend itself to teaching as well as some of the other unique factors, according to the participants. However, they believed that it could be somewhat achieved by teaching values other than materialism and contrasting those values with the strong desire to acquire material possessions that so many people exhibit. The concept that people are more important than things would be central to such programs. Though not as specific as the other programs offered, participants felt that this could be a worthwhile addition to school curricula that should be explored in future research.

Resiliency is a very teachable skill as evidenced by the number of books that espouse methods for raising resilient children, such as those by Brooks and Goldstein (2001) and Richardson (1995). Participants felt that such training was not only essential for increasing the number of successful African American fathers, but that it was vital as a survival skill for young African American males.

Countering the stereotype was a unique factor for which the participants did not discuss a training program. They thought that something about the inherent danger in stereotyping should be taught, but no curriculum ideas were proffered for using this as a motivator to increase the number of successful African American fathers.

CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

This study investigated the positive aspects of African American fatherhood from the perspectives of eight successful African American fathers who were committed to their children and families. The study sought to determine discernable factors that may have had helped to determine the interviewees' success in fathering. Information was sought on motivation, underlying philosophy, beliefs, and circumstances in the lives of the fathers to determine if there were common themes to provide insights that might increase the likelihood of other fathers exhibiting the same type commitment.

The fathers interviewed did not fit the stereotype of the African American absentee or deadbeat father so prominently displayed in the media. School counselors in the Department of Defense Dependent Schools (DODDS) system in the Mannheim and Heidelberg, Germany military communities designated the participants in the study as successful African American fathers.

The study was important, because the behavior of absentee and deadbeat African American fathers lead to single-parent households, which seems often to deleteriously affect the lives of their children. The increases in the numbers of single-parent, female-headed households has caused growing concern in the public sector and among policy makers specifically. Single-parent households make up a great percentage of the poor in America. Such households are five times as likely to live below the poverty line as are two-parent households, with almost fifty per cent of children who resided in female-

headed household being judged as poor in a 1998 study (Lugaila, 1998). Further, studies indicate that children raised in single-parent homes are at increased risk of not only poverty, but for dropping out of school, juvenile delinquency, teen pregnancy, substance abuse and increased likelihood of becoming divorced if they marry (McLanahan & Sanderfur, 1994). These realities made this study vital and timely. The statistics noted and the stereotype of African American fathers as composed of mostly deadbeat and absentee fathers made telling the stories of successful African American fathers both imperative and compelling.

In order to capture the full essence of these factors, the qualitative, phenomenological approach was utilized for the study. Current literature has not fully addressed the issue of successful African American fathers, and phenomenology seemed to offer the best chance of providing an in-depth examination of the lives of these eight successful African American fathers by producing descriptive data in their own words. The intent was to allow the researcher and his readers to see the world as the participants see it. To do this an open ended, in-depth questionnaire was used to explore the life history and present functioning of the participants.

Each participant was interviewed for ninety minutes, with the interview audio-taped and later transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were submitted to the participants for accuracy, correction, clarification, and confirmation. After participant confirmation, the tapes were reviewed several times by the researcher in an effort to find common themes.

Six major recurring themes related to successful fathering were identified in the interviews. These were: mentoring, respect for women, generativity, religion and

spirituality, money's not being a determinant of success, and resiliency. A seventh factor, avoiding stereotypes, was considered a minor theme as it was mentioned by four of the participants.

Recommendations

Expansion of this type of qualitative study with larger, more age-diversified populations, more structured interview techniques and utilizing more formal questionnaire-type instruments is recommended. Interviews of spouses and children could possibly enrich the findings. A second research opportunity would involve comparative analysis of the motivation, philosophies, and general characteristics of successful and unsuccessful African American fathers using a relatively large sample of both.

Another useful research project would be a longitudinal study of African American male youth using comparative groups to test the effectiveness of imparting some of the themes that were identified in this study. In such research, one group of young men could be trained by mentors on one or more of the themes found in this study. The second group would not receive the training. By following these two groups over time and measuring how fathering behaviors emerged, a researcher could quantify the effects of the theme training by mentors.

The same research that was conducted in this study could be replicated and expanded in a civilian community. The purpose would be to determine if there are differences, simply because of the confounding factors of the structure and support systems that are inherent in military communities and based on the participants affiliation with the US military.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX 1

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

1. Title: Informed Consent Form. Research is being conducted under the auspices of the University of Oklahoma—Norman Campus. This form documents that participants have given willing consent to be subjects in the research project.
2. Introduction. The study concerns African-American Fathers: Factors that positively influence their commitment to their children. The principal investigator is John L. Carter Jr., a candidate in the European Ph.D. Cohort of interdisciplinary studies with a focus on organizational leadership. His faculty sponsor is Dr. George Henderson, Dean of Liberal Studies.
3. Description of the Study. This study is focused on discerning and understanding the factors, which influence African-American fathers to initially commit and remain committed to their children. Each subject, who has been designated by a school counselor as a successful, committed father, will be interviewed about the source and sustainability factors that produced the successful outcome. The interviews will take about ninety minutes and will be audio taped for later transcription and analysis.
4. Potential Risks and Benefits of Participation.
 - A. Risks. There are not any foreseeable risks or discomforts to the participants.
 - B. Benefits. Subject will not be paid for their participation in this study. Neither the investigator nor any other party involved in the research will receive monetary remuneration for this project. Benefits accrue through a better understanding of successful African-American father motivation and the possibility of exporting this motivation to others, in hopes of reducing the number of “deadbeat and absentee fathers”.
5. Subject’s Awareness.
 - A. **Conditions of Participation. Participation in this study is strictly voluntary. Refusal to participate does not invoke any penalty or loss of benefits to which the subject is otherwise entitled. The subject may discontinue participation at any time without penalty.**
 - B. Confidentiality. The subject’s identity as a participant will be kept confidential to protect anonymity as the source of the information collected in the interview. Only the principal investigator and his five-person dissertation committee will have access to the audiotapes. The audiotapes will be used for academic research and publication purposes and will be destroyed no later than three years after the interview.
 - C. Compensation for injury. Risk of injury is not foreseen. No compensation for injury is available.
 - D. **Contacts for Questions about Research and/or Subjects Rights. Questions concerning research itself may be referred to John L. Carter, Jr., telephone +49(0)6221-383830, email JohnCarter4@compuserve.com <mailto:JohnCarter4@compuserve.com>. Questions regarding your rights as a research participant should be directed to the Office of Research Administration Oklahoma University at (405) 325-4757 or email irb@ou.edu <mailto:irb@ou.edu>.**
6. Signature.

 Participant

 Date

APPENDIX 2

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The following is a list of questions asked at the interviews. Though the order of the list reflects the approximate order in which questions were asked, the specific order was determined by the flow of the interview. Not all questions were asked of all interviewees.

1. Why do you think you were designated as a “successful African American father” by your child or children's school counselor?
2. Describe your family of origin and your nuclear family.
3. What, if anything, in your family of origin influenced you to become a successful father?
4. What was the nature of your relationship with your parents? Influence of father? Influence of mother?
5. What, if anything, in your community growing up impacted your concept of fatherhood?
6. What role, if any, did religion play in your upbringing and present lifestyle?
7. What was the influence of economics in your family of origin?
8. How has your affiliation with the military impacted your parenting style?
9. Did you have a mentor or role model in addition to your biological father?
10. Please describe the way that you were socialized? Peer influence? Did this influence your interaction with females?
11. Describe the influence, if any, of extended family on your concept of fatherhood.
12. Describe your relationship with your child or children.
13. Why do you think that some rich black men, such as NBA stars, reportedly opt to not take care of their offsprings properly? Is it economics or some other influence?
14. Is there a role for the federal government or the education system regarding fostering positive African American father-child relationships?
15. If the statistics are correct and seven of every ten black children are born into single parent female headed households, do you have any suggestions or strategies to reduce those numbers? How would you influence young black men to be more responsible?

APPENDIX 3

SAMPLE INTERVIEW

On the following pages the transcript of the interview with one of the participants, “John,” is presented. This is to provide the reader a representative sample of a complete interview from beginning to end.

The interview was audiotaped with the participant’s permission, then professionally transcribed. The letter “Q” indicates the questions and comments of the researcher: “A” indicates the comments of the interviewee.

INTERVIEW WITH "JOHN"

Q. For the record, state your name and marital status and your understanding of this interview.

A. Good afternoon. My name is John. I am a 48-year-old black male who happens to be a married father of two children, a 21-year-old son, and an 18-year-old daughter. My daughter is attending her first year in college and my son is in the military. I am doing this interview of my own free will. I am not expecting any type of gratuities in return. And John Carter has informed me that he is utilizing the information from this as part of his Ph.D. dissertation at the University of Oklahoma.

Q. Okay. Now, John, as you know, as I told you before, you were designated by an administrator, a portion of the staff here at Mannheim High School, as a successful African-American father. What do you think made that person say that? What, is it something you do at the school? Or why would you think that somebody could look from the outside and say, there is a successful African-American father?

A. I think maybe it was a portion of the involvement at the school: the involvement of my wife at the school: and also, the activities of my children.

Q. So, your children did well: is that what you are telling me?

A. They did fairly well, yes.

Q. Okay. But you and your wife were both involved in the school?

A. Yes. We were both involved.

Q. In what way?

A. Well, I was the -- for two years, president of the High School Booster Club. We were both members of the AVID Program when our son was in the program for two

years. My wife was president of that. And, then various activities in the school that was always assist with, whether it's with Photography Day, of helping organize that, or helping with the barbecue around the schools.

Q. You said "AVID." And AVID, if I remember correctly is an Advancement through Individual Determination and this sort of thing. This for kids who have the test scores, but may not be doing as well as they should. Is that the program?

A. That's correct.

Q. Okay. Let me ask you this: You just described your family. You have a wife and two children. Could you describe for me your family of origin, your mom, your dad, sisters and brothers, this sort of thing?

A. That is an interesting one. My family originally originated from the Gulf Coast of Mississippi. I came from a separated home at an early age, three years of age. I was three, and my brother was five, and my sister was one at that time. My father decided to leave my mother and he left Mississippi and went to Illinois to start a new life for himself without us.

At the age of -- when I was eight years old, my mother decided that it was time that she departed Mississippi, and sought greener pastures up in the northern land. Up until that time we were living with my maternal grandmother and father, and my mother had her own little place maybe about a mile away. But, because of difficulties with employment, basically where she was staying was an old, one room, shack type of a building. So, my grandparents thought it better that we stay with them, and it helped us out.

And in 1957 we moved to Ohio State with a cousin for approximately six months. until my mother found a job at a TB sanitarium as a nurse's aide. And, then, we moved into the Kimmelbrook Projects, a great place. And we lived in the projects for approximately five years. And, then, my mother was able to save money on the side, and she was able to rent a home, and it was on the east side of Youngstown, Ohio, which is the other side of the railroad tracks, and we stayed together as a family. In fact, I was the only one that stayed with my mother the entire time until I graduated from high school. My brother and sister periodically went to live with my grandmother.

Up to -- at one period my brother was gone for three years, and my sister for about six years. And, my grandmother, because of benefits that she received from my grandfather's retirement with the railroad, they adopted her so that she would be able to get some of the benefits there. And it was not a close -- it wasn't a very close-knit family. It was a loving family in regards to my grandmother and my grandfather supporting, and we were realizing the love that was there from an early age of them providing for us, and then my mother. But, the closest that I have seen, in my wife's family, it never existed in my family, and I kind of missed that. And we came -- well, I came from a history of divorced spouses.

My grandmother was divorced before she remarried again. My mother was divorced and was never remarried. My brother divorced two times. My sister divorced two times. And I had it made up in my mind that if I ever got married it was going to be until "death do us part" or that I would do everything in my powers to make it work.

Q. You said earlier, John, that your father left when you were one -- is that right?

A. No, I was three and my sister was one.

Q. Oh, you were three. Do you remember that as a painful experience for you, even at three? Or did you just not really understand it or what was your reaction -- at three?

A. Three; I really didn't understand it. I -- mom was always "Mom." My grandfather was always "Daddy," and my grandmother was "Nanny." And we always -- my grandfather had that role of daddy and growing up, until we moved, we kind of separated him being the grandfather and --

Q. So he was more of a father than the father who left to you?

A. Correct. And it was interesting, though, because I didn't realize it until I was 10 years old, and he died. I was named after him. And after he died and I was just looking at him, and just finally at that time it just dawned, "Hey, my grandfather is a white man." And I was thinking of the hell that had to go through, he and my grandmother at that time in the deep South.

Q. In the deep South --

A. And it had been an interracial couple, and realized at that time that, if he overlooked the stigmas of society at that time and took us on, and which he really didn't have to do, and provided for us. At that early age I had made up my mind that I would do everything in my powers to do the same and to help people and accept people just as they were.

Q. Right. So he gave some racial tolerance and that kind of thing in addition to being a father?

A. Yes, he did.

Q. Did you -- I mean, did he ever kind of sit down and actually talk about what a father's responsibility to you, or did he just kind of live it?

A. He lived it.

Q. He lived it.

A. He just lived it and provided not only for our physical needs, and also our emotional needs. His lap was always there for us to crawl on after we had gotten a whipping from either my grandmother or mother, and he was always there to make us laugh, and to comfort us, and to just show us the right way of doing things.

Q. So your grandmother was African-American in features and appearance?

A. Yes.

Q. And he was Caucasian-American, in a manner of speaking?

A. Correct.

Q. And your father, the one who left when you were three, was African-American?

A. Correct.

Q. Let me ask you this: In the neighborhood there, you know, in Mississippi, before you moved to -- I mean, you stayed there until you were eight, right?

A. Yes.

Q. Okay. Were there any people in that who kind of mentored you in addition to your grandfather? Were there any other men who kind of mentored and talked about what a man is supposed to be or anything like that? Or do you remember anything like that?

A. I can vaguely remember there were the Atkins'. It was the Atkins', Mr. Atkins and his three or four brothers who lived in the area with their families. And Mr. Atkins --

well. Mrs. Atkins was a schoolteacher and Mr. Atkins had a job downtown. So, he was kind of at that time the affluent one in the neighborhood, and his brother had a barber shop that we used to go over to his house and get our hair cut. And the older men were sitting there, and I can remember just listening to them talk about life and watching them play checkers.

Q. So they gave a little bit of wisdom from that spot?

A. Yes.

Q. Now, when you left Mississippi and you came up to Ohio, the kids that you hung around with, your peer group at that time, do you remember any of the values that they had? I mean, you guys at that age you don't talk about values, but I mean, was there anything that was kind of standard? Were there any kinds of values like that that you guys talked about?

A. Are you talking about just initially getting --

Q. No, it was once you got in -- you know? From eight, you got there when you were eight: eight until about sixteen is when we get a lot of influences from our peers and whatever.

A. We moved from different locations during that time. Let's just say, for the -- my eighth year, when we arrived there, during that time, we arrived in the Fall of my eighth. We lived with the cousin who lived in an urban neighborhood, individual homes, and the kids went to a public school system. And our values were -- Yes, ma'am. No ma'am. Yes, sir. No, sir. Very respectful, not only within the house but to the adults in the neighborhood.

If there was a fruit tree and we could get to it and not get caught, we were there. The values of stealing the stuff, that wasn't there. Fighting wasn't condoned. And from nine to thirteen, we moved to the projects and life changed. I was never an aggressive, loud, boisterous person, and it was either -- in the projects, it was like you either get killed or you were killed. Either you fought or you were beat upon, and I was the receiver of the pain of the bullies in the neighborhood. But, I guess it was "the strongest survive." But I guess I was somewhat on that, maybe not in the physical retaliatory type stuff, that somehow I had some strength there that I survived that. But, even there in the projects, with the older -- with the adults, it was still, yes, ma'am, no, ma'am -- even with the roughnecks that were out there. They, at least to the adults, they gave --

Q. They gave them respect?

A. They gave them the respect. And maybe out in back, when they went out knocking around at this and that, but they -- in the presence of the adults, they showed that respect. And I think that was the one time in my life that the four of us: my brother, my sister, and my mother, were the closest; that we were finally on our own for the first time.

Q. And in kind of a hostile environment it sounds like.

A. It was a hostile -- and we were left alone quite a few -- a good amount of time, because Mom worked. When we got home from school, many times she wasn't there if she was working the swing shift. And that brought us closer together, that we spent a lot of time together, in the house playing cowboys and Indians, having camp outs in the house, and some good memories and still hell.

Q. Yes.

A. But some good memories.

Q. Yeah. And it sounds like -- and don't let me put words in your mouth, but it sounds like you guys didn't really realize that you were poor?

A. Didn't realize we were poor when in Mississippi, because we had -- we only had to go to the store for a very few things, because my --

Q. You raised your own?

A. My grandfather grew everything, or he raised it. We had somewhat of a semi-community cow. We got up in the mornings and we milked that. We had chickens that we killed for food, or the eggs, the fresh eggs. Ducks. We grew everything from field peas to butter beans, sugar cane for your year's supply of sorghum, or molasses, greens --

Q. You killed a pig at the beginning of the year?

A. A pig or two was slaughtered there. We strung them up over the big limbs of the pecan trees and gutted them. We had a salt house. After the pig was butchered we put it up and salted it down, and put it out in the salt house.

Q. Yeah. The smoke house and all that.

A. We had fruit trees around to pick fruit and then can.

Q. How about when you got to the projects; did you -- it sounds like you had a pretty good life? I mean --

A. It was different --

Q. I mean, as best you could.

A. A pretty good life, and we didn't realize we were poor. We were poor. Hand-me-downs was just an expected thing, and I remember wearing some of my sister's clothes to

school, or in the wintertime -- and not only wintertime, but mostly the wintertime.

Shoes had holes in them, but put that piece of cardboard or two in the bottoms of the shoes and just kept wearing them. Dinner sometimes was mayonnaise sandwiches or syrup sandwiches. We didn't think anything of it.

Q. Didn't think anything of it ?

A. I can't remember when we went to bed hungry, because we had something. Or we had the surplus cheese --

Q. The surplus cheese and --

A. Or the surplus milk that you could never ever stir the lumps out of, and it was ----

Q. Yeah. But you made it?

A. Yes.

Q. Let me ask you this: One of the things that I kid kids about -- you know what I do? I work with kids and street kids. Basically, you guys, between about the age of 13, 16, you know, the hormones in tennis shoes? You know? That is what I kid them about, because they really are. There are always things that are changing.

When you were going through that period, do you remember anybody talking about not fathering kids out of wedlock, or giving any speeches about that? Or -- do you see what I am saying? I mean, the natural urges come. Did you have anything that pulled you back from -- you know, making kids out of wedlock and that sort of thing?

A. My mother, I think, maybe mentioned it a time or two. And, then, it was just basically; one, that we always either --. Mom didn't go that often to church, but I always ended up going either on my own or with a cousin to church. But, I think that the values that I accepted there --

Q. The church said, let's not do this --

A. And it was just something that I didn't want to deal with and I just realized I am looking at the situation that I was in at the house from the separated home. And looking at the environment of where we grew up, and how many one-parent homes there were in the projects, and looking at some of the kids, the guys in high school who -- you know, the hormones were just busting out of their pants there. And the girls were also, and seeing the numbers with the babies, and I just said to myself, "No."

Q. You weren't going to do that?

A. I wasn't going to do it.

Q. So it sounds like, even though it wasn't mom and dad so much, but you got religion kind of early -- or at least you were going to church and kind of accepted those values.

A. Yes. It started at the time with my grandfather, and living with my grandparents. He was Methodist and my grandmother was a Baptist, and going to both of those churches. And then moving up to Ohio at eight years old, the cousin we stayed with.... was a matron in the church. And she was always there on Sundays in her white dress, and her badge on, gloves, taking care of the sisters who were filled with the Spirit, and went to the Baptist church there. We went to the projects, and in fact, our cousin drove out to the projects, which was maybe about a 20-minutes drive and picked us up just about every Sunday and we again attended the church there.

Then, when we moved out of the projects, and to a neighborhood, in fact the first place we moved to, that my mother rented, was across the street from our cousin, and we still attended the church she went to. Then, we moved, again, still on the east side about

a mile away. we moved in the vicinity of a Catholic church. and that was the first time that basically the racial structure of my friends changed. Because now. we moved out of a basically completely black neighborhood. into a neighborhood that was a multi-racial. multi-ethnic neighborhood. and about 80% of the people that lived there attended the Catholic church.

And. so. the kids we played out in the street with. they kept talking about their church. and then I ventured on over to the Catholic church and attended the Mass there. Then around the eighth grade -- up into the eighth grade in the public school system and I attended the eighth grade at the Catholic school there.

Q. The Parochial School ?

A. And then went to high school and continued within the Parochial school system there. and got involved in the eighth grade with being an altar boy. There were -- I came in contact with some priest/religious figures-- males. that really had an impact upon me.

There was a Father Ralph Friedrich. He was -- Father Friedrich used to come to the house and talk to my mom and myself. and he got me a job at the school so I could work there at the school and pay for my tuition. Father Friedrich was unique. He walked the talk. He really got involved with the Civil Rights Movement. made several journeys down to the South and was involved with some voter registration and marches down there. And. then. he went on down to Central America and I can't remember what countries that were having problems there. and he got involved in the movements there. And that was in grade school and high school. just several priests and nuns who really got involved with me and caused me to just sit back and think about a purpose in life and what one should be looking at to accomplish something. and leave something behind.

Q. A legacy that you --

A. What are people going to say that you accomplished? They made me begin to think about that and continue even more so at that time.

Q. Let me just go -- one of the things that I told you about before we started this interview was, one of my things was that maybe economics had something to do with these terrible statistics, you know, having so many kids out of wedlock -- but that does hold up for you, does it? Because you -- you guys were poor but you still hung as a family. You didn't just break up. Now, your dad left, but you still had the -- this thing.

Speaking of economics -- and you lived in the projects, but you still were a family -- there was this article as I was doing my research, about a year ago, *Sports Illustrated* had an article called, "Where's Daddy?" And what they did was they -- it was eleven NBA stars.

A. Right.

Q. Do you remember the article?

A. Yes.

Q. And what they said was, you know, guys like Shawn Kemp with seven kids by different women; Larry Johnson with four kids; and they talked about the fact that these guys are fighting with these women over -- what to me, sounds like chump change. Because when you are making \$12 million dollars a year, you know, four or five hundred dollars a month to take care of your kid doesn't seem like anything.

What do you think that is about? Is that just that they don't respect the women? Or is it that they feel like they are trapped? What would make a father, you know, who's got seven -- let's take Shawn Kemp. He had seven kids by seven different women, and

he is fighting with these women about four or five hundred dollars a month or whatever it is to take care of those kids. What do you think is going on there?

A. Whoo! I think it's -- one, I think it's a thing of respect for the women, that somehow in a generalized statement -- and I am probably wrong for doing that -- but somehow within maybe the mind of a black male, if you look at the athletes, the black athletes, I would say a majority of them -- I would say over 70% of them came from a background, a poor background. And think of the mentality that was -- that we were indoctrinated with at that time of going out and sowing your oats. And, being told that, on one side, "Boy, you got some responsibilities here if you bring kids out." Then, on the other ear, "Hey, don't worry about that." And the person that is telling you that, here they have four or five kids that weren't ----

Q. Born out of wedlock?

A. Out of wedlock and not taking care of them. I guess the most important thing to them was the peewee bottle of Richards, or some vodka, or some type of alcohol.

Q. So you think maybe they were socialized that women are not important and whatever.

A. I don't think it's just the athletes. I think it's just an unfortunate -- within the -- if you look at that lower socioeconomic group, and unfortunately within the urban area, that with the exodus of the majority of the white population out of the city, and leaving it. And when they left it, the conditions just went down, and not just where the majority of the blacks lived. It was a jungle, and it is a jungle still. I think -- I still just think that it's out there that maybe were just there just for pleasure.

Q. Pleasure?

A. And child-rearing is up to the woman. Yeah, I can father as many children as I can, that was -- I have been given the gift to do that, and if I do it that is fine. You take care of them. When I come back, you are woman. Don't go messing around. When I decide I am coming back, you be ready for me, whether it's a year from now; whether it's tomorrow --

Q. Just entitlements?

A. Yeah, I guess so.

Q. Let me ask you this: If you had the power, and I am going to give you unlimited power now, to change this, to try to work on changing that kind of mentality that we just talked about, where would you start and what would you do?

Now, let me tell you where I am coming from. You are a successful, black father, and now we want to get this imported to people -- I don't know whether you want to start with the kids, or whatever, so that we have more successful, black fathers. How would you do it?

A. First, I was thinking I would start with the fathers. But, to an extent the old saying of, "you can't teach an old dog new tricks": sometimes that is true.

Q. So if you already fathered the child you might now start there is what you are saying?

A. I am just starting to talk about of the father, of the excepted adult age, whoever could be a father -- I would look towards -- I would start seriously to employ that time with the teenagers and work on back with the males, with the black male, and begin to really share. And I think that's the -- the share value is -- I am trying to think of who would be doing the sharing with them. If you are looking for the percentages there, there

are more who are without -- who are not supporting families, than those who are very supportive. So, here you are going to have a small core group that somehow would be getting out and about, showing another way of living: of showing how to treat another person as an individual, as a man, as a woman, to accept people as they are -- not as a person to -- to treat a woman as a lady until she so decides she wants to forfeit those rights to be treated as a lady. And, then, try to remind her of not only of a lady, but her womanhood.

Q. Let me cut you off for just a minute. One of your counterparts, it sounds like you guys are going the same way. What he said was, it was incumbent on those of us who are good fathers, okay? To basically start with what he called the groundswell. In other words, you are a good father. You would take it upon your responsibility -- as your responsibility to take maybe two or three teenage boys, 13, 14, 15, or whatever age, and to kind of mentor them to this thing. To kind of say, "Hey, son, putting another notch on the gun is not what it's all about." You know? What is more success is to have a successful family with a mother, a father, and children, and this sort of stuff. Do you think that would work?

A. It's going to be -- again, you would have so few doing that. You are narrowing the impact area that you can't get that burst of an explosion out there, that somehow those fragmented pieces can touch this person, that person. But, I think the way that I would do it is just basically on a day-by-day basis of walking the talk, and having people see you.

And, even now, if I want to become a dog out there, I would say, "Jeez, I can't even do that and rest. I can't go here without someone knowing me, or there," and it's just on a daily basis of them seeing me, and just living the talk and just showing people

that you can. Not only treat someone with respect, but somehow people will treat you with respect. But, then, sometimes even though you may treat people with respect, they may not in return treat you that way. But, that is -- that doesn't give you the right to turn around and just be disrespectful to people and say, "Screw it. I am just going to treat people as the people treat me."

I personally have this -- whether it's a weakness or whatever, that no matter what kind of hell I go through, and I keep thinking back to my grandfather -- and just people like -- like Gandhi. Just looking at the injustices that they went through, and what they were doing it for. It wasn't for themselves. It was for a large group of people, but they just lived daily, just going out and doing it; not trying to zero in on just a small number, but just walking out in the world and doing it. And, wherever you walk, there is going to be --

Q. There's going to be somebody?

A. You will be able to touch someone. There is going to be a print out there that someone may put their foot into and something may jump off of that.

Q. Another one of your counterparts said that the way that we could get this thing imported, exported, whatever is out there, was to start -- and he wanted to start basically with kindergarten kids. What he was saying was that with kindergarten kids, what they need to know, is what a family looks like. And even what he is saying is, some of those kids in there may be from a single-parent family. And he even made a little joke about it, that it might be something like when you are teaching you go, "Jack and Jill went up the hill and when they came down, they came back to an intact family," and here is what an intact family is.

What do you think of that? Do you think education could play a role if we started real early to keep our kids from just going out and making all these kids, and not taking them and whatever?

I think if you started with the Kindergartners, it would take you a good 15 to 20 years to see results of that.

Q. Results?

A. And, yes, I would be in with the kindergartners, and I would look at that senior high schooler on down. Because somewhere along the line, besides those few families that are out there, that senior, junior, freshman, in another year or two, they are going to be out there. They are going to be the dogs out there sniffing up the skirts of all the girls, and the girls are going to be there just lying and spreading their legs or whatever, and I think you are going to have to start there.

Let that be a major focal point, and then as you go down the line to the kindergartners, work with them, and begin to plant a seed there. But, then, they are going to be able to see that those older kids, on up through the high schoolers, that now will be graduating and becoming adults, young adults, and then older adults. And, then, by the time that they are in high school, these previous -- the students who were ten years ahead of them, would have graduated, had families, and that that tree -- that seed that was planted now, would have been a tree providing shade. And that shade is being provided by those seniors and juniors who were already in high school, when Junior was in kindergarten. Now they are providing that shade and that soothing breeze is there for them as they come up and to their adulthood from kindergarten. Now, they would have come up all these years with an example there.

Q. Okay. One of the things that one of your counterparts said -- and I am just throwing things out at you that you might not think of.

A. Yes.

Q. He said that one of the things we've got to do is start controlling TV and the *MTV*. And his point was, he said, "All our kids see on *MTV* are scantily-clad women, basically there," as you said, you know, "as a vessel to support the men. The guys don't give them much respect." And he says that that breeds the idea that whatever you do to them, whether it's produce a child, or just have wanton sex, is okay. And he was saying that he didn't advocate censorship, but he says that something has got to be done about that before we can change it around. What do you think of that?

A. I think that the media has some type of -- has some impact on the children, but I think that the family has another -- the parent has another greater impact. Because looking at the *MTV*, I can see with my kids, that back in the States they may watch some of it, and then when some of the singers would come on with their vulgarity, or whatsoever, they just become disinterested. Do a station search, surfing the stations, and then coming back to see what else was on. They enjoy their music, but there's a level to what's acceptable and what's not acceptable.

And, then, even with my son; he may get a CD that has maybe a couple of songs on it with that -- some vulgarity in it, and then others would have some, not hidden messages, but "slap you in the face" messages in regards to sex or in regards to the perception of a woman. And it's just women; whether a black woman, white women, and just a woman in general being treated less than -- and hearing those I have expressed my concerns with them, and what I perceive that I believe a woman should be treated as, and

that I really didn't like the songs and just don't want to hear them in my presence.

Also, I would appreciate it if he wouldn't listen to them.

Q. So you just put down father values to your son, but you don't agree with the guy, that the government has to do something with controlling that, or the media, or whatever? Do you think it's individual family, and dad and mom have to step up and say, "You can't listen to that"? Or "I don't want you listening to that, or" --

A. Turn it off!

Q. Or "turn it off," that is what you would do?

A. Turn it off. Someone is going to pay to listen to it, they can pay to listen to it. I can pay to listen to something else. There is the, if worse comes to worse, there is the Public Broadcasting System there, and it's not the most exciting of all, but it's a very informative and overall will help the development of the child. There are some good topics on it. And you don't have to listen to them. There are millions of people buying albums. But, then, there are tens of millions of people who aren't buying the albums. So, it's a choice that someone is going to make.

Q. So you wouldn't censor it where no one can get it but you? It's an individual choice and you go to make those choices and as a parent you may have to influence those choices with your children?

A. I would put a restriction in regards to the age limit, that at some type of a -- whether it's a PG-rated or whatever, if it's involving the hidden messages of vulgarity, the sex, or whatever, that that being only kids at a certain age be allowed to have access to that. The access meaning, being to go in a public area and listen to it or view it, as you would have with the high violence or sex type movies, with the PG ratings or whatever

that kids aren't supposed to see -- whatever age limits that children aren't supposed to attend.

But, then, the parents realize when the kids are leaving the house, we are going to watch this movie. I am quite sure they can see the newspaper, read it nowadays, and they can see that PG-17, and here there are 12- and 13-year-olds saying, well, "We are going to the movie to watch this." the parents are accepting them. So, when the kids come back and they are acting -- they may act out what they see in the movie, then the parents get all upset. They should have known it from the -- they knew exactly what the content was.

Q. Should have known it was their responsibility before --

A. Again, it's -- they are sending hidden messages there of one side saying, no, you don't; but then the other side says, we are going out there to see it. "No problem."

Q. Before we did this interview, you provided me with a folder that was quite impressive. It talked about your family being one of the Great American Families. It talked about you being chosen as -- the Boy's Club with the Big Brother/Big Sister. It talked about your involvement with kids in general as a parole officer.

So it seems like even before you had your own family, because it seems like you were a young soldier in some of those, that you already had a commitment to children in trying to do the positive thing. Where do you think that came from?

A. From the man I called "daddy." From nanny, and then from mom, and a lot from my grandfather. Because at that age, like I think I mentioned, that at ten years of age and realizing, that here this man I was named after, and I called my daddy, was a white man. And everything that he did and provided for while we were down staying with them, and

then we moved to Ohio: sending me money and the cards; and coming up and visiting us; and just being so -- so warm. had a big impact.

And, then, my mom, for looking at the sacrifices that she made, of doing without, so that we could have those things that we needed -- but, then, also those things that we wanted.

And, then, finally, I guess, the impact of the priest. Up until that point there was never any one-on-one contact with the ministers of a church, of coming down and talking with them.

Q. When we were talking before -- I am going to try and summarize what you have told me, and I want you to correct at any point. Okay?

A. Okay.

Q. Basically, it sounds like you were raised, from age three, without a biological father in your life?

A. Correct.

Q. Did you ever connect with that father at all in later life?

A. Yes, we did. When we moved to Ohio, from between the age of maybe ten on to high school, maybe every other year, or every three or four years -- it may be every three years that we would see our father. He had gotten remarried and had another family, and we would go and stay with them as a family sometimes; and those were our brothers and sisters. Not half-brothers or sisters -- we don't know anything about that "half" stuff.

Q. It was brother or ----

A. It was just nothing but brother -- and then, later in life, after, in high school and after high school, of looking and seeing what they have, were being provided with, and

what we didn't. it was then that we realized the things that I was missing out on. And, then, when I got married and began to look for family, what example do I have, and not having that, I really had harbored some hard feelings in regards to him not providing for the four of us.

Q. There was some anger with dad about that?

A. Right.

Q. Did you ever confront him with that?

A. Yes. We sat and talked and he explained his side of why the divorce came through. The women in my family, all the way down to my sister right now, are overbearing and I believe that was a time when they were married, that it was probably the best thing for them to move away from my grandmother. Because as much as he loved us, she had – (pause)

Q. Had her nose in their business?

A. Nose in the business, of knowing what's best, and sometimes that wasn't the best. It was just a little bit strained.

Q. If I captured what you said, then the person who really mentored you, for lack of a better word, for the father that you became, was your grandfather?

A. I would say yes.

Q. And his was not so much through talking, but the way he lived it? You didn't sound like you had a whole bunch of talk where he says: well, this is what you are supposed to do, and here's what a father is like. It was more that he lived that way; is that what I heard?

A. Yes.

Q. Okay. That the second thing I think I captured about what you said, was that religion became important to you at fairly early age, and listening in the church, you adopted some of those values which had to do with what a family should be, and what a man should be, and that sort of thing. Is that true?

A. True. And just a caveat of that. We were never -- I guess the term of "holymen." I am definitely far from that, but the religion has played a big part. Yes.

Q. Okay. And it sounded like, out of the religious experience that, even though, of course a priest would not be married, and I don't think they can be married today; but that you were influenced by priests about doing the "right thing." It was not necessarily around children, but that you gave me some examples about this Father Friedrich, that he gave you some examples about being a man and doing the right thing and helping others.

Is that -- did I capture that right?

A. Yes, and to the extent that after high school, my senior year, I had a foot into the Seminary. I had visions of being the first black Pope. But, a priest friend told me, "Wait. Wait. Give yourself a year, and then make that decision." And, then, between there the draft came up; number four in the lottery, and that was the end of priesthood and eventually a break off from the Catholic church. But, then still, moved here and there with different religions until at the present time, the basic nondenominational type of a Christian service.

Q. The other thing that I think I captured what you said, was that poverty, or lack of money, or whatever, did not really affect your commitment to children; that the fact that you were in the projects and saw these other people just having babies willy-nilly without

taking care of them. didn't seem to have an influence on you. In fact, it influenced you the other way: is that true?

A. I would -- yes. I would agree with that statement. And, yes, it did influence me the other way.

Q. That if I am going to have kids I am going to take care of them, and this sort of thing?

A. Yes.

Q. Okay. It sounds like also that the peer group that you hung with -- because it sounds like a lot of times the peer group you were around were beating you up. But, the peer group did not have an influence of like, just go out and have kids, and that sort of stuff: that you already had some values that they couldn't shake?

A. Here's the shocking thing: Yes. One time I faltered, and one group we lived with -- I mean, the area we lived in got picked up one time for shoplifting, around maybe 11 years old, and then that's when we moved near the Catholic church: that is where the ethnic racial changes came. The kids that I played with, quite a few of them, the majority of them, a lot of times -- the civil right movement was really going very strong in the mid-sixties to the early seventies, and that was during those high school years. And I really drew a lot of strength by looking at the leaders that were out there, that were providing some type of example of us. Like Dr. King, and then began to -- then there as Father Friedrich -- but just looking the black side, like Dr. King, Dr. Abernathy, and the men who were out there doing that.

And the women also who were providing that support! They were in the background and I don't want to leave them out in regards to where I am now. But, again,

my mother had a big part in that, of where I am. Because as a result of her suffering, I made up my mind, that no, I am not going to cause another woman --

Q. To have children and then go --

A. To go through that. And the things that she did without, the relationship she went in with some questionable men there, but she did what she had to do to get us through life.

Q. The food, shelter -- through life?

A. Through life, yeah.

Q. If I also -- and like I said, I don't want to put words in your mouth. But, it sounded to me like you didn't think that the government basically had much of an intervention, as far as monitoring what goes on, on TV, and all this stuff, that really is a parental responsibility, and you would leave it there as a way to fix this thing. Is that correct?

A. The parental responsibility, yes, parents putting pressure onto the various forms of media influence; and I think through that, the power of the parents, the power of numbers. The power of numbers will get someone elected or not elected. The power of numbers will get a radio station, television station either -- either give them support or non-support, and that will either lead to their survival or just destruction. And it could be done in that manner.

Q. Another thing I thought I heard you say, as far as education was concerned, you weren't really enamoured with the idea of starting with the Kindergarten. You thought maybe you need to start with the teenage -- the high schooler and then let them then pass

it on to the kindergartner so that they had somebody to look up to as far as. "Hey, we don't just make children. It's a responsibility." and this sort of thing. Was that --

A. A major part of the energy being with the high schoolers, but it also -- energy is put in towards the junior-highers, your elementary, and then down to your kindergartners also. Of having that parental or adult influence there, but a major portion of that influence -- the major part of that energy being directed towards the high schoolers. And then, a smaller portion with the kindergartners, but as they continue to grow up there is more energy directed towards them. But, then, as they are also growing up, all that energy, either direct it towards the teenagers, that seed is already planted now, and it's growing. It's not a seed where we are doing a transplant out of a jar full of flowers. That's a transplant where you are grafting them now. They are already a plant, and you are just relocating them and providing some fertilizer, some substance --

Q. Nourishment --

A. So that they can become stronger, and they may need it. It was a shaded plant. You are moving it from the sun to the shade; or a sun plant moving from the sun to the shade; that it can become stronger. And, then, they provided that beauty and the strength for those younger ones as they are coming up. And not only are they getting it from the adults, but they are getting it from, now, younger adults, who just graduated from high school. By the time they are in high school, they would have been a --

Q. Just like the adults are?

A. Yes. Yes.

Q. One of the things I thought I heard you say too was that, if you, you know, are a dedicated father, was that you had a belief about your legacy, and what you leave behind.

Is that -- did I capture that right, that you really are concerned that, hey, what I leave here, what people think of me afterwards, what I have left is very important? Is that a value for you?

A. For me it is, and I think it's important for -- I hate to -- I need to get away from my kids and the relationship of my kids. It's our kids, not just my wife's kids. But, somewhere along the line, someone is going to look back and say: what did you do? Then, you see what you did and then somehow, someone, maybe a young child, and they may have seen you when you are out there, P-faced drunk on the street corner, or that they would have seen you coming out of their sister's bedroom, and they knew you were married to --

Q. Somebody else?

A. Yeah, someone else. And just a negative impact that would have had, I think we have that responsibility. I have that responsibility to provide some positive input into society where someone would look at it and say, "Yes, that is another way of handling it."

Q. Okay. So it is important?

A. Right.

Q. Do you think -- is there some way -- I am going from summarizing now; but is there some way we could get that to this next generation that, hey, it is important? What do you think?

A. The only way that I can think of, is that the John Carter's and the John's step out there everyday, knowing that someone's eyes are going to be on you, and doing what's right.

Q. Doing the right thing?

A. Just doing the right thing and someone will see it. And from that, they will make a choice -- that is what I want to do or that's not what I want to do, and just continue doing it. And they will see it day after day after day, and eventually, if not today, maybe five years from now, maybe ten years from now, that it will finally hit upon them -- that's what I should have done. Let me go ahead and make a course adjustment in life and go in that direction.

Q. So, if I was to summarize it, most of the things you have said is, that if we are going to get more good, successful, African-American fathers, it's for the ones who are successful to live it and to get as many people to see it as possible?

A. Yes. And to think back to Charlie Powell, who I was named after, and looking at again what he went through, and what Martin Luther King went through. If they went through it, then there is no way that I can't go through it. And I think back to just an old Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi, that have the saying of: Lord, where there is hatred, let me sow love.

It took me so long to realize that that "sow" wasn't an S-O, "so." It was an S-O-W, "sow." And the only way I can do that is just by a daily basis; just going out there and doing the right thing. And, yes, I may get slapped in the face, I may get kicked in the rear, but that does not mean that I cannot -- or I should not stop loving and sharing.

Q. Thank you very much.

A. Okay.

Q. This will be made into a transcript. It will be typed up.

Before I use it, I will let you review it to make sure that, you know, what's on the tape is what you really, really wanted. If there is anything you find objectionable or whatever, then we'll deal with that. So, thank you very much.

A. My pleasure.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]