

AFRICAN AMERICAN FATHERS' PERSPECTIVES: BARRIERS AND SOCIAL
SUPPORTS FOR INVOLVEMENT WITH NONRESIDENTIAL CHILDREN

By

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This research document is dedicated to Lieba Gouin, the ideal spouse, mother and friend.

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The purpose of this study was to learn more about African American nonresidential fathers. The study was designed to discover how these fathers conceptualized “good” fathering and their own level of involvement. The study also uncovered fathers’ perceived barriers to father involvement, social supports for father involvement, and strategies used to increase father involvement. The research was guided by the theoretical perspective of Symbolic Interactionism, which focused attention on the multiple meanings men assigned to their roles as fathers.

The study sample was comprised of African American nonresidential fathers from Florida and Georgia. To participate, fathers were required to have at least one nonresidential child 18 years of age or younger. I hypothesized that, compared to less involved fathers, more involved fathers would report fewer barriers to involvement, more social support, and more strategies to increase involvement. I also examined differences by SES and hours worked in ranking of the characteristics of the “ideal” father.

In-depth, face-to-face interviews were conducted with study participants at a location of their choosing. Both numerical and textual data were collected, using measures designed by the researcher (the “ideal” father, barriers to involvement, social supports, and strategies to increase involvement), as well as accepted measures of father involvement and social status.

The study’s hypotheses were tested using the Mann-Whitney U test. Textual data were analyzed by identifying themes from the interview transcripts and collapsing sections of the text into categories.

Findings indicated that there was a significant difference between high and low involvement fathers on the number of perceived barriers, with less involved fathers experiencing more barriers. According to findings from rankings, fathers reported poor relations with the child’s mother as the most important barrier to involvement, while the most common strategy for increasing involvement was improving relations with mothers.

Other findings shed light on how fathers define their roles in relation to their children. In defining the “ideal” father, regardless of SES level, most men placed utmost importance on spending time with children, over and above financial support. In addition, although social support was viewed as helpful in facilitating involvement, it did not emerge as strongly as expected. Fathers viewed their personal characteristics as important in determining their successes in connecting with their children. Several important themes emerged from the textual data, including the importance of the father’s father, conflicts of co-parenting, and the emotional toll of nonresidential fathering. Implications of findings are discussed for theory, programs for fathers, and future research.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

The fathering literature is large and multifaceted, and addresses a number of important questions. Answers to some of the questions have been partially developed, while other questions remain unexplored. In the past two decades, social scientists have devoted considerable effort and energy to learning more about how fathers interact with their children and how this interaction affects outcomes for fathers and children (Braver & Griffin, 2000; Doherty, Kouneski, & Erickson, 1998; Eggebeen & Knoester, 2001; Jain, Belsky, & Crnic, 1996; Lamb, 1997). Much work is yet to be done on this issue, and researchers from many disciplines continue pushing toward a better understanding of fathering, within the context of the family as well as society at large.

Since divorce has become so pervasive in our culture, issues surrounding divorced fathers have been at the forefront of discussion and scientific inquiry (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1997; Seltzer & Brandreth, 1994). Researchers want to know how divorce affects fathers, why parents get divorced, how society currently defines “good” fathering after divorce, and whether or not divorced fathers are doing their part to rear healthy children. Studies have shown that a son’s experiences with his own father are pivotal in preparing him to become a father himself (Palkovitz, 2002; Popenoe, 1996; Snarey, 1993). Therefore, these issues are important for the health and well being of our entire society, since today’s children will one day be rearing families of their own.

Father Involvement After Divorce

It is well documented that, in general, when fathers get divorced they spend much less time with their nonresidential children (Furstenberg, 1995; Pleck, 1997). Many divorced fathers are not only uninvolved with their children but they are unlikely to pay child support or to contribute financially in other, less formal ways, such as giving the child spending money or buying school supplies or clothes (Greene & Moore, 2000). In fact, one pivotal study showed that 49% of the children sampled had not seen their father at all for the last twelve months, and only about 15% of the children had contact once a week or more during the same period (Furstenberg & Nord, 1985). Other studies have demonstrated a similarly low level of nonresidential father involvement (Eggebeen, 2002). It is difficult to describe the range of involvement by nonresidential fathers with any certainty, since father involvement has been conceptualized differently from one study to the next (Bruce & Fox, 1999; Cooksey & Craig, 1998; Palkovitz, 2002). However, researchers can state with some confidence that involvement levels are indeed low (Hetherington & Cox, 2002; Lamb, 2002; Marsiglio, Amato, Day, & Lamb, 2000; Nelson, Clampet-Lundquist, & Edin, 2002).

Lack of nonresidential father involvement negatively affects child outcomes. For example, fathers' lack of attention, discipline, and care of children can threaten a child's self esteem (Deutsch, Servis, & Payne, 2001). One study showed that when nonresidential fathers withhold various types of financial support from families on welfare, children's home environments lack sufficient cognitive stimulation for a child's optimum development (Greene & Moore, 2000). Similarly, another study found that when nonresidential fathers withhold child support payments, children's home environment, health and nutrition, and educational attainment can be compromised

(Amato, 1998). In general, nonresidential father involvement can foster children's social competence, their ability to interact appropriately with family members, friends, and other children at school, and their level of academic achievement (Dudley & Stone, 2001; King, 1994). It must be noted, however, that nonresidential father involvement can improve child outcomes only if the time spent with children is of sufficient quality, and conflict with the child's mother is minimal (Hetherington & Cox, 2002; Lamb, 2002).

This low level of involvement with nonresidential children has negative impacts on fathers as well. For example, research suggests that divorced fathers living without their children have smaller family networks as well as smaller social networks, compared to fathers in intact families with either biological or step children (Eggebeen & Knoester, 2001). One longitudinal study showed that divorced nonresidential fathers were more depressed than their married counterparts (Shapiro & Lambert, 1999). Some fathers harbor guilt and anger concerning the details of their divorce proceedings and their reduced amount of influence in the lives of their children (Dudley, 1991; Eggebeen & Knoester, 2001). Finally, low levels of involvement with children may impede a father's psychosocial development (Hawkins & Dollahite, 1997). Scholars have pointed out how time spent with children aids a father's developing ability to care for the next generation (Marsiglio et al., 2000; Snarey, 1993). When fathers are prevented from participating fully in their children's lives, both generations lose out (Lamb, 1997; Snarey, 1993).

Barriers to Father Involvement

These concerns have led to the burgeoning literature on nonresidential father involvement. In the past two decades, research has exposed a number of obstacles to involvement often referred to as "barriers" (Marsiglio, 1993; Pasley & Minton, 1997). The fathering literature has enumerated a long list of potential barriers to involvement,

including the following: mother's "gatekeeping" of father-child contact, geographic distance between father and child, time since divorce, the birth of a child in the father's new family, age of the biological child, legal issues related to the divorce, father's perceptions of mother's parenting, father's emotional stability, mother's emotional stability, sex of the child, quality of the coparental relationship, father's economic well-being, father's economic security, mother's preferences and beliefs regarding fathering roles, and encouragement from others to engage in parenting behavior (Amato, 1998; De Luccie, 1995; Doherty et al., 1998; Ihinger-Tallman, Pasley, & Buehler, 1995). The research shows that for most nonresidential fathers, involvement levels are low, and this is due in part to barriers to involvement (Furstenberg & Nord, 1985; Ihinger-Tallman et al., 1995).

This emphasis on barriers to involvement is appropriate given the difficult situation most nonresidential fathers face (Doherty et al., 1998; Seltzer & Brandreth, 1994; Stewart, 1999). However, although the scholarly work has produced a long list of difficulties, researchers have given little attention to determining which barriers are most important, particularly from the fathers' point of view. Some studies have suggested that the relationship with the former spouse may be the most influential factor determining involvement level (Ahrons, 1983; Ahrons & Miller, 1993; Hetherington, Cox, & Cox, 1976; Hetherington & Cox, 2002). This makes sense given the fact that the mother is the residential parent and has significant control over the child's daily activities. Other studies suggest that the father's view of the divorce proceedings and custody arrangement determine his fathering behavior post-divorce (Dudley, 1991; Dudley & Stone, 2001). These findings have prompted some scholars to advocate joint legal custody of children

as a solution to low levels of father involvement (Ahrons, 1980; Braver, 1998; Braver & Griffin, 2000). However, which barriers are most problematic for nonresidential fathers is still largely unknown (Hamer, 2001; Marsiglio et al., 2000).

There is also a dearth of information about how fathers attempt to overcome these barriers (Hamer, 1998; Hetherington & Cox, 2002). This may be due in part to the fact that much of society holds a “deficit perspective” of nonresidential fathers (Pasley & Minton, 1997). For example, much of the past research on these fathers has been driven by efforts to collect child support payments, not to understand the areas where fathers are trying hard to “be there” for their children (Hamer, 2001). In addition, much of the research on fathering has centered on levels of involvement, not on the reasons for those levels (Cabrera & Peters, 2000).

Very few studies have considered the factors that may encourage nonresidential fathers to be involved with their children, or which of these factors are most important (Hamer, 1998). An exception is recent research that suggests fathers’ involvement with children is particularly sensitive to a lack of social support (Doherty et al., 1998; Marsiglio & Cohan, 2000). It appears that fathers, more than mothers, need to be encouraged by others to engage in good parenting. This research has utilized ecological theory to study the impact of social factors on men’s fathering behavior, but this is just a beginning (Doherty et al., 1998). It would be very helpful to have a list of encouraging factors for fathering behavior, including social factors and personal traits of fathers.

Ethnically Diverse Samples

By studying fathers of various races and cultures, scholars have gained important insights that can benefit all fathers (Allen & Doherty, 1996; Hewlett, 2000). For example, Hewlett (2000) helps us conceptualize fathering in the United States by

utilizing the concept of father “investment” in children, rather than “involvement.” The concept of investment is broader, taking into account anything a father does to benefit a child. In some cultures a father may have very little direct contact with his children, but may provide important linkages to the extended family or community. This network of support is vital for the child’s well-being and points to the need for a broader conceptualization of fathering in the United States as well (Hewlett, 2000).

In the United States, much of the fathering research not concerned with white, middle class samples has centered on low-income African American men (Hamer, 2001; Jarrett, Roy, & Burton, 2002). As a group, these fathers are often faced with many challenges, both contemporary and historical. They face racism, a hostile media, a history of impoverishment, negative stereotypes, and a host of economic problems (Allen & Doherty, 1996; Hamer, 2001; Jarrett et al., 2002). In a society where fathering is still largely defined in economic terms, this last challenge may be the most difficult for these men to overcome (Graham & Beller, 2002; Hamer, 2001).

Many of these fathers were never married to the mother of their child and do not live with their children (Nelson et al., 2002). This “never-married” and often nonresidential status means that they usually have little authority over what happens to their children, especially as the children get older. Never-married fathers tend to be poorer, less educated, and less ready for the work force than fathers who marry (Hamer, 2001). Many of these men feel as though their voice is not valued and the child’s mother keeps them from being involved with their children (Hamer, 2001).

In addition, low-income African American men are more likely to father children at a younger age than their white counterparts. Young fathering worsens a bleak economic

situation, and makes it extremely difficult for these fathers to maintain a strong bond with their new family (Allen & Doherty, 1996). Early fathering can also hinder a young man's own development. While still trying to grow up himself, he must try to meet the needs of an infant and build a relationship with the child's mother (Allen & Doherty, 1996).

In spite of these challenges, many low-income African American men aspire to be great fathers. They overcome huge economic obstacles to provide for their children as best they can (Hamer, 1998). As new fathers, they intend to stay involved with children, even though that involvement may wane over time (Nelson et al., 2002). In the face of complete poverty, many of these men provide for their children even when that provision is limited to giving of their time and energy (Hamer, 1997). Family scholars need to know more about these men, who appear to care so much for their children, even in the face of economic uncertainty and social disapproval (Nelson et al., 2002).

Research Questions

Research Question 1: How do fathers conceptualize their ideal of good fathering?

Research Question 2: How do fathers evaluate their degree and type of involvement with their children?

Research Question 3: What perceived barriers affect father involvement and which barriers are seen as most difficult to overcome?

Research Question 4: What social supports encourage involvement and which do fathers consider most helpful?

Research Question 5: What strategies have fathers used to increase involvement with their children?

Importance of the Research Questions

This research will help to explain the previously observed phenomenon of low nonresidential father involvement. It will document African American fathers'

experiences regarding the difficulties of parenting a child that lives elsewhere, as well as the benefits of encouraging factors that facilitate involvement with children (Cabrera & Peters, 2000; Dudley, 1991). The results of this research may benefit African American fathers. It is well documented that society holds a negative view of many African American fathers and their role in the family (Allen & Doherty, 1996; Hamer, 1998). This study will help explain that role. It is also important to remember that understanding the behavior of nonresidential fathers may benefit their children and former spouses as well (Doherty et al., 1998; Shapiro & Lambert, 1999; Silverstein, 1996). Research that leads to improved social policy can positively impact both father and child outcomes, and relieve the pressures of parenting for the child's mother (Hamer, 2001; Popenoe, 1996).

No matter what the causes of low involvement are, it is important to hear from fathers themselves if involvement levels are to increase (Braver & Griffin, 2000; Furstenberg, 1995). Speaking directly with nonresidential fathers will uncover some specific strategies they have used to increase involvement levels. These strategies are important knowledge for fathers who find themselves in this situation, as well as for practitioners who work with nonresidential fathers. Examples of strategies to increase involvement may include attempting to improve relations with the child's mother, and using computer and Internet technology to keep in touch with a child who is geographically distant.

Hypotheses/Propositions

Following are the 6 hypotheses that guide this research.

1. In defining the ideal father, participants will rank spending time with children as more important than providing economic support.
2. In defining the ideal father, participants with higher SES will rank the ideal of providing economic support higher than those with lower SES.

3. In defining the ideal father, participants with more hours worked per week will rank the ideal of providing economic support higher than those with fewer hours worked per week.
4. Fathers who are less involved will report more barriers to involvement than those who are more involved.
5. Fathers who are less involved will report fewer social supports for involvement than those who are more involved.
6. Fathers who are less involved will report fewer strategies used to increase involvement than those who are more involved.

Following are the 3 propositions that guide this research.

1. Fathers will report the most difficult barriers to be a poor relationship with the child's mother and their relatively low income.
2. Fathers will report the most helpful social support to be their kin network.
3. Fathers will report the most commonly used involvement strategy to be attempts at improving relations with the child's mother.

Definitions

A nonresidential father is defined as a biological father who does not live with his child(ren) and who spends less than 50% of his time with his child(ren). Father involvement is defined as active participation in supporting the child emotionally, socially, cognitively, physically and financially from birth onwards. Barriers are events or situations that impede a father's involvement with his children. Social supports for involvement are events or situations that encourage fathers to maximize involvement with children.

Limitations

This research effort has several limitations. First, the findings of this study cannot be generalized to all African American nonresidential fathers since the sample is not

representative. Also, the focus here is on fathers; information from mothers and children will not be collected. The literature shows that fathers typically report higher father involvement levels than mothers report (Hawkins, Bradford, Palkovitz, Christiansen, Day, & Call, 2002; Seltzer, 1991). In addition, fathers may not be willing to discuss some barriers to involvement if it will make them appear irresponsible or uncommitted to their children (Bernard, 2002).

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Economic and Social Context

To understand fathering in the 21st century, it is necessary to consider the context in which fathers live (Lamb, 2000). This context includes changing economic indicators for men and women, changes in family structure and processes that impact fathering, and changes in what society expects of fathers. Fathering behavior is linked to a man's personal traits, but is also partially determined by family and social forces impacting his thoughts and decisions about the fathering role (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). Every parent depends on, and is affected by, his or her social context. For a variety of reasons, this appears to be particularly true of fathers (Doherty et al., 1998).

Economics for Men and Women

The economic context for fathering is very important. Today, as in the past, society views breadwinning as one of the main tasks of fatherhood (Christiansen & Palkovitz, 2001). However, in recent years the U.S. economy has made it more difficult for fathers to fulfill that role. In the 1990's men's workforce participation declined slightly (White & Rogers, 2000). In fact, men's workforce participation has decreased from 80% in 1960 to 71% in 2000 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2003). In addition, while skilled jobs provided good pay and minimum wage service sector jobs were being created, there were fewer good jobs in between. Manufacturing jobs, which historically enabled men to provide for a family, continued to decrease in number (White & Rogers, 2000). Recently, the number of manufacturing jobs has decreased sharply from around

17,000,000 in 2001 to around 15,000,000 in 2003 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2004).

Conversely, economic prospects have continued to improve for women (Amato, Johnson, Booth, & Rogers, 2003; White & Rogers, 2000). More and more women are moving into the labor force, and their wages relative to men continue to increase (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2003). In fact, many families stayed out of poverty in the 1990's because of a wife's income (White & Rogers, 2000). Even for many higher income families, wives' income has become necessary to maintain their current standard of living or to become upwardly mobile. Married couple families used to make more money than single-headed families because a male breadwinner was present. Now, it is much more likely that they make more money due to the presence of a working wife (White & Rogers, 2000).

Although many dual-earner families have greatly benefited from the wife's income, this arrangement has challenged the breadwinning role of the husband (Jarrett et al., 2002; White & Rogers, 2000). As wives spend more time at work, and their income continues to increase, they often expect husbands to increase their level of housework and childcare. Men, however, often resist this shift in gender roles. They may consider domestic duties "women's work," or they might resent losing some of their leisure time. Either way, moving away from breadwinning and toward housework and childcare confuses the already shifting fatherhood role (Garbarino, 2000). Although this shift in gender roles tends to increase marital satisfaction for women, it tends to decrease marital satisfaction for men (Amato et al., 2003).

Fathers and Demographic Change

The changing demography of the family unit is another factor impacting fathering in the United States (Dudley & Stone, 2001; Gupta, Smock, & Manning, 2004; Teachman, Tedrow, & Crowder, 2000). The divorce rate remains close to 50% for first time marriages, with mothers still gaining custody of children the vast majority of the time. In recent decades there has been a sharp rise in cohabitation rates, along with a steady decline in early marriages. In 1970, the median age at first marriage was 23 for men and 21 for women. In 2000, the median age was 27 for men and 25 for women (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2001). Both of these trends tend to increase the incidence of non-marital births. At this point in history, half of all Caucasian children, and around two-thirds of all African-American children will spend part of their childhood in a single parent home (Dudley & Stone, 2001). In the U.S., this amounts to roughly 12 million nonresidential fathers and 20 million children living in some other household (Graham & Beller, 2002).

Taken together, these trends increase the number of fathers and children who have a tenuous connection. Some researchers, with the aforementioned statistics in mind, have argued that the family is in decline, and that the fathering role is being diminished (Blankenhorn, 1996; Popenoe, 1996). Others take the view that recent demographic shifts may be harmless, or even better for the family. The real question concerns the role of the father in the modern American family. Confusion over what that role should be contributes to our collective anxiety about so many “fatherless” children, and how this situation may affect children and families (Hewlett, 2000; Townsend, 2002).

In spite of these enormous social and economic changes, it is reasonable to expect fathers to adjust to this new reality. Many fathers could embrace a more nurturing role.

If they are a nonresidential parent, they could take responsibility for children who live elsewhere. If these changes are to take place, several things need to happen. First, researchers must stay abreast of the needs of fathers so they can be properly supported in their efforts to be responsible for children. Second, U.S. society needs to work on a more precise “script” for the nonresidential fathering role so that it is less ambiguous and therefore easier to enact (Garbarino, 2000). Finally, researchers, practitioners, and anyone else involved with families, should build a more welcoming social climate for fathers where they are honored as important in the lives of children and encouraged to take an active role in their child’s development.

The History of the Fathering Role

When thinking about fathers and what should be expected of them in today’s society, it is helpful to remember that the fathering role has changed through time (Lamb, 2000; LaRossa & Reitzes, 1995). It is not static, but responds to cultural, economic, political, and social forces. Unlike the mothering role, which seems to be almost universally agreed upon, and is more clearly defined given the biological connection between mother and child, the fathering role is more of a social invention (Garbarino, 2000; Hewlett & West, 1998; Silverstein, 1996; Townsend, 2002). As such, fathers are expected to vary their behavior depending on the needs of the family at that point in time (LaRossa, Gordon, Wilson, Bairan, & Jaret, 1991). The last 200 years of American history illustrate that fact, and serve as a backdrop to our thinking on this issue.

The Moral Teacher

During the earliest years of our country’s history, from Puritan times through the Colonial era, fathers were expected to be moral teachers and spiritual guides for their children (Lamb, 2000). This was an important role, given that the culture of the time was

very concerned with Biblical teachings, and young men and women were directed to adhere to Christian principles. A good father would ensure both that his children could read the scriptures, and that he lived his life as a good example for them to follow. Unfortunately, not all fathers were allowed to influence their children so deeply. For example, many African American fathers were slaves during this period of history and were often completely separated from their children (Dudley & Stone, 2001).

The Breadwinner

By the middle of the 19th century more and more fathers were leaving the family farm and home to work in industry, and the dominant image of the good father was that of a breadwinner (Lamb, 2000). This separation of the public and private spheres assigned men the responsibility for earning the household's income, while their wives took on more duties related to homemaking and child rearing. The breadwinner ideal for fathers was reinforced by this new lifestyle that limited a father's contact with his children, and seemed to be a good fit for mothers, who were deemed better able to meet the direct needs of children (LaRossa, et al., 1991). The fathering role was dominated by the expectation of breadwinning until the Great Depression. However, this was not the case with working-class fathers, who were unable to provide enough income without help from their wives and extended family (Mintz, 1998). This was particularly true of African American fathers who, even after the Civil War, had to face a racist society that locked them into the difficult economic realities of sharecropping and tenant farming (Furstenberg, 1995; Hamer, 2001; Pleck & Pleck, 1997).

The Sex-Role Model

Beginning in the 1930s, and for several decades thereafter, men were expected to be appropriate sex-role models for their children (Lamb, 2000). Historians have linked

this new role to the worldwide upheaval and dislocation caused by events such as the Great Depression and World War II. Presumably, children needed an increased amount of direction as they tried to make sense of their scattered and confusing surroundings. Although fathers were seen as more emotionally close to their children after World War II, mothers still performed most of the daily tasks associated with caring for children (Dudley & Stone, 2001). Fathers were called upon to meet this perceived need in society, but continued breadwinning and other activities as well. In each era of the history of the fathering role, fathers have participated in similar activities, but focused on a particular need associated with the historical period (Dudley & Stone, 2001; Lamb, 2000).

The Nurturant Father

By the 1970s, the ideal of the “nurturant” father emerged, although not necessarily for the first time in history (LaRossa et al., 1991). This new focus for fathering was in response to several factors requiring men to be more personally involved in daily caregiving to children (Dudley & Stone, 2001). Those factors included a declining birth rate, declining wages for many men, and increasing workforce participation of women (Doherty, et al., 1998; LaRossa et al., 1991; Teachman et al., 2000). The expectation that men will participate in childrearing continues today. Men are encouraged to help the child’s mother care for the child’s direct needs, as well as be involved in maintaining the house and scheduling family appointments and events. This cultural shift has led to the literature on father involvement, and to concern over child outcomes, especially with nonresidential fathers and their children. In reality, relatively few fathers have significantly increased their level of direct care giving (Mintz, 1998).

Authors continue to call for more historical studies of fathering (Abramovitch, 1997; LaRossa et al., 1991; Mintz, 1998). Much more data are needed to draw any

reliable conclusions, particularly when it comes to fathers of different ethnic and religious backgrounds. The history of the fathering role is very complex, as is the contemporary discussion about what fathers should be doing for their children. Since the role of fathers has varied so much in the past, perhaps we should not expect today's fathers to fill a single role. More historical data will shed much light on this very important national discussion (Mintz, 1998).

Recent Trends in Fathering Research

The fathering literature is very complex, with a variety of important issues and perspectives. Researchers are faced with a number of challenges due to the charged political nature of the topic, and the large number of stakeholders interested in fathers and fathering behavior (Cabrera & Peters, 2000). Fathering is a concern for fathers' rights groups, feminists, child advocacy groups, politicians, and nearly everyone else concerned about families and children, since the behavior of fathers has been linked to child outcomes. Fortunately, many authors from a number of different disciplines are conducting research on a variety of fathering topics (Catlett & McKenry, 2004; Marsiglio et al., 2000).

Multiple Perspectives

Now that the fathering literature is maturing, researchers are approaching the field from a number of different perspectives, including historical, conceptual, and theoretical (Doherty et al., 1998; Marsiglio & Cohan, 2000). As discussed previously, some authors are working to put the father's role in historical context. This information is important for the national discussion about what a father's roles should be. Other researchers are working to revise and expand certain fathering concepts, most notably the concept of father involvement (Marsiglio, Day, & Lamb, 2000; Palkovitz, 1997). A number of

theoretical frameworks have been applied to fathering including symbolic interactionism, ecological theory, phenomenological perspectives, and others. Since much of the previous work on fathers was empirically driven, researchers are now building theoretical frameworks for fathering experiences and behavior (Doherty et al., 1998; Hawkins & Dollahite, 1997; Marsiglio et al., 2000).

Methodological Issues

Scholars in the fathering field also face a number of methodological issues (Marsiglio, et al., 2000). For example, a major thrust is to develop an adequate father involvement instrument that takes into account everything a father does with his children, not just direct contact and care. An additional challenge is that many of the questions researchers would like to ask fathers are rather sensitive, raising concerns about the validity of responses. Questionable data also arise when fathers report differently than mothers or children on variables such as father involvement, amount of financial support, or the quality of the father-child relationship (Eggebeen, 2002). Recent work on fathering has addressed some of these challenges. For example, several authors have released a new measure of father involvement that takes into account a father's direct contact with children, as well as other dimensions of involvement such as setting rules and limits for children's behavior and knowing where the children are and what activities they do with their friends (Hawkins et al., 2002).

Fathering and Child Outcomes

Another important area of work on fathering is the impact of father involvement on child outcomes (Marsiglio et al., 2000). This topic is of great importance due to the large number of children who will spend at least part of their childhood living apart from their father (Cabrera & Peters, 2000). This topic also draws attention because of the need for

fathers in intact families to spend more time in direct contact with children, due to mothers' increased workforce participation (Doherty et al., 1998). This part of the fathering literature is politically charged, has important implications for social policy, and is a result of several of the most fundamental social changes of the last few decades. For these reasons, this topic will continue to be studied and make up a large portion of the fathering literature (Cabrera & Peters, 2000).

Research on Father Involvement

When it comes to research on father involvement, there is great variation from one study to the next in design, method, and measures (Pleck, 1997). Some of this research is qualitative, some is quantitative, and some studies include both methods. A number of studies are strictly empirical, while others have a strong theoretical foundation. Some research efforts are based on mothers' reports while others are based on fathers' reports. Some of the data sets are based on local samples and are disproportionately white and middle-class, while others include national samples, or make an attempt to gather data from a diverse population. Most notably, there is great variation from one study to the next in how father involvement is conceptualized and measured. The following discussion will illustrate this variation, with a focus on studies that use Symbolic Interactionism or Identity Theory as a guiding framework.

Measures of Father Involvement

Much of the literature focuses on father involvement in intact families. For example, Harris and Morgan (1991) studied differential father involvement with sons and daughters. The data on father involvement came from a short measure (6 items) that included both behavioral and affective components. The aim of this study was to measure the components of the "new nurturant role" for fathers. McBride and Rane

(1997) interviewed mothers and fathers using Lamb and colleagues' categories of parental involvement (interaction, accessibility, and responsibility). In a more recent study, Rane and McBride (2000) again used this three-category format for involvement, but cautioned that broader conceptualizations were on the horizon, due to a recent recognition that fathers provide more for their children than merely income and direct care. Pasley and colleagues (2002) measured father involvement with an 11-item scale consisting of different child-related tasks and responsibilities. This study focused on fathers' level of involvement, or performance in the fathering role, as related to the concepts of "commitment" and "psychological centrality."

A pivotal study by Furstenberg and Nord (1985) conceptualized nonresidential parental involvement as amount of contact in general, frequency of telephone calls and letters, and quality of the parent-child relationship. The involvement measure allowed the authors to gain information about topics such as "activities with parents in the last month" and "number of times child sleeps over at nonresidential parent's house" (p.895). Seltzer, Schaeffer, and Charng (1989) explored the relationship between divorced fathers' visits with their children and payment of child support. Father involvement was defined as frequency of visitation and amount of child support paid. Using a national data set, Seltzer and Brandreth (1994) measured nonresidential father involvement, conceptualized as social contact and economic involvement, including child support payments and other financial transfers to the mothers of their children. Using a current national data set, Hofferth, Pleck, Stueve, Bianchi, & Sayer (2002) presented information on nonresidential father involvement, such as how money is spent on the child, how much time the father spends with the child, and the quality of the father-child relationship.

An interesting study conducted by Minton and Pasley (1996) compared father involvement for divorced, nonresidential and nondivorced fathers. The father involvement scale was an adaptation of Ahrons' (1983) measure, and included questions about how often fathers participated in a number of different activities with children, such as helping with schoolwork and visiting nonresidential children. A recent study conducted by Fox and Bruce (2001) interviewed any man who identified himself as a father. Based on extensive fieldwork, the father involvement measure consisted of 4 categories: responsivity, harshness, behavioral engagement, and affective involvement.

Limitations of Measures of Father Involvement

The cross sectional design of the research also prevents researchers from examining generational differences that would determine whether a certain population of fathers is becoming more or less involved through time (Marsiglio et al., 2000; Marsiglio & Cohan, 2000; Palkovitz, 1997). An additional problem is the lack of a measure that could be applied appropriately to fathers in different situations, whether cohabiting, divorced and nonresident, or married and resident with his children (Hawkins et al., 2002). Until researchers can develop a comprehensive measure of father involvement that is inclusive of all fathers, many important questions will remain unanswered (Hewlett, 2000; Townsend, 2002).

Reconceptualizing Father Involvement

Defining Fatherhood

One reason father involvement is measured so differently from one study to the next has to do with U.S. society's definition of good fathering. Because our culture has not yet agreed on what fathers should be doing for or with their children, it is very difficult to create a measure of involvement that has any real meaning. Many authors

have pointed out the tension between what fathers currently do for children, and what society expects them to do (Christiansen & Palkovitz, 2001; Daly, 1995; Draper, 1998; Kissman, 1997; Peterson & Steinmetz, 2000). Societal expectations of fathers now include both breadwinning and direct care of children, along with related household duties (Silverstein, 1996; Teachman et al., 2000). A relatively small number of men are meeting these expectations (Marsiglio et al., 2000; Peterson & Steinmetz, 2000). If social norms indicate that fathers should spend much of their time in direct care giving, then any valid measure of involvement would put these activities at the center. However, if social norms direct fathers to also support their children in more indirect ways, such as providing money or access to extended family networks, then the involvement measure would have to be much more comprehensive (Christiansen & Palkovitz, 2001; Hawkins et al., 2002; Palkovitz, 2002).

There are many stakeholders interested in redefining fatherhood, including social scientists, politicians, parents' rights groups, and the judicial system (Doherty, 1997; Marsiglio et al., 2000). Many writers agree that, along with the recent changes in gender roles for women, society would benefit from updated fathering roles (Palkovitz, 2002; Pasley & Minton, 1997; Silverstein, 1996). For example, Silverstein (1996) points out that if fathering could be altered to include more nurturing and care taking, this change would benefit women by reducing their workload. This change could also benefit men, by aiding their personal development, and by providing a more realistic and less oppressive set of gender roles for men.

While studying fathers and families in different cultural contexts, social scientists accentuate the point that fathering is a set of socially constructed roles, rather than a static

historical or moral imperative (Allen & Connor, 1997; Hewlett, 2000; Townsend, 2002). They lend an important perspective to the national debate about fathering, since they recognize that fathers may play a number of different roles and be important in children's development. For example, Townsend (2002) suggests that instead of expecting fathers to enact a strict set of gender roles, society should consider not only how fathers interact directly with children, but also what else they can provide. For example, in many countries around the world, fathers provide for children by ensuring their participation in extended family networks. He also suggests that when searching for a definition of fatherhood, we should take into account the larger social context for child development. Fathers are not the only men involved in caring for children, and what they do provide is partially determined by familial, social, cultural, and economic circumstances.

New Father Involvement Measures

A broader definition of fatherhood will naturally lead to a more comprehensive measure of father involvement (Marsiglio et al., 2000). Recent efforts to expand the father involvement measure have been successful. For example, Palkovitz (1997) has enumerated 15 different categories of father involvement. These include communication, teaching, monitoring, thought processes, errands, caregiving, child-related maintenance, shared interests, availability, planning, shared activities, providing, affection, protection, and supporting emotionally. Also, a number of researchers have developed the Inventory of Father Involvement, which takes into account most of these categories (Hawkins et al., 2002) and, like the Palkovitz measure, offers a broader conceptualization of father involvement.

Child Outcomes

Researchers place great importance on formulating an appropriate measure of father involvement because father involvement is directly related to a host of child outcomes. In fact, concern about child development is at the heart of much of the research on father involvement and fathering in general. Research conducted over the past 40 years consistently shows that father involvement in intact families directly affects child outcomes (Amato, 1998; Palkovitz, 2002). However, only limited evidence suggests that nonresidential fathers can contribute to healthy child development (Lamb, 2002; Stewart, 2003). This is partly due to the fact that needed data are simply not available at this time. In addition, existing studies show mixed results, perhaps because of the many barriers a nonresidential father must overcome in order to engage in meaningful parenting.

Fathers in Two-Parent Families

Fathers in two-parent families have much to offer their children. Research demonstrates that paternal involvement can reduce behavior problems (Amato & Rivera, 1999), increase social competence (Almeida, Wethington, & McDonald, 2001), improve self-esteem (Deutsch et al., 2001), and even protect against poor mental health later in life (Flouri & Buchanan, 2003). Father involvement in two-parent families can also positively impact cognitive development (Radin, 1986), school performance (Palkovitz, 2002), and overall well being (Amato, 1998).

Nonresidential Fathers

The connection between nonresidential father involvement and positive child outcomes is more tenuous. Only limited research has been conducted in this arena. In addition, external factors can make it very difficult for nonresidential fathers to actively

parent their children. Even so, research has demonstrated that nonresidential father involvement is associated with children's increased social competence and academic achievement (Caldwell, Wright, Zimmerman, Walsemann, Williams, & Isichei, 2004; Dudley & Stone, 2001; King, 1994). In addition, higher levels of nonresidential father involvement are associated with lower levels of depression in children (Stewart, 2003). One study showed that nonresidential father involvement can contribute to a home environment that encourages important cognitive stimulation (Greene & Moore, 2000). Another study found that nonresidential father involvement can improve a child's overall health, nutrition, and educational attainment (Amato, 1998).

There are two main factors that help determine a nonresidential father's success in supporting the positive development of a child. First, the father must have a high quality relationship with the child where he engages in active, authoritative parenting (Amato, 1998; Stewart, 1999; Stewart, 2003). This is a major challenge for most nonresidential fathers, given the lack of regular time with the child. Second, the father must engage in this quality parenting in a context of low conflict with the child's mother (Hetherington, 2002; King & Heard, 1999; Lamb, 2002). This is another major challenge for fathers due to the combative nature of many post-divorce relationships (Dudley, 1991; Dudley & Stone, 2001).

Much more research is needed in the area of nonresidential father involvement and child outcomes (Lamb, 2002). The only conclusive finding so far is that these fathers can benefit their children by paying child support (Stewart, 2003). Ideally, an appropriate measure of father involvement would be developed and specific components of involvement would be linked to specific outcomes for children (Graham & Beller, 2002;

Green & Moore, 2000). This type of progress would pave the way for helpful suggestions for fathers who are attempting to support the positive development of their nonresidential children.

Father Outcomes

Very little research has been conducted that addresses how father involvement with children impacts father outcomes (Eggebeen & Knoester, 2001; Nock, 1998). This gap in the literature is unfortunate not only because it ignores the needs of fathers, but also because well adjusted and highly functioning fathers are more likely to relate positively to their children. They can be expected to relate more positively to the child's mother as well, an important factor in determining the father's success in nonresidential parenting (Arendell, 1995; Braver & Griffin, 2000; Ihinger-Tallman et al., 1995).

Research suggests that involvement with children benefits nonresidential fathers. Divorced, nonresidential fathers have smaller family networks and social networks, compared to fathers in intact families (Eggebeen & Knoester, 2001), may be more depressed than married fathers (Shapiro & Lambert, 1999), and may be dealing with considerable guilt and anger concerning the details of their divorce proceedings (Dudley, 1991; Eggebeen & Knoester, 2001). Also, low levels of involvement with children may impede a father's psychosocial development (Hawkins & Dollahite, 1997). Scholars have pointed out that the amount of time spent with children aids a father's developing ability to care for the next generation (Marsiglio et al., 2000; Snarey, 1993).

More research on father outcomes will be conducted, as scholars increasingly recognize the challenging situation many nonresidential fathers face. The literature on nonresidential fathering has moved from a focus on father "absence" and "dead-beat dads," to a realization that many factors contribute to what appears to be low levels of

nonresidential father involvement (Bruce & Fox, 1999; Cooksey & Craig, 1998; Stewart, 1999). Future research should determine exactly what those factors are, and develop models that explain and predict father involvement (Ihinger-Tallman et al., 1995).

Barriers to Father Involvement

Stakeholders interested in fathering want to know why nonresidential fathers are not more involved with their children. In spite of economic or cultural trends, society expects that fathers will care for their children and provide for them adequately. This is especially true at a time in history when mothers have increased their workforce participation, and fathers are being called upon to increase time spent in child rearing and household tasks (Jarrett et al., 2002). Many are particularly critical of low-income African American fathers, who are viewed as unwilling to parent at all, especially when it comes to providing financial support (Hamer, 2001).

In spite of harsh criticism of nonresidential fathers, there is an increasing appreciation of the difficulties faced by any parent attempting to care for children who live elsewhere. Many barriers to involvement have been identified including: mother's "gatekeeping" of father-child contact, geographic distance between father and child, time since divorce, the birth of a child in the father's new family, age of the biological child, legal issues related to the divorce, father's perceptions of mother's parenting, father's emotional stability, mother's emotional stability, sex of the child, quality of the coparental relationship, father's economic well-being, father's economic insecurity, mother's preferences and beliefs regarding fathering roles, and lack of encouragement from others to engage in parenting behavior (Allen & Hawkins, 1999; Amato, 1998; Doherty et al., 1998; Ihinger-Tallman et al., 1995; Manning & Smock, 1999; Stone & McKenry, 1998).

One limitation of research on barriers is that much of what is known comes from studies on mostly White, middle class fathers post-divorce (Marsiglio et al., 2000). The list of barriers may or may not be accurate for fathers from different racial, cultural, or marital backgrounds. For example, fathers outside of the United States may be expected to provide very differently for their children and may face very different barriers to involvement (Hewlett, 2000; Townsend, 2002). African American fathers, many of whom were never married to the mother of their child, may also face different types of challenges to father involvement (Hamer, 2001; Mincy, 2002).

We also know little about which barriers are most difficult for fathers to overcome. It is known that a poor relationship with the child's mother reduces father involvement (Ahrons & Miller, 1993; McBride & Rane, 1998). In addition, some fathers are responsible for children in several different households, reducing the amount of effort they can expend on any one child (Manning, Stewart, & Smock, 2003). Divorce litigation can also have a tremendous effect on the amount and quality of the time a father spends with his children (Braver & Griffin, 2000; Dudley, 1991). However, we need to ask fathers themselves which barriers have the greatest effect on their level of father involvement.

Few studies have considered the factors that may encourage nonresidential fathers to be involved with their children, or how fathers overcome difficult barriers (Hamer, 1998; Hetherington, 2002). An exception is recent research that suggests fathers' involvement with children is particularly sensitive to a lack of social support (Doherty et.al., 1998; Marsiglio & Cohan, 2000). Many people have a "deficit perspective" of nonresidential fathers, leading them to ignore the possibility that fathers even try to

overcome barriers to involvement (Pasley & Minton, 1997). In contrast, a strengths approach, characteristic of other areas of inquiry about family life, would explore how fathers contribute to their children's development despite many obstacles.

Theory

An important challenge for authors studying nonresidential fathers is to produce more research that is theoretically grounded, and adds to the theory of fathering behavior (Cabrera & Peters, 2000; Ihinger-Tallman et al., 1995; Marsiglio et al., 2000). In the past, much of the literature was strictly empirical, due to the fact that early research was driven by a policy interest in fathers' fulfillment of child support obligations. Recent studies, however, have employed a number of different theoretical frameworks to help explain nonresidential fathering. These theories include symbolic interactionism, ecological theory, feminist perspectives, and others (Catlett & McKenry, 2004; Hamer, 2001; Marsiglio & Cohan, 2000; Pasley et al., 2002).

Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic Interactionism is perhaps the most popular theory used in the field of nonresidential fathering (Allen & Doherty, 1996; Fox & Bruce, 2001; McBride & Rane, 1997). The beginnings of this important theory go back to the turn of the 20th century (Klein & White, 1996). Although many writers have contributed to the framework over the years, and differing schools of thought and multiple emphases can be found within the theory, several major themes form the basis of its orientation (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993).

The first theme is the importance of an individual's self-concept. This is because, according to the theory, people's behavior is based on how they see themselves in relation to others. The second theme is the relationship between individual freedom and

social constraint or support. Each person is a social actor, living in a social context and impacted by the actions of others. The third theme is the importance of meanings for understanding human behavior. In sum, people behave according to the meanings things have for them, and those meanings are constructed in a social context (Klein & White, 1996).

LaRossa and Reitzes (1993) present a number of assumptions that follow from these themes that help to define Symbolic Interactionism.

1. Human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them.
2. Meanings arise in the process of interaction between people.
3. Meanings are handled in and modified through an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with things he or she encounters.
4. Individuals are not born with a sense of self but develop self concepts through social interaction.
5. Self concepts, once developed, provide an important motive for behavior.
6. Individuals and small groups are influenced by larger cultural and societal processes.
7. It is through social interaction in everyday situations that individuals work out the details of social structure (pp. 143-144).

Other Theories

Ecological theory has also been used as a framework for studying fathering (Doherty et al., 1998). Ecological theory is useful because it incorporates a developmental approach to fathering while also taking into account larger cultural and social processes. This is important for the study of fathers and children facing racial prejudice and living in extreme poverty (Hamer, 2001; Hewlett, 2000).

Recently, authors have conducted studies on fathers from a feminist perspective (Catlett & McKenry, 2004; Silverstein, 1996). Feminist perspectives emphasize the social construction of gender, the lived experience of women, and the social and historical context of family development (Osmond & Thorne, 1993). These foci facilitate the study of men's and women's gender roles in parenting, the effect of historical forces on expectations for parenting, and social changes around parenting issues such as the increased need for fathers to provide daily care for children since more mothers have entered the workforce.

Symbolic Interactionism and Nonresidential Fathering

Symbolic Interactionism is the most appropriate theoretical framework for this research because it facilitates the study of individual perceptions, thoughts, and behaviors. This allows a better understanding of fathers' perspectives as nonresidential parents, information that is generally missing from the fatherhood literature. In addition, Symbolic Interactionism puts fathers' perceptions of the social context at the forefront, facilitating a focus on social supports, which have previously been so important to African American families, and perceived barriers that affect ongoing contact with children. Finally, Symbolic Interactionism is broad enough to encompass the experiences of diverse fathers with various social, cultural, and marital backgrounds. This is important to the fathering field so that models of fathering behavior can be created and used to develop and inform government policy.

African American Fathers

The vast majority of research on nonresidential fathers has centered on divorced, white fathers who have limited involvement with their children (Hamer, 1998; Hewlett, 2000; Marsiglio et al., 2000). Expanding research efforts to include minority fathers,

particularly those who have never married, remains an important goal for social scientists (King, Harris, & Heard, 2004; Mincy, 2002). Although many gains have been made in understanding fathering behavior, no one knows for sure how well this knowledge applies to minority fathers. It is important to build theories about the behavior of these men, the barriers that prevent them from being more successful, and the social supports that encourage them to “be there” for their children (Hamer, 2001; Jarrett et al., 2002).

African American nonresidential fathers are worthy of attention, both because they make up a large proportion of America’s minority population, and because as a group they struggle economically (Edin, 2001; Jarret et al., 2002). Economic success is important in our culture since fathers are expected to provide a good living for their family (Graham & Beller, 2002). Compared to white fathers, African American fathers are much more likely to be underemployed, unemployed, and poor (Hamer, 1997; Mincy, 2002). They are also more likely to be incarcerated. Of course, African American men have a long history of poverty and racism in this country, a fact many point to as one cause of present day fathering behavior (Allen & Doherty, 1996; Graham & Beller, 2002; Hamer, 2001).

Another challenge for African American nonresidential fathers is the stigma they have acquired, in part through media coverage of the poorest, least successful fathers (Hamer, 1997; Newman, 2001). Researchers may also have inadvertently contributed to society’s view that most of these fathers are violent, abusive, and addicted to drugs (Allen & Connor, 1997; McLanahan, Garfinkel, Reichman, & Teitler, 2001). These types of fathers have frequently been the subjects in qualitative research with African American families (Hamer, 2001). Unfortunately, one of the groups most in need of social support

for fathering has often been assumed to be uncaring, unresponsive, and even harmful to their own families.

Not only are they held in contempt by mainstream culture, but many low-income African American fathers also have a poor reputation with the mothers of their children (Edin, 2001; McLanahan et al., 2001). African American women may be ready to marry if they can find the “right” man. However, when fathers’ income is unstable and limited, it is very difficult for them to provide for a family economically, and women do not perceive them to be a desirable long-term mate. In fact, women see marrying such a man as a potential burden, and often limit his involvement with the children based on the amount of money he brings into the home (Edin, 2001; Hamer, 2001).

It is true that some fathers are unable to spend time with children due to issues of substance abuse or domestic violence. Others, although caring and responsive to children, are not in a good position to improve child well being because of overwhelming barriers such as great geographic distance between father and child or incarceration (Lamb, 2002; Palkovitz, 2002). However, this is not the case with all nonresidential African American fathers. Diverse cultural values, alternative family structures due to difficulty in making ends meet, and larger social trends shape the fathering behavior of these men. Many African American fathers contribute valuable resources to their families, in spite of difficult economic realities (Dudley & Stone, 2001; Hamer, 1998; Mincy, 2002; Roy, 2004). The welfare of African American families depends on a better understanding of their situation, and an appreciation for their potential as caring, productive fathers (Carlson & McLanahan, 2002; Mincy & Pouncy, 2002).

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The literature review illustrates that although much has been accomplished in the fathering field, much remains left undone. This is particularly true when it comes to the study of minority fathers who do not live with their children. The present status of the literature is reflected in this study, which aims to build on what has been done in the past while exploring remaining themes. This study is both confirmatory and exploratory in nature (Yin, 1993). Since the design of any research effort depends on the nature of the questions that are being asked (Bernard, 2002; Hutchinson, Marsiglio, & Cohan, 2002), the case study design was chosen for this research.

Case studies lend themselves to in-depth consideration of a large number of variables for each unit of analysis (deVaus, 2001; Yin, 1993). In this way, case studies facilitate research on individuals in their social context (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This makes the case study design ideal for investigating fathering behavior, since fathering roles are partly determined by social forces (Doherty et al., 1998; Hamer, 2001).

Specifically, the study is retrospective, and includes data collected from multiple cases. Each case is the unit of analysis; in this instance, a case is an individual father. The population that was studied was nonresidential African American fathers, with at least one nonresidential child 18 years of age or younger.

Data Collection

Pretest

Prior to beginning data collection, a pre-test of the questionnaire was conducted with 3 volunteers who fit the study criteria. All 3 fathers were asked for input on the instrumentation and methodology. All 3 fathers believed that the questionnaire was well designed and the interview methodology would provide useful data about nonresidential fathering. Since there were no major changes made to the questionnaire after the pilot phase, these three fathers were included in the sample.

Sampling Strategy

The sampling frame for the study included all African American nonresidential fathers in Florida and Georgia. A purposive sampling strategy was used that identified study participants based on these characteristics (Bernard, 2002; deVaus, 2001). Individual fathers were located through personal contacts, with staff from 55 different agencies serving families and fathers, and through contacts with leaders of local churches. Following the interviews, each father was asked to provide names of others who might be willing to participate in the study. Particular fathers were sampled to ensure variation in socioeconomic background. In Florida, lower and middle income fathers were interviewed but no upper income fathers volunteered to participate. The researcher was able to contact and interview upper income fathers in the Atlanta area.

Purposive sampling strategies do not lead to representative samples. Since the aim of the study was to generalize results back to theory rather than a particular population, participants were sought out who exhibited characteristics that placed them within the bounds of the theory in question (Bernard, 2002; Miles & Huberman, 1994). A representative sample was unnecessary, and would not have provided the data needed to

answer the research questions (Curtis, Gesler, Smith, & Washburn, 2000; Marsiglio & Hutchinson, 2002; Yin, 1993).

Instrumentation

Since there were a number of research questions to be answered, there were several different sections to the interview questionnaire. The entire questionnaire is presented in Appendix A. The first section of the questionnaire was designed to build rapport between participant and researcher. The father was asked to simply tell a little bit about himself, for example where he grew up, what hobbies he enjoyed, and what kind of work he did. This strategy seemed to work well because the father found this to be an easy topic to start with, and it gave the researcher a chance to ask some additional questions to help set a conversational tone or indicate where he had something in common with the father.

Father involvement measure. The Inventory of Father Involvement (IFI) was used during the next phase of the interview to measure father involvement with children (Hawkins et al., 2002). The participant looked at a card printed with the Likert scale from 0 to 6 (0=low, 6=high), while the researcher read each item from the measure and recorded the participant's response. As previously described, there have been a number of different conceptions of father involvement, along with a number of different measures. This measure is broader than most, taking into account almost any conceivable type of father involvement, including items measuring the affective aspects of fathering. A broad measure is in step with the fathering literature, and with many social scientists working to conceptualize father involvement in a new way. In addition, it is a very recent measure, reflecting the contemporary concern about the quality of involvement, and the diversity of fatherhood experiences. The 9 sections of the

instrument have good internal consistency reliability with scores ranging from .69 to .88 (Hawkins et al., 2002).

The ideal father. The researcher designed the next section of the questionnaire to measure participants' views of the roles and functions of the ideal father. Based on Hamer's work (2001), fathers were asked to prioritize 6 fathering roles: provide discipline, provide emotional support, be a role model, provide economic support, spend time with children, and teach boys to be men and girls to be women. Fathers were presented with each of these roles on printed note cards and were asked to rank order the cards from 1 to 6, with 1 being the most important role.

Barriers to father involvement. Moving toward the more exploratory part of the study, the researcher designed a question that asked fathers to free-list all barriers to father involvement from their own perspective. After verifying that the list was complete, the researcher wrote the barriers down on blank cards so they could be prioritized, as in the question on fathering roles and functions. For this question, the note cards were created during the interview because it was important for the participants to create the list of barriers themselves, rather than having a list handed to them.

Social supports for father involvement. To determine what social supports encouraged father involvement, the researcher designed a question that asked fathers to free-list all social supports for involvement with children from their own perspective. After verifying that the list was complete, the researcher wrote the social supports down on blank cards so they could be prioritized, as in the two previous questions. For this question, the note cards were created during the interview because it was important for

the participants to create the list of barriers themselves, rather than having a list handed to them.

Strategies to increase father involvement. A final open-ended question asked the fathers to free-list all strategies they had used to increase father involvement. The researcher took notes as each father began to discuss the different strategies used. The researcher compiled the list of strategies based on the notes taken during the interview and verified that the list was complete. Fathers were not asked to prioritize this list.

Demographic characteristics. At the end of the interview, demographic data were gathered to describe the sample, including age, union status, number of children, current job, and the number of hours worked each week. This section also included a measure of socioeconomic status (SES). Although there are a number of different measures of SES, the Hollingshead measure (1975) has been widely used, and takes into account four different factors: education, occupation, sex and union status (Hollingshead, 1975).

Before turning off the audiotape and putting away the questionnaire, each father was asked if there was anything else the researcher needed to know before concluding the interview. This question worked well with a number of fathers who had been slow to “warm up” during the interview or who needed to review some of their answers. This question also enabled the researcher to uncover several important emergent themes.

Procedure

All data collection took place through in-depth interviews, in a quiet place chosen by each participant. Fathers were interviewed in restaurants, offices, a daycare center, and a public library. Participant confidentiality was maintained by assigning each father an identification number instead of using his name to identify him on the questionnaires. Following the requirements of the University of Florida Institutional Review Board, the

study questionnaire was approved prior to conducting interviews. A copy of the IRB Protocol is found in Appendix B. In addition, each father was fully informed about his rights as a research participant through the informed consent process. A copy of the Informed Consent is found in Appendix C. All interviews were audio taped, and questionnaires and audiotapes were stored in a secure location. Immediately following each interview, the researcher spent some time taking notes about the interview on issues such as level of rapport between researcher and participant, data quality, and follow-up with the participant on finding other fathers for the study.

Data Analysis

Data analysis proceeded using Miles and Huberman's (1994) 3-part model: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data reduction is necessary so that raw data can be interpreted. The data display phase is central to Miles and Huberman's model, and involves using a number of matrices to aid in data analysis. The conclusion drawing and verification phase is also an important step in the analysis of data, and involves techniques such as counting, making comparisons, and following up surprises.

There are several strengths to using this approach to data analysis. First, it is very useful as an overall plan for dealing with a large amount of data, whether qualitative or quantitative. Second, the data display process is particularly helpful in managing the qualitative data, which can be cumbersome and therefore difficult to analyze (Bernard, 2002). Also, the data display phase is very useful in identifying and explaining outliers because it enables the researcher to review the data variable-by-variable or case-by-case. It is important to note that the three phases take place in no particular order, and may

occur more than once. As the researcher cycles through these phases, conclusions are verified and validity is strengthened.

Data Reduction

The data reduction phase began with calculating the descriptive statistics for the sample on fathers' age, union status, number of children, and the number of hours worked each week. Scores on the SES measure were calculated next by averaging and weighting each father's score on educational attainment and occupational prestige. Scores on the Inventory of Father Involvement (IFI) were also calculated for each participant by averaging their responses to the 26 items on father involvement.

Next, data addressing the research questions were reduced, starting with tallying fathers' responses to the question on the roles and functions of the ideal father. This yielded a prioritized list of fathering roles and functions for the sample. The master list of barriers to father involvement was compiled from each father's responses, as well as the master list of social supports for father involvement and strategies used to increase involvement. Finally, emergent themes were copied from the original transcripts into a separate text document to prepare for analysis.

Data Display

Since this study primarily used a variable-by-variable approach to data analysis, data for each of the 6 hypotheses and 3 propositions were placed into one variable-by-variable table, or matrix. The matrix for each hypothesis and proposition was extremely helpful in finding the patterns in the data and preparing to test the hypotheses. In addition, one matrix was created for each of the 17 cases that included most of the reduced data for that particular case, including numerical data and ranking data. See Appendix D for an example of an individual case matrix. These matrices were helpful

throughout the data analysis process, especially when attempting to explain outliers. No matrices were created for the emergent themes because the researcher did not find this technique to be useful for the textual data.

Conclusion Drawing and Verification

Each hypothesis was tested during this phase, using the matrices as a tool for comparison between groups and variables. For each hypothesis, the sample was divided into two groups based on the natural break in the data. The Mann-Whitney U Test was used to determine if there was a significant difference between the two groups. The Mann-Whitney U Test was chosen to test the hypotheses because it is a nonparametric test that does not assume normality and is appropriate for use with ordinal variables. The three propositions corresponding to the research questions were addressed during this phase as well. The text document containing the emergent themes was cut into sections of text so that the themes could be collapsed into categories. Outliers were identified and explained by working with the matrices for each case. Some data analysis techniques useful during this phase were noting patterns, counting, making comparisons, noting relations between variables, and following up surprises (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The analysis techniques and matrices mentioned above were utilized over and over again as the researcher worked to draw conclusions about the data.

Limitations

The cross-cultural interview pattern was one limitation of this study. In this case, the researcher was European American and the study participants were African American. Some researchers have pointed out the challenge of obtaining high quality data in a situation like this (Allen & Doherty, 1996; Bernard, 2002). However, there is

some evidence that variables other than race may be more important in conducting a successful cross-cultural interview.

In recent interviews with young men of various racial backgrounds, participants said the personality, style and experience of the researcher were more important than their race (Hutchinson et al., 2002). They also mentioned that when discussing sensitive material, it was comforting to know the interviewer was a stranger, as was the case in this study. Furthermore, the researcher was able to overcome the issue of cross-cultural interviewing to some degree by building rapport between researcher and participant. This was achieved through the interactive interview technique described above, and the informed consent process. In addition, since the researcher was truly a stranger to the participants as well as the issues under discussion, participants seemed to perceive the interview as a chance to tell their story.

Another potential limitation of the study was the sampling strategy. One recruiting tool for finding fathers was speaking with local pastors to get contact information for fathers who might be willing to participate. African American nonresidential fathers that attend church regularly may be different in some respects than the overall population of African American fathers. Although initially this was a concern, the final sample only included 1 father recruited in this manner. In addition, the researcher had limited access to fathers who fit the study, and had to rely on practitioners who were willing to help. Although many practitioners were helpful, the researcher typically did not get an interview unless the practitioners were willing to actually set up the interview themselves.

CHAPTER 4 RESULTS

This chapter presents the results of analyses of data that were collected during in-depth interviews with 17 African American nonresidential fathers, using a case study design. The focus of the study was the perceived barriers to nonresidential father involvement for African American men. Sample statistics will be provided first, followed by data addressing the research questions. Data for the three propositions will be presented next, followed by reduced data and statistical results for each of the 6 hypotheses. Finally, emergent themes that do not correspond to any particular hypothesis or proposition will be explored. These emergent themes are presented one at a time, supported by quotes from the fathers themselves.

Study Sample

The demographic characteristics of the sample are summarized in table 4-1. The 17 fathers ranged in age from 23 to 45 years and had a mean age of 36.1 years. Over 40% (41%, n=7) of the fathers reported never being married while nearly 60% (59%, n=10) reported at least one divorce. The fathers had from 1 to 6 children with at least 1 minor child living in another household. Fathers reported an average of 2.5 children. 51% of the children were boys and 49% of the children were girls. The children's mean age was 9.08 years of age.

All participants were employed and worked between 15 and 100 hours per week, with a mean of 52 hours per week. All of the fathers had at least a high school degree. Participants' scores on the measure of socioeconomic status (SES) ranged from 27 to 58

on a scale from 6-66, with a mean score of 43.6. This situated most fathers at the moderate level of SES. The Four-Factor Index of Social Status (Hollingshead, 1975) calculates SES by averaging the scores of both spouses for educational level and occupation. The scores of fathers who were married or cohabiting at the time of the interview were averaged with those of their spouse or partner. For fathers living as a single householder, their SES level was calculated using only their educational level and occupation.

Table 4-1. Sociodemographic characteristics of sample

	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>\bar{x}</u>
<u>Age</u>			36.1
<u>Ever married</u>			
Yes	10	58.8	
No	7	41.2	
<u>Number of children</u>			2.5
0-2	10	58.8	
3-4	5	29.4	
5-6	2	11.8	
<u>Age of children</u>			9.08
Male	22	51.0	9.03
Female	21	49.0	9.12
<u>Work hours/week</u>			52.0
0-30	2	11.8	
31-60	10	58.8	
61-100	5	29.4	
<u>Educational level</u>			
High school graduate/GED	8	47.1	
Partial college	4	23.5	
Standard college degree	5	29.4	
<u>Socioeconomic status</u>			43.6
6-26	-	---	
27-46	9	52.9	
47-66	8	47.1	

Additional information about fathers' occupation is found in table 4-2. Although there was variation among the fathers in the types of jobs they held, most fathers fell at a relatively high occupational level. These fathers were technicians, semiprofessionals, and managers.

Table 4-2. Occupational level of sample

Occupational Level	n	%
3	3	18
4	2	12
5	2	12
6	3	18
7	5	28
8	2	12

Research Questions

Research Question 1: How do fathers conceptualize their ideal of good fathering?

Participants were asked to define the ideal father by prioritizing 6 fathering roles: provide discipline, provide emotional support, be a role model, provide economic support, spend time with children, and teach boys to be men and girls to be women. As a group, participants ranked the fathering roles in the following order:

- Spend time with children
- Be a role model
- Provide emotional support
- Provide discipline
- Provide economic support
- Teach boys to be men and girls to be women

Research Question 2: How do fathers evaluate their degree and type of involvement with their children?

The fathers' scores on the Inventory of Father Involvement ranged from 2.0 to 5.77 on a scale from 0 to 6 (0=low, 6=high). The mean score was 4.61. This may be a high mean score for the sample, but it is difficult to tell because no other studies have used this very recent measure.

Research Question 3: What perceived barriers affect father involvement and which barriers are seen as most difficult to overcome?

Fathers were asked to list all barriers that had prevented them from doing a better job as a nonresidential father. Fathers reported a total of 49 barriers, and on average, reported nearly 3 barriers ($\bar{x}=2.88$). The list of barriers is shown below. This is a list of individual responses and reflects no data reduction except the elimination of any redundant responses. When more than 1 father responded with the same barrier, the number of fathers that reported that particular barrier is found in parentheses.

Relationship with the mother

- Mother's attitude (2)
- Visitation depends on mother's mood (2)
- Tenuous relationship with mother
- Mother using children to hurt father
- Lack of trust/respect from mother
- Volatility of relationship with mother
- Mother is not civil
- Lack of communication/cooperation from mother

Distance/logistics

- Geographic distance between households (8)
- Work schedule (4)
- Living in different households (2)

New marriage/others

- Blended family (6)

- Child's age
- Mother's parents
- Outside influences

The father himself

- Anger with mother
- Father has "no say"
- Father's own immaturity/pride
- Uncertainty about paternity confuses involvement
- Emotional barrier; feels bad about leaving sons in poor environment
- Father is the main disciplinarian; creates distance between father and son

Money issues

- Child support (2)
- Financial struggles post-divorce (ex-wife wants more money)
- Lack of finances is difficult (father on disability benefit)

Legal issues

- Custody arrangement (2)
- Court system is anti-father and racist
- Legal barriers

Lack of social support

- No family nearby
- Lack of community support for fathering, especially Black fathering

Research Question 4: What social supports encourage involvement and which do fathers consider most helpful?

Fathers were asked to list all social supports that helped them in their nonresidential fathering. Many fathers mentioned social supports but went on to speak about other supportive factors that were not social in nature. All of these data were captured and are presented here. Fathers reported a total of 54 social supports, with an average of about 3 sources of support ($x=3.18$). This is a list of individual responses and reflects no data reduction except the elimination of any redundant responses. When more than 1 father

responded with the same social support, the number of fathers that reported that particular social support is found in parentheses.

Family members

- Father's parents (7)
- General family support (4)
- Girlfriend (4)
- Father's present wife (2)
- Mother's parents (2)
- Spending time as a family (even though divorced)
- Mother's grandparents
- Father's stepfather
- Father's fiancé
- Older sons

The father himself

- Father has matured (4)
- Thinking of a bright future (2)
- Own will power (2)
- Motivated by lack of father when young

Church/religion

- Church provides the spiritual side for the children (3)
- Seeing own mortality
- Faith in one Supreme Being
- Religion teaches forgiveness, helps you reason correctly
- Church taught him how to be a responsible father

Community support

- Neighbors help raise children
- Fathering program
- Daycare has allowed the father to volunteer and be with his children
- Talking with other parents
- Talking with other nonresidential fathers
- "Neutral" community places to interact with child (e.g. church, school, toy store)
- Interacting with youth at church
- Coaching a girls' sports team

Children

- Children matured, realized father is trying his best
- Son has grown up, needs less emotionally
- Time spent with son
- Plight of children in modern society

Work

- High paying job allows father to care for his son
- Seasonal work provides time off to spend with children

Research Question 5: What strategies have fathers used to increase involvement with their children?

Fathers were asked to list all strategies they have used to overcome the barriers to nonresidential fathering. Fathers reported a total of 48 strategies, with an average of almost 3 strategies ($x=2.82$). They were not asked to prioritize the list of strategies. This is a list of individual responses and reflects no data reduction except the elimination of any redundant responses. When more than 1 father responded with the same strategy, the number of fathers that reported that particular strategy is found in parentheses.

Improving relations with the child's mother

- Let the past go, peace is better (6)
- Maintain involvement with school, daycare (5)
- Minimize conversation with mother (3)
- Take the mother to court (3)
- Talk respectfully with the mother
- Encourages each child to let mother know that they enjoy being with father
- Play the guilt card to get more visitation

Improving relations with the children

- Ensure good relationship with father through explaining discipline (2)
- Doing things they enjoy doing (2)
- Father calls child regularly (2)
- Get all children together when work slows down (2)
- Spend any available time with the children (2)
- Ensure that children are connected to father's extended family (2)

- Graduated from college; wanted to show daughters something positive about himself
- Tries to get them all summer (more impact on their lives)
- Father's parents pick up child and spend time with him

Spiritual/church

- Child attends all church activities
- As a youth pastor, uses church resources to provide for children
- Living a good Christian life
- Put situation in God's hands
- Prayer brings patience
- Attend men's support group at church

Scheduling/logistics

- Parents meet half way between two distant households (2)
- Talk with supervisor about work schedule
- Spends all weekend w/children when in town
- Stay up late on Saturday to see children after working all night on Friday
- Drive all the way for visitation when mother refuses to meet half way
- Child spends Christmas, summer

Propositions

Proposition 1: Fathers will report the most difficult barriers to be a poor relationship with the child's mother and their relatively low income.

After verifying that the list of barriers was complete, each father was asked to prioritize the barriers in order from most important to least important. The proposition was supported in that the majority, 53% (n=9), reported that a poor relationship with the child's mother was the most difficult barrier to overcome. The remaining 47% (n=8) reported a variety of most difficult barriers including the custody arrangement (n=1), the mother's parents (n=1), being away in the military (n=1), living in 2 different households (n=2), an anti-father and racist local court system (n=1), geographic distance (n=1), and a difficult work schedule (n=1). It should be noted that 88% (n=15) of the fathers

mentioned the mother as a barrier, but not all listed that barrier as the most difficult one to overcome.

The second part of the proposition was not supported in that only 6% (n=1) reported that lack of income was a barrier at all, and that particular father was on disability benefit. It should be noted that a few fathers mentioned a variety of different money issues that did not have to do with lack of income per se. Also, 1 father commented that his relatively large income was helpful because it enabled him to provide better for his son.

Proposition 2: Fathers will report the most helpful social support to be their kin network.

After verifying that the list of social supports was complete, each father was asked to prioritize all supports in order from most important to least important. There was limited support for the proposition in that 29% (n=5) of the fathers said family members constituted the most helpful social support. Another 29% (n=5) reported a variety of most important social supports, including time spent with a son (n=1), “neutral” community locations (n=1), church involvement (n=2), and involvement in coaching young people (n=1). The remainder of the sample (42%, n=7) listed a variety of other factors as most supportive, including cherished pictures of a daughter (n=1), faith in one supreme being (n=1), personal will power and desire (n=2), motivation toward fathering due to father absence as a child (n=1), religion (n=2), and time off to spend with children due to seasonal work (n=1). It should also be noted that although only 29% (n=5) of the fathers mentioned family as the most important social support, family was the most often cited support overall.

Proposition 3: Fathers will report the most commonly used involvement strategy to be attempts at improving relations with the child's mother.

The proposition was supported in that 71% (n=12) of the fathers reported attempts to improve relations with the child's mother. These strategies took on several forms, including learning to be more relaxed and respectful toward the mother (n=8), avoiding the mother altogether to reduce the opportunity for conflict (n=8), and engaging her directly to solve specific problems (n=4).

Hypotheses

H1: In defining the ideal father, participants will rank spending time with children as more important than providing economic support.

Although participants were asked to define the ideal father by prioritizing all 6 of the fathering roles, only two indicators were used to test the hypothesis, provide economic support and spend time with children. The data strongly supported the hypothesis, in that 88% (n=15) rated spending time with children as more important than providing economic support, while 12% (n=2) said the financial support was more important.

Hy2⁰: Participants with higher SES are not statistically different than participants with lower SES on their ranking of the ideal of providing economic support.

Hy2^a: In defining the ideal father, participants with higher SES will rank the ideal of providing economic support higher than those with lower SES.

The hypothesis was tested using the Mann-Whitney U Test. Two groups of fathers were formed by dividing them into high and low SES groups at the most natural break in the data. SES scores ranged from 58 to 27 with a break between the scores of 45 and 39. The high SES group was comprised of 10 fathers while the low SES group contained 7 fathers. The Mann-Whitney U Test is useful for determining whether the ranking of a particular variable is different between two groups. The mean rank for the high SES

group was 8.60, while the mean rank for the low SES group was 9.57, for a U score of 31. The results of this test showed there was no significant difference between the two groups. Fathers in the high SES group ranked the ideal of providing economic support no differently than fathers in the low SES group (see Table 4-3 below). Therefore, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected.

Table 4-3. Mann-Whitney U test: High and low SES groups on ranking of the indicator “providing economic support.”

	\bar{x}	n	U	Sig.
High SES group	8.60	10	31.000	.740
Low SES group	9.57	7		

* $p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$. *** $p \leq .001$

Hy3⁰: Participants with more hours worked per week are not statistically different than participants with fewer hours worked per week on their ranking of the ideal of providing economic support.

Hy3^a: In defining the ideal father, participants with more hours worked per week will rate the ideal of providing economic support higher than those with fewer hours worked per week.

The hypothesis was tested using the Mann-Whitney U Test. Two groups of fathers were formed by dividing them into high and low work hours groups at the most natural break in the data. The number of hours worked per week ranged from 15 to 100 with a break between the work hours of 50 and 45. The high work hours group was comprised of 9 fathers while the low work hours group contained 8 fathers. The Mann-Whitney U Test is useful for determining whether the ranking of a particular variable is different between two groups. The mean rank for the high work hours group was 8.50, while the mean rank for the low work hours group was 9.44, for a U score of 32. The results of this

test showed there was no significant difference between the two groups. Fathers in the high work hours group ranked the ideal of providing economic support no differently than fathers in the low work hours group (see Table 4-4 below). Therefore, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected.

Table 4-4. Mann-Whitney U test: High and low work hours groups on ranking of the indicator “providing economic support.”

	\bar{x}	n	U	Sig.
High work hours group	8.50	9	32.000	.743
Low work hours group	9.44	8		

* $p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$. *** $p \leq .001$

Hy4⁰: Fathers who are less involved are not statistically different than fathers who are more involved in the reported number of barriers to involvement.

Hy4^a: Fathers who are less involved will report more barriers to involvement than those who are more involved.

The hypothesis was tested using the Mann-Whitney U Test. Two groups of fathers were formed by dividing them into high and low IFI groups at the most natural break in the data. The scores on the Inventory of Father Involvement (IFI) ranged from 5.77 to 2.0 with a break between the scores of 5.0 and 4.92. The high IFI group was comprised of 8 fathers while the low IFI group contained 9 fathers. The Mann-Whitney U Test is useful for determining whether the ranking of a particular variable is different between two groups. The mean rank for the high IFI group was 6.33, while the mean rank for the low IFI group was 12.00, for a U score of 12. The results of this test showed there was a significant difference between the two groups. Fathers in the low IFI group reported

significantly more barriers to involvement than fathers in the high IFI group (see Table 4-5 below). Therefore, the alternate hypothesis must be accepted.

Table 4-5. Mann-Whitney U test: High and low IFI groups on number of reported barriers to father involvement

	\bar{x}	n	U	Sig.
High IFI group	12	8	12.000	.021(*)
Low IFI group	6.33	9		

* $p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$. *** $p \leq .001$

Hy⁵⁰: Fathers who are less involved are not statistically different than fathers who are more involved in the reported number of social supports for involvement.

Hy^{5a}: Fathers who are less involved will report fewer social supports for involvement than those who are more involved.

The hypothesis was tested using the Mann-Whitney U Test. Two groups of fathers were formed by dividing them into high and low IFI groups at the most natural break in the data. The scores on the Inventory of Father Involvement (IFI) ranged from 5.77 to 2.0 with a break between the scores of 5.0 and 4.92. The high IFI group was comprised of 8 fathers while the low IFI group contained 9 fathers. The Mann-Whitney U Test is useful for determining whether the ranking of a particular variable is different between two groups. The mean rank for the high IFI group was 8.56, while the mean rank for the low IFI group was 9.39, for a U score of 32.5. The results of this test showed there was no significant difference between the two groups. Fathers in the low IFI group reported a similar number of social supports for involvement as fathers in the high IFI group (see Table 4-6 below). Therefore, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected.

Table 4-6. Mann-Whitney U test: High and low IFI groups on number of reported social supports for involvement

	\bar{x}	n	U	Sig.
High IFI group	8.56	8	32.5	.743
Low IFI group	9.39	9		

* $p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$. *** $p \leq .001$

Hy6⁰: Fathers who are less involved are not statistically different than fathers who are more involved in the reported number of strategies used to increase involvement.

Hy6^a: Fathers who are less involved will report fewer strategies used to increase involvement than those who are more involved.

The hypothesis was tested using the Mann-Whitney U Test. Two groups of fathers were formed by dividing them into high and low IFI groups at the most natural break in the data. The scores on the Inventory of Father Involvement (IFI) ranged from 5.77 to 2.0 with a break between the scores of 5.0 and 4.92. The high IFI group was comprised of 8 fathers while the low IFI group contained 9 fathers. The Mann-Whitney U Test is useful for determining whether the ranking of a particular variable is different between two groups. The mean rank for the high IFI group was 11.00, while the mean rank for the low IFI group was 7.22, for a U score of 20. The results of this test showed there was no significant difference between the two groups. Fathers in the low IFI group reported a similar number of strategies used to increase involvement as fathers in the high IFI group (see Table 4-7 below). Therefore, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected.

Table 4-7. Mann-Whitney U test: High and low IFI groups on number of reported strategies used to increase involvement

	\bar{x}	n	U	Sig.
High IFI group	11.00	8	20.000	.139
Low IFI group	7.22	9		

* $p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$. *** $p \leq .001$

Emergent Themes

An important strength of the in-depth interview is the ability to gather large amounts of data on each participant in the sample. In addition to all of the data that were collected to describe the sample and answer the research questions, propositions, and hypotheses, this data gathering method allowed for additional themes to emerge. Each interview was audio taped and transcripts were produced and coded. Through qualitative analysis, a number of important themes were identified.

The Importance of the Father's Father

The majority of the fathers ($n=11$) spontaneously began telling me about their own father, either as an introduction to their experience as a father or as a way to explain their thoughts or behaviors regarding parenting. For the fathers I interviewed, there was a very clear link between the way they were fathered and the way they chose to father their own children. Many of the fathers explained their desire to be involved with their children by recounting how their own father had largely been absent during their own childhood. One father said, "I didn't have a dad. And I knew what it's like not having a dad, and I never want any child to go through that." During a particularly emotional interview, one father lamented that, "...We had two contacts; I seen him at his father's funeral and I

seen him at his funeral.” Another father commented that, “I don’t know my real father so one of the rules I had before I ever got my son was to be the best father I could.” One father explained that his life would have been better with a little more, “Face time, that’s something I didn’t have when I was a little kid....My life...would have at least went a little smoother if...he just popped up once in a while.”

Only a few fathers (18%, n=3) reported growing up with a loving father and were truly grateful for his involvement in their lives. One father said,

Yeah, even though my parents had divorced, my dad was always there. Every weekend he was there. Every school function he was there. Every football game I played in he was there. He was there; sitting in the stands, in the cold; he was there...and that was important. You know, he was there. He made it known that no matter what’s going on between me and your mom, I’m going to be here for ya’ll.

This was more than merely a physical presence, it was a matter of making sure the children knew they were loved and that their needs were met. This participant’s father was not only involved in his nonresidential son’s life as he was growing up, but has been involved with his grandchildren as well. As the father explained, “When I was gone...he would go and look out for them. He made sure that if they needed anything above and beyond what I was doing, he would bridge the gap.” Another father said, “I think my father pretty much was there for me and raised me the best way he could.”

Although several fathers reported growing up with a stepfather, only 1 participant gave a stepfather major credit for making a difference in his life. This father said,

Well I can say this; my experience being fathered taught me a whole bunch of different things about fathering. You know I didn’t grow up in the home with my father, but I was maybe 5 or 6 when my mom got married. She wasn’t married to my [biological] father but he [the stepfather] was the epitome of what a father is supposed to be.

Conflict with the Mother of the Father's Children

All study participants had quite a bit to say about the mothers of their children. Although 2 fathers reported that they had a good relationship with the mother, most fathers (88%, n=15) indicated that they had experienced a considerable amount of conflict with the child's mother over time. One father explained that he wished the mother could "Just be civil." Another father said, "Honestly...all I have to say is *attitude* [original emphasis]." Many fathers mentioned they felt constrained by the mother's shifting mood. They felt that mothers made spontaneous decisions about visitation based on their feelings at a particular time. One father noted that "whatever whim and fancy" the mother felt at the time he was supposed to pick up his children for visitation would determine if he got to see his children. Another father said that "Sometimes it's good and sometimes it's not. It's according to how she feels." Another father commented, "If she don't want you to see him, you're not going to see him."

One father felt that his child's mother judged him harshly for any small thing and used these incidents as an excuse to deny him visitation with his children. He explained that the mother would come to his apartment and deny visitation because, "There may be dirty dishes in the sink....[She would say] You keep a dirty house so...I don't want my son in this [mess]."

A number of fathers (29%, n=5) were convinced that mothers withheld visitation as retaliation for the failed relationship. Fathers said this was the one way mothers could get back at them, through the children. One father explained, "She was under the impression that she could use the children to ...hurt me, because she knew how I felt about my kids." Another father commented that the mothers of his children "Use my children as ...that weapon against me." One father felt confused by this behavior. He commented, "It's

weird, isn't it? I don't, I don't understand....It's like I want you to know who your father is, but then it gets down to the nuts and bolts of visitation and then we want to play our little games."

Several fathers (24%, n=4) believed the child's mother would grant visitation if there were something in it for her. For example, one father noted, "I know guys that don't pay anything hardly and they get more visitation than I do. I guess it's the relationship...you gotta keep some level of involvement in the relationship, maybe a romantic involvement....We don't have any...of that." Another father explained that the mother has tried to "get sex" when she was in town or stay at the father's house instead of getting a hotel room. Another father commented that what the mother really wants is for the father to pay for everything; even for things she is supposed to pay for. "But," he says, "I can't really voice that 'cause ...she won't let them come [for a visit]."

Emotional Toll of Nonresidential Fathering

Difficult issues like those discussed above along with the general loss many fathers felt in reducing involvement with their children, have taken an emotional toll on some (29%, n=5) of these men. One father explained, "I would say something else is the emotional toll it takes on you from not seeing your kids...'cause I know in the beginning it hurt like all get up." A few of the fathers felt that their children were living in a poor environment with the mother, and were saddened about leaving them there. A father explained this saying,

My son tries to get his stuff ready to come stay with us...for the weekend. I tell him to go get his shoes; he can't even find them 'cause it's buried up under this mess of stuff. And it really breaks my heart so now I pretty much just stay in the living room. And I deal with the fact that ...I kinda left them in that environment.

Several fathers (18%, n=3) became emotional when talking about finally getting to see their children after a long break. One father said, "...[I] cried like a baby, man. I cry when he comes, and then I cry when he leaves you know. That's my...heart, man, my heart and soul." Another father commented, "I didn't see him for a year. And I would go home and try to make arrangements to see him. And doors were slammed in my face. Police were called on me, things like that. It takes a toll." This had hurt one father in the past and he worried about what might happen in the future. He explained his concerns saying, "I still have those other things...in my mind, like when is this going to happen again? When is she going to stop them from coming over here again?"

Coping with Nonresidential Fathering

One of the ways that fathers (29%, n=5) coped with the strain and disappointment of nonresidential fathering was through "letting go." One father explained, "I just go with the flow....Because I don't want my daughter to see [me] acting all crazy...." Another father commented that even though he sometimes gets upset when his child's mother does something he disagrees with, often he doesn't "bother with it." One father described the importance of being able to "let the past go" because you can't "go back and change nothing." Another father explained his struggle to, "get past that point where you're so pissed off... 'cause she hurt you."

One father described an interesting twist on the idea of "letting go." He formulated an elaborate and long term plan to appear so relaxed about visitation that his ex-wife would be fooled into thinking he did not care about seeing his son. He hoped this would "take the fight out of her," since he was convinced she was trying to hurt him by preventing visitation. When I asked him to explain some of his comments, he answered by saying,

It's a Kung Fu movie. There's the master; you swing at him and you miss. No matter how hard you fight and no matter how hard you swing, you miss. You really wind up doing nothing. It takes two; you're not going to fight. I just throw my hands up...She realizes that I'm not going to argue, I'm not going to fight, not going to get drawn into anything.

According to the father, this tactic worked really well because his ex-wife eventually stopped trying to hurt him by withholding visitation.

Eight fathers mentioned that the church is supportive of their fathering in various ways. In addition, several fathers (18%, n=3) discussed their personal belief in God and how that has helped them deal with these difficult situations. Their beliefs have seen them through hard times, given them a glimpse of the bigger picture, and helped them find forgiveness for their mistakes. Two fathers described particular religious experiences that occurred during their struggles with being a nonresidential father. One father explained,

And that's when I turned my life like the prodigal son and got tired of eating the swill, and floating with the pigs, and decided to come back with Him [Jehovah]. Then immediately He taught me how to deal with things that were beyond your control that He could handle. And when Jehovah did that, it took a lot of the stress away.

Another father commented,

In the Bible...it may start out pretty bad, it may start out slow...but they always finish on time...God has to strike them down and knock them down...and they have to go through something devastating...to really understand and be mature and do the right thing. So I think that's what's happened to me...I been twisted up, shaken around, spun around...thrown down on my feet, I'm standing there wobbling, dizzy, trying to catch my balance. But eventually I'm going to catch my balance. And everything's going to come together and I'll be walking straight again.

A third father described how he feels trapped in a really difficult situation. His trust in God does not necessarily change the situation, but helps him deal with it as best he can. He explained,

Because of my faith...God has allowed me, God has helped me to deal with it per se...to have a positive outlook.... I don't even deal with it....I walk around within the parameters of the space that I've been given and...I just do all I can in that space.

Several of the fathers (18%, n=3) were very oriented toward the future, when things would be better and they would have the time they desire to have with their children.

One father explained that next time around, things were going to work out much better.

He said, "But I have a woman that I'm willing to get engaged with and really start something, and take it to the top. No matter what I'm not going to let her go...." Another father commented that he has "big plans" to make sure his children are taken care of when it comes to "Finances and things that I can do to help them go to school when they get older." Fathers were also concerned about how their children would perceive them as they grow up. One father was mindful that

...my daughter will always look up to me, and she's going to form an opinion. And it will not be one that says my father turned his back. It will be one that says, in the face of animosity, in the face of trials and tribulations, he made a [good] decision.

These fathers felt very strongly about their hope for the future. One father even attributed the downfall of some fathers to the lack of this orientation. He commented that "All I can do is gaze on the future.... To be a better man without really...falling apart like some fathers do...." "I look toward the future," he said, "and the future is real bright."

The Meaning of Fatherhood

Nonresidential fathering was a challenge for these men because of the conflict with the child's mother and the limited amount of time available to spend with their children. They were also frustrated because this situation had prevented them from enacting specific fathering roles that were important to them.

Control. Most of the fathers (76%, n=13) believed that fatherhood meant having some form of control or influence over a child's daily activities. Fathers often felt that they had "no say," and this angered some of them. One father said, "I have no say when they're at their [mother's] house.... Like...I'm just her boyfriend and those aren't my kids, they just her kids..." Another father explained,

It's just the point of her not giving me that full power with my child.... I still don't feel it, you know what I'm talking about? It's like...she putting a limitation on me with my child....There shouldn't be no limitation...dealing with something I helped create.

Another father commented that, "I mean I really did want to be there for him. But she says I was too controlling." One father felt that he could not properly influence his son because the mother was not cooperative, and did not even allow him access to basic information about the child. He explained,

I think it's real important for any father to know where his child's school is, what his medical records are...just basically his activities. I would love to take him to martial arts class; I can't. To me that would help him out tremendously because I know most kids that take martial arts do well in school.

Discipline and guidance. A number of fathers (41%, n=7) were particularly concerned that their children were not being properly disciplined or taught right from wrong in the mother's household. This aspect of fathering was very important to these fathers. One father explained, "The things that I try to teach him, it's not reinforced at home, so it makes it difficult..." Another father said, "They don't really discipline him like I would discipline him. Then they pick up the phone [to ask for help] and I'm like...you done spoiled him...what am I supposed to do now?" In fact, several fathers said they spent time with their children specifically to work on this issue. One father noted,

I go pick them up from daycare...and...I just...take them home....And then I can...discipline the way I want to discipline....I feel that if I go pick them up and bring them back [home], that little thing that they doin'...is going to cease.

Another father visited his son at school to check up on his disrespectful behavior and surprised him while he was outside with a group of friends. The father said, "He was real shocked" because the son thought his father lived too far away to find out about his discipline problems.

Although several fathers (18%, n=3) tried to exert more influence over their children's lives in this manner, they identified a downside to this strategy. These fathers commented that they had become the main disciplinarian and this was a barrier to meaningful involvement with their children. One father noted, "Yes, it's a barrier because I discipline him more than anybody else so that's a barrier for him to stay away from me." Another father commented, "Then when she did something wrong, her mom always called me and then I was looked at as I guess the 'heavy.' [The] only time you come around is when I get in trouble."

Protector. Another fathering role that was important to some (29%, n=5) of the fathers was to be the protector of their children, the mediator between children and society. One father felt that society was changing for the worse, and that children must be protected from its influence because, "Society's teachings...are always bad..." Another father regretted his parenting situation and did not want his child to grow up thinking that having a nonresidential parent is normal. He commented that, "I think we have an obligation to show (daughter) that where we are is not the norm." Another father was concerned, "Seeing what children go through now, seeing how hard it is in society for children nowadays." This father was motivated to spend time with his children so that he could protect them from the difficulties they would face out in the world.

Racism

One father reported that a particular judge in his local court system had been both “anti-father” and racist as well. The father explained that,

“The judge comes from the old school and he kinda took exception to the fact that I was intelligent, well spoken, and Black. And...that’s being blunt...Like I said, I think everybody has their own bag of horrors when it comes to going to court, but...I was treated more like I was dealing in Crack as opposed to being a good father.”

He also commented, “For all the...Black men that don’t pay child support, don’t have a job...it seems like I was carrying the load for all of them.”

Another father mentioned that society does not do enough to support Black fathers. He commented, “I just think that society in general...has not always been [supportive]...[There is a] lack of family support and then I would also say...community support...for a man...having a relationship with a child...especially a Black man.”

Fathers’ Motivation

All of the fathers seemed motivated to do the right thing for their children. Some fathers (47%, n=8) had some interesting comments about this as well. One father explained,

As time has progressed around the 70s is when divorce and separation and the whole family setting has deteriorated. But back in the 60s the whole family sat together, around the same table, they had dinner at the same time; now it’s a rush rush society. The microwaves, nobody sits together, the whole family setting has just blown apart. And now it’s easy for everybody to say I don’t want a family. You see but in my case, I wanted my family. I tried to fight hard for my family.

Fathers were also motivated to take responsibility for mistakes they had made in the past. One father commented, “I can’t sit around and blame my twins’ mother and my son’s mother ‘cause that’s...not right. That’s not fair. I have to square the blame on my shoulders, and...be accountable...for the things I’ve done.” Another father said, “It’s all

about responsibility.” Another father commented, “I should have handled my business properly....I made a lot of mistakes.”

Fathering as a Single Man

In spite of their difficult circumstances, a number of participants (41%, n=7) had some interesting comments to make about fathering as a single man. One thing 2 fathers mentioned was the importance of putting their parenting first, ahead of everything else, ahead of other plans or desires. One father explained that he is, “Single and a parent...that’s the way I see this. You know...I’m a parent first. I’m a parent first in my mind, in what I do, in my thought process....” Another father said that, “I put being a father beyond any personal issues I have with her [the child’s mother].”

One father has a daughter who lives 9 hours away. He is involved in coaching a sports team made up of young girls the same age as his daughter. He also works with youth at his church and says that these experiences help him relate to his daughter and learn how to be a better father to her. He explained that, “I interact with other kids and...I’m teaching them some of the stuff that I would have taught my daughter. And then...I make her feel part of my team...[because] I always order a shirt [jersey] for her.” This father has been able to fill his fathering gap with coaching and church work, and even bring his daughter into those settings when she comes home for the summer.

A second father explained that certain places have served well as a substitute location for parenting and child development. He calls these locations “neutral places” because the focus is on the parent-child relationship rather than on the volatile situation between the parents. He finds these places to be very helpful in his fathering. They are, “What I call a neutral place; restaurant, open place, park, something like that....The biggest problems we have [is when] I come to her house, she comes to my house, you

know what I mean?" These locations provide him with a comfortable place to interact with his child. He went on to say that,

The school that he goes to helps, 'cause these are neutral places, the church and the school. I can go to his school functions and I'm at ease....So if he's in a school function, I can go there or go to a playground and spend time with him and that helps a lot.

Summary

In-depth interviews with 17 African American nonresidential fathers yielded an array of useful data. Significant findings include master lists of barriers to involvement, supports for involvement, and strategies used to increase involvement. Data also illustrated the nature of the conflict between mothers and fathers, and the strong bond between fathers and their children. In addition, coping with the stress of nonresidential fathering and gender issues between fathers and mothers emerged as important themes.

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION

This study focused on the barriers to nonresidential father involvement for African American men. A number of specific areas were explored including fathers' definition of the ideal father, perceived barriers to father involvement, social supports that encourage father involvement, and strategies used to increase father involvement with children. These areas of interest arose from the fathering literature, as well as from current ideas about fathering, and some observations about the deficiencies in the literature. This chapter will present a discussion of the major findings of the research as well as the study's limitations, recommendations for future research, and ideas for applying the results to programming for nonresidential fathers and their families.

Fathering Roles and Functions

As a group, the fathers ranked the ideals of spending time with children and being a role model the highest. This result corroborates prior research suggesting that even relatively absent fathers have the desire to spend time with their children (Hamer, 1998; Nelson et al., 2002). This finding may also be due to the nature of the sample. This group of fathers could be moving beyond traditional fathering roles such as providing economically, to include more nurturing roles enacted during time spent with children.

Another finding of this study was that higher SES fathers were no different than lower SES fathers on how they rated the ideal of providing economic support. This is an important finding since it does not support previous research. Other researchers have found that as a fathers' SES rises, so does the importance he places on providing

economically (Hamer, 1997). Likewise, lower SES fathers downplay the importance of providing if they are not able to meet that expectation. That idea is not supported by this research effort, although the different findings here may be due to the small sample size or the moderate SES level of the study group.

Taken together, the data suggest that fathers are very interested in being with their children and meeting their needs. On the other hand, it may have been important to study participants to present themselves as “good” fathers. It is also possible that through self-selection, this small sample is biased toward men that are invested in a more nurturing set of fathering roles. This issue is addressed further in the section, Recommendations for Future Research.

Barriers to Father Involvement

One of the goals of this research was to compile a list of barriers to father involvement from the fathers’ perspective. All barriers reported by the 17 fathers were collapsed into the following categories: relationship with the mother, distance/logistics, new marriage/others, the father himself, money issues, legal issues, and lack of social support. All of these barriers were anticipated by the existing fathering literature (Amato, 1998; Doherty et al., 1998; Ihinger-Tallman et al., 1995). Although scholars recognize that custodial mothers often employ “gatekeeping” to control or limit a nonresidential father’s access to his children, there has been disagreement about which barriers to involvement are most important. One contribution of this study is to highlight conflict with the children’s mother as the most difficult barrier for fathers to overcome. Fathers also highlighted geographic distance from the child’s home and fathers’ and mothers’ blended families as difficult barriers to overcome.

The fathering literature suggests that one of the principal barriers for fathers is unstable employment and lack of income. In this study, only 1 father of the 17 interviewed described income level as a barrier to involvement. Fathers identified an assortment of money issues, but they had nothing to do with the father's level of income. Instead, they were related to post-divorce decisions about how money should be allocated. In fact, the 1 father who identified income level as a barrier was on a disability benefit. This data suggests that fathers of all socioeconomic levels understand children's need for both economic provision and nurturing. On the other hand, most of the fathers fell at the middle income level and income may not be an issue for them.

Another significant finding related to barriers to involvement was that less involved fathers reported significantly more barriers to father involvement than more involved fathers. Apparently the sheer number of barriers made it difficult for fathers to be involved.

Supports for Father Involvement

Another goal of this study was to compile a master list of social supports that encourage nonresidential fathering. All social supports reported by the 17 fathers were collapsed into the following categories: family members, the father himself, church/religion, community support, and change in children. Although very few studies have focused on social supports for father involvement, the existing literature did anticipate both family and religious support, especially for African American fathers (Hamer, 1998). These factors figured prominently in the fathers' comments.

However, only 29% (n=5) of the fathers reported their kin network to be the most helpful social support, although support from various family members was mentioned more often than any other type of support. Instead, a diversity of social supports were

reported to be the most helpful, including time spent with the child, a seasonal work pattern, church, a father's own will power and desire, and "neutral" community locations. Although some of these supports are more personal than social, they reflect the actual answers the fathers gave to the question about social supports. It seems that in the minds of the fathers, their ability to be involved with their children had to do with both social supports and with their own character as individuals (Patterson & McCubbin, 1984). Although various family members provided important support to most of the fathers, the fathers did not always put this type of help at the top of their lists. For some this was due to the fact that no family lived nearby or because they were perceived to be part of the problem. For others, they simply felt that their own personal will power to do the right thing was more important than receiving help from family.

Much of the literature on social supports for African American families has focused on mothers and it could be that mothers, as primary custodial parents, are more likely to receive social support rather than fathers (Allen & Doherty, 1996). Perhaps fathers are not as receptive to family support because they believe that manhood means doing things without help from others. As one father put it, "Men initially don't get that kind of support...[because] we're taught to be self-sustaining...and to...do it on your own."

Strategies to Increase Involvement

Another goal of this study was to compile a list of strategies that fathers have used to overcome the barriers to nonresidential fathering. All strategies reported by the fathers were collapsed into the following categories: improving relations with the child's mother, improving relations with children, church/religion, and scheduling/logistics. The existing literature has been almost silent on this issue because of the "deficit perspective" that runs through much of the fatherhood research (Pasley & Minton, 1997). The present

study has contributed to the literature by compiling this list of strategies, thereby underscoring the energy many fathers have put into improving their difficult fathering situation.

Another finding of this study is that less involved fathers were not statistically different than more involved fathers in the number of strategies reported ($p=.139$). At least in this sample, the number of strategies to increase involvement was not associated with greater involvement. Future research on the effectiveness of certain strategies may further illuminate effective means for coping with barriers.

Conflict with the Mother of the Father's Children

This study supports existing literature that describes the conflicts experienced by men and women after divorce or relationship dissolution (Ahrons & Miller, 1993; Dudley & Stone, 2001). The participants of this study related how they often fought with their children's mother over visitation rights and schedules, past hurts and disagreements, and the present allocation of resources (Braver, 1998; Hetherington & Cox, 2002).

In addition to conflict over a variety of different subjects, fathers perceived that at times the mothers of their children retaliated for the failed relationship by withholding visitation altogether. One father called this behavior "playing games." As much as fathers reported the desire to separate their relationship with the mother from their relationship with the child, they did not appear successful. The fathers did not report "playing games" themselves, but it appears that the child may have been caught in the middle because of continuing conflicts between the father and the mother.

Fathers also reported conflict over standards of parenting (Ihinger-Tallman et al., 1995). At times the fathers were not satisfied with how the mothers were parenting. Two fathers described how, as a residential father, they would simply make up for the

mother's deficiency in any area where she was lacking. However, after becoming nonresidential, this was no longer possible since the father was no longer in the home. According to these fathers, mothers who were not satisfied with the fathers' parenting performance would at times use this as one reason for withholding visitation.

There was a surprisingly large amount of contact between some of these fathers and the mothers of their children. One father who had joint custody of his daughter even set aside time to do things "as a family." Several fathers reported that mothers had tried to carry on the relationship in various ways. This contact may be due in part to African American women's tendency not to remarry after divorce (Edin, 2001; Hamer, 2001). Continued contact could be an additional source of conflict for nonresidential African American fathers and mothers.

Coping with Nonresidential Fathering

The emotional toll of separation from children and the energy expended on conflict with the children's mothers created an extremely stressful situation for these fathers. Working long hours to pay child support, parenting with a limited social network, and feeling misunderstood or neglected by the courts only served to increase fathers' level of anxiety and stress. One father explained how the stress had taken a toll on his health. He commented that, "Yeah, [the stress can] cause you health problems too....My blood pressure went way high."

Many fathers found some success in dealing with the stress by simply "letting go." For most of the fathers, this took the form of settling for the type and amount of involvement the mother would allow. Fathers reported feeling powerless to change the situation and forced simply to allow the mother to be in control. Many fathers seemed to

feel guilty about this, but explained that if they spoke up too much about how the mother was wrong, she would take away the little time he had been given with his children.

Although fathers displayed a number of coping behaviors in response to these stressors, most of their behaviors served to minimize the problem by looking forward to better times in the future (Pearlin, Menaghan, Lieberman, & Mullan, 1981; Pearlin, 1989). These fathers believed the future would be better because they were correcting their past mistakes or because of plans they had made to change their lifestyle or meet the needs of their children. They also believed in a bright future because God would help them “be mature and do the right thing,” as one father put it.

The Meaning of Fatherhood

Study participants became very upset when they were denied visitation with their children. They missed being with their children and were very excited when finally getting to see them after a long time had passed. However, the real problem with being denied visitation was that it prevented them from enacting particular fathering roles that helped to define them as men. For this group of men, fatherhood meant exercising some amount of oversight and control over the daily lives of their children, providing discipline and guidance, and protecting their children from the negative influence of society. Symbolic Interactionism suggests that these fathers are behaving according to their understanding of what fatherhood is all about. This is in striking contrast to the popular image of the lazy father, the incompetent father, or the “deadbeat dad” (Lamb, 2000; Mincy, 2002), who ignores both the meaning of fatherhood as well as the needs of his children.

Coping and Gender

The fathers that participated in this study were certainly not “deadbeat dads.” In contrast, they obviously cared about their children and desired to spend time with them; indeed, they placed spending time with children above providing economically. In addition, these fathers had formed a strong bond with their children and had formulated plans that they hoped would lead to an even better relationship in the future.

However, in spite of their desires and efforts they remained relatively unsuccessful at securing the type of involvement they wanted, or at minimizing conflict with the child’s mother. This may be due to what appears to be fathers’ relatively limited coping repertoire (Pearlin, 1989), which was mainly restricted to “letting go” when conflict with the child’s mother became too great, and putting their faith in a brighter future.

Although these fathers could be described as nurturing to some degree, the meaning of fatherhood from their perspective included relatively traditional fathering themes such as protection, discipline, and control. Their comments about the mothers of their children suggested that mothers also enacted traditional roles, such as taking the lead in daily caregiving of the children and focusing on the affective needs of the family, behaviors that would be expected of the custodial parent.

Theory

Symbolic Interactionism served as an appropriate and helpful framework for this study. The theory was used to help organize the literature review, develop the interview questionnaire, and analyze the textual data. An important contribution the theory made to this research effort was to maintain the researcher’s focus on the fathers’ own perspective of past events and present realities. For example, when asked about helpful social supports for nonresidential fathering, a number of the fathers answered with supports that

were related to the fathers' own personal characteristics rather than what the researcher would define as supports that were social in nature. Data on both social and personal supports were included in this category because the researcher followed the theory's lead in honoring the participants' sense of self.

The data that were collected fit the theory well and strongly supported the framework's focus on self-concept, the relationship between individual freedom and social constraint or support, and the importance of meanings for understanding human behavior (Klein & White, 1996). For example, one of the interesting findings from the study suggests that, at least for these 17 men, fatherhood means exercising control over children, protecting them from society's negative influences, and providing them with proper discipline and guidance. Many study participants attempted to enact these roles, even though they spent a relatively small amount of time with their children, and even though the child's mother did not necessarily invite their involvement. As Symbolic Interactionism suggests, the meaning of fatherhood for these men goes a long way in explaining their behaviors, their amount of stress as nonresidential parents, and their relative lack of success in limiting conflict with the mother of their children.

Feminist perspectives could also be employed in future studies. This suggestion is not due to a failure of Symbolic Interactionism, but to the emergence of themes from the textual data suggesting that more research needs to be conducted in the area of gender relations and co-parenting. Feminist perspectives emphasize the social construction of gender, and would be useful for examining how gender influences co-parenting, and explaining how mothers as well as fathers experience parenting after divorce or relationship dissolution.

Symbolic Interactionism recognizes that fathers and mothers construct their parenting roles based on socially desired expectations. For example, it appears that the fathers in this study defined fatherhood as involving protection and discipline, and according to the fathers, mothers defined motherhood along traditional gendered lines as well. Specifically, although these fathers had the best of intentions, their overall lack of flexibility, particularly in nurturing children, seemed to limit their success in establishing positive relationships with mothers. Feminism would allow researchers to focus more on the impacts of these gendered relations between men and women. These traditional parenting roles seem to have been challenged by the divorce or the end of the relationship, and were redefined in the context of co-parenting.

In this study, conflict ensued because mothers asserted their authority as the residential parent, and fathers saw this as a barrier to involvement with their children. Studying only fathers or only mothers provides just a partial view of these complex gendered relationships that involve issues of power and influence as well as role fulfillment. A feminist perspective would illuminate such issues.

Summary and Conclusions

In some ways, this study confirmed much of the literature on nonresidential African American father involvement. This literature has described African American fathers as caring parents, even when they spend relatively little time with their children, and this study supports that notion. In addition, the existing literature on African American families has emphasized the importance of kinship networks, and the findings of this study revealed that many fathers drew upon church and other religious resources and extended family for support and guidance. Also, the fathers' list of barriers was very similar to the list compiled in the fathering literature, with fathers reporting poor relations

with the child's mother as the most important barrier, and the sheer number of barriers significantly affecting the fathers' level of involvement (Ihinger-Tallman et al., 1995).

At the same time, this study presented information not reported in other fatherhood studies. First, contrary to past research, the fathers in this study placed the utmost importance on spending time with their children, regardless of the father's SES level (Hamer, 1998). In addition, the literature suggests that a major factor impeding the success of these fathers is their relative disadvantage as African American men.

Although clearly many minority fathers are at a disadvantage due to racism and poverty, the fathers in this sample did not report these factors to be pivotal to their fatherhood experience, but rather focused on the challenges of their nonresidential status. These findings were probably affected by the moderate SES level of the study sample and possibly by the sample's older age, although the study's emphasis on personal experience may have steered away from discussions of these more structural barriers. Finally, the fathers' reliance on social support was not as prevalent as expected and wasn't significantly associated with level of involvement. In the fathers' views, their personal characteristics were also important in determining their involvement level as fathers. These findings appear to be consistent with research suggesting that men's social support networks are not as extensive as women's and that men tend to rely on intimate partners for social support.

One of the central contributions of this study is to underscore the importance of coping behaviors as they relate to gender roles, both before and after divorce or relationship dissolution. The data presented here suggest that co-parenting is a stressful experience that often deepens problematic gender issues between fathers and mothers.

Although these ideas are not foreign to the fathering literature, they have not been a major focus for fathering researchers (Allen & Hawkins, 1999; Catlett & McKenry, 2004; Roy, 2004).

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research on African American nonresidential fathers would benefit from a feminist perspective combined with some of the concepts found in the stress and coping literature. This would enable researchers to uncover which parenting roles mothers and fathers enact prior to divorce or relationship dissolution, and then determine if expanding those parenting roles after separation lessens post-divorce stress for mothers and fathers. Research of this kind would shed more light on the important questions about parenting role changes after divorce and relationship dissolution. Ideally, future research would gather data from both mothers and fathers, and would be longitudinal in design.

This study had limited success with the Inventory of Father Involvement that other researchers on nonresidential fathers may wish to consider. One problem evident in this research was a possible response bias, in that fathers often seemed to estimate fairly high degrees of involvement despite conflicted co-parenting and other obstacles such as geographical distance. They also seemed to base their ratings of involvement according to the amount of access they are given to their children. So, for example, a father might score himself quite high on a particular item, based on what he imagines he would do if he were allowed to be more involved by the child's mother. A more productive approach may be to use an involvement measure that takes into account whether the father is living with his child or not. In addition, future research on this topic should include a measure of social desirability to detect reporting bias toward being a "good" father.

Implications for Practice

The results of this research suggest approaches to professional practice that may help to facilitate father involvement with their nonresidential children. First, fathering programs must help fathers develop an array of coping skills, particularly to deal with the co-parenting relationship. In a socially safe environment like a fathers' support group, men could discuss the stress of taking on new fathering roles and support each other in this endeavor.

In addition to encouraging new fathering roles and the use of appropriate coping skills, programs that target fathers must provide "neutral places" where fathers feel comfortable and can interact positively with their children. This must be a context for parenting and child development rather than merely a fun place to play together. This location must provide opportunities for fathers to cook meals with their children, teach them, and simply provide them with daily care. In this way, fathers could be involved in meaningful parenting in a setting where there is no conflict with the child's mother (Amato, 1998; Lamb, 2002; Stewart, 2003). Fathering programs could maximize their impact by teaching fathers new skills and providing the "neutral location" in which to practice those skills in a supportive atmosphere.

Programs targeted to families could also do more to facilitate father involvement. One of the important findings of this research is that despite common myths about African American nonresidential fathers, these men care deeply for their children. With the proper support from practitioners, these fathers could provide children with much that they presently do without. Programs must take a careful look at their structure, policies, and practices, and ensure that fathers are not treated as outsiders or simply ignored altogether. All programs that serve families can become more inclusive and welcoming

to fathers in various ways. As family professionals learn to engage fathers as parents and important members of the family, father involvement will be encouraged, and family outcomes will improve.

APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

START TAPE NOW

Thanks a lot for meeting with me and giving me some of your valuable time. I'm looking forward to hearing about your experiences fathering children that do not live with you.

Before we begin, I want you to know that you have the right to withdraw from this study at any time. You do not have to answer any question you do not wish to answer. Your name will not be used in any report. Let's go over the informed consent document together. (participant reads and signs consent form; I give him a copy)

Can you tell me a little bit about yourself? Where did you grow up? What kind of work do you do (full time, part time)? What hobbies or interests do you have?

How many children do you have? Where do they live?

ID# _____

Date/Location of Interview

NOTES

This first section of the interview is about your involvement with your children that do not live with you.

Inventory of Father Involvement

ID# _____

Think of your experience as a nonresidential father over the past twelve months. Rate how good of a job you think you did as a father on each of the items I ask you about. A zero would indicate that you did a "very poor" job, while a 6 would indicate that you did an "excellent" job. If an item is not applicable to your situation, let me know and I will circle "NA" for not applicable. Refer to the card I have given you for each of the questions.

		VERY POOR						EXCELLENT	
a.	attending events your children participate in (sports, school, church events).	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	NA
b.	encouraging your children to read.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	NA
c.	providing your children's basic needs (food, clothing, shelter, and health care).	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	NA
d.	praising your children for being good or doing the right thing.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	NA
e.	giving your children's mother encouragement and emotional support.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	NA

Rate how good of a job you think you did as a nonresidential father on...

f.	being involved in the daily or regular routine of taking care of your children's basic needs or activities. (feeding, driving them places, etc.).	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	NA
g.	letting your children know that their mother is an important and special person.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	NA
h.	praising your children for something they have done well.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	NA
i.	encouraging your children to succeed in school.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	NA
j.	being a pal or friend to your children.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	NA

Rate how good of a job you think you did as a nonresidential father on...

- k. accepting responsibility for the financial support
of the children you have fathered. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 NA
- l. encouraging your children to do their homework. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 NA
- m. telling your children that you love them. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 NA
- n. knowing where your children go and what they do
with their friends. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 NA
- o. spending time just talking with your children when
they want to talk about something. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 NA

Rate how good of a job you think you did as a nonresidential father on...

- p. cooperating with your children's mother in the
rearing of your children. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 NA
- q. reading to your younger children. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 NA
- r. teaching your children to follow rules at school. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 NA
- s. encouraging your children to continue their
schooling beyond high school. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 NA
- t. disciplining your children. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 NA

Rate how good of a job you think you did as a nonresidential father on...

- u. helping your older children with their homework. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 NA
- v. planning for your children's future (education, training). 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 NA
- w. encouraging your children to develop their talents
(music, athletics, art, etc.). 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 NA
- x. spending time with your children doing things they
like to do. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 NA
- y. encouraging your children to do their chores. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 NA
- z. setting rules and limits for your children's behavior. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 NA

Next I would like you to define the ideal father. What should the ideal father do for his children? Please put these fathering jobs in order from most important to least important.

ID# _____

Rank order roles/functions

- Provide discipline
- Provide emotional support
- Be a role model
- Provide economic support
- Spend time with children
- Teach boys to be men and girls to be women

NOTES

Some fathers report that certain barriers make it difficult for them to do a good job of fathering their nonresidential children.

ID# _____

Barriers

What barriers (obstacles) prevent you from doing a better job as a nonresidential father?
FREE LIST

Please put these barriers in order from most important to least important. RANK ORDER

NOTES

Some nonresidential fathers report that certain social supports help them in their fathering efforts.

ID# _____

Social supports

Which social supports help you in your nonresidential fathering?

FREE LIST

Please prioritize these supports from most important to least important.

RANK ORDER

NOTES

Some fathers have used certain strategies to overcome the barriers to nonresidential fathering.

Strategies

ID# _____

What strategies have you used to improve your nonresidential fathering?

OPEN-ENDED

NOTES

ID#_____

Are there any other questions I should ask you about fathering?

Is there anything else I need to know?

We are almost finished. All I need now is some basic information about you and your children.

Demographics

1. What is your age?_____
2. Which of the following best describes your living arrangement? (researcher circles)

Married and living w/spouse

- one spouse, male or female, gainfully employed
- both spouses gainfully employed

Family w/out spouse

- head has never been married
- divorced person employed full time
- separated/divorced unemployed person receiving support payments
- single person cohabiting with partner (If so, do you and your partner share expenses?)

3. How many children do you have and in how many households?

Household	# Children, age, sex
One	
Two	
Three	

4. Job_____

5. # Work hours/week _____

ID# _____

6. Occupation _____

- (1) Farm laborers/malesial service workers
- (2) Unskilled workers
- (3) Machine operators and semiskilled workers
- (4) Smaller business owners, skilled manual workers, craftsmen, and tenant farmers
- (5) Clerical and sales workers, small farm and business owners
- (6) Technicians, semiprofessionals, and small business owners
- (7) Smaller business owners, farm owners, managers, and minor professionals
- (8) Administrators, lesser professionals, and proprietors of medium-sized businesses
- (9) Higher executives, proprietors of large businesses, and major professionals

7. Education

- (1) Less than 7th grade

Highest grade completed: _____

- (2) 7th, 8th, or 9th grade

- (3) 10th or 11th grade

Which one(s) completed? _____

- (4) High school graduate or GED

Which? _____

- (5) Partial college (at least one year completed); or has completed specialized training

Number of years of college completed: _____

Type of college degree received: _____

Type of specialized training: _____

Years of specialized training completed: _____

- (6) Standard college or university graduate

Type of degree received: _____

- (7) Graduate professional training (graduate degree completed)

Type of degree received: _____

For researcher use only

ID#_____

Married and living w/spouse

- one spouse, male or female, gainfully employed (based on employed member's oc/ed)
- both spouses gainfully employed (based on oc/ed of both spouses)

Family w/out spouse

- head has never been married (head's oc/ed)
- divorced person employed full time (present head's oc/ed)
- separated/divorced unemployed person receiving support payments (status based on oc/ed of person making payments)
- Single person cohabiting with partner (if living "as married," combine oc/ed; if simply sharing quarters, use only father's oc/ed)

Factor	score	factor weight	score X weight
Occupation		5	
Education		3	

Total score

- compute for each householder
- average scores together
- scores weighted and summed
- education weighted by 3
- occupation weighted by 5
- sum of two scores ranges from 8 to 66

Hollingshead, A.B. (1975). *The four-factor index of social status*. Unpublished manuscript, Yale University, New Haven, CT.

APPENDIX B
IRB PROTOCOL

1. TITLE OF PROTOCOL:

African American fathers' perspectives: Barriers and social supports for involvement with nonresidential children.

2. PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:

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4. DATES OF PROPOSED PROTOCOL:

From August 15, 2004 To December 15, 2004

5. SOURCE OF FUNDING FOR THE PROTOCOL:

None

6. SCIENTIFIC PURPOSE OF THE INVESTIGATION:

The purpose of this study is to learn more about the barriers to nonresidential father involvement for African American men. Specifically, the research will determine how fathers define good fathering and how they rate their level of involvement with their

children. It will also determine which perceived barriers affect involvement and which are most difficult to overcome. The study also identifies what social supports encourage father involvement and which are most helpful. Finally, the study uncovers specific strategies fathers use to increase involvement with their children.

7. DESCRIBE THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY IN NON-TECHNICAL LANGUAGE.

African American fathers will be selected for a face-to-face interview lasting about one hour. The researcher will follow a printed questionnaire, read the questions, and write the answers. Some portions of the interview will be tape recorded. The first section of the questionnaire focuses on demographic characteristics, including questions about each father's age, number of children, and occupation and income. The Inventory of Father Involvement (Hawkins et al., 2002) is a measure of how well a father feels he is doing on various fathering tasks. The questionnaire also includes a series of open-ended questions that ask the participant to list or rank the fathering roles that he feels are most important, which barriers to father involvement are the most difficult to overcome, and which social supports for fathering are the most helpful. The final question asks participants to list any strategies they use to increase involvement with nonresidential children. A pre-test of the instruments will be conducted with three volunteers. Input from the pre-test will be used to make any needed revisions to instruments and methodology. There will be no follow-up phase of this study.

8. POTENTIAL BENEFITS AND ANTICIPATED RISK.

No more than minimal risk. However, any study participant who feels upset because of the interview will be offered the name of the local health center or other resources.

9. DESCRIBE HOW PARTICIPANT(S) WILL BE RECRUITED, THE NUMBER AND AGE OF THE PARTICIPANTS, AND PROPOSED COMPENSATION:

About 10 African American nonresidential fathers will be recruited for participation in the study. All fathers will be over the age of eighteen. Study participants will be located through local churches, particularly those with a predominantly African American congregation in Alachua, Bradford, or Clay County. In addition, fathering programs around the state of Florida will identify fathers who may be willing to participate in the study. Fathers who participate in the study will be asked to identify others who may be willing to participate. All fathers must have at least one child under the age of eighteen to meet the study criteria.

10. DESCRIBE THE INFORMED CONSENT PROCESS. INCLUDE A COPY OF THE INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT.

Prior to conducting the interview, each study participant will be informed of the length of the interview and the types of questions that will be asked. Participants will also read and sign an informed consent document. This document will outline the participant's right to withdraw consent at any time, skip any question that he does not wish to answer, and contact the UFIRB with any questions about participants' rights.

Principal Investigator's Signature

Supervisor's Signature

I approve this protocol for submission to the UFIRB:

Dept. Chair/Center Director Date

APPENDIX C
INFORMED CONSENT

Informed Consent

Protocol Title:

African American fathers' perspectives: Barriers and social supports for involvement with nonresidential children.

Please read this consent document carefully before you decide to participate in this study.

Purpose of the research study:

The purpose of this research study is to learn more about African American fathers who are not living with their children.

What you will be asked to do in the study:

With your permission, I will ask you a series of questions about your experience as a father. With your permission, I will audiotape a few portions of the interview.

Time required:

1 hour

Risks and benefits:

There is no particular risk or benefit of participating in this study.

Compensation:

There is no compensation for participating in this study.

Confidentiality:

Your identity will be kept confidential to the extent provided by law. Your questionnaire and audiotape will be assigned a code number. The list connecting your name to this number will be kept in a locked file in my faculty supervisor's office. When the study is completed and the data have been analyzed, the list and audiotapes will be destroyed.

Only my supervisor and myself will have access to the audiotapes and other paperwork.

Your name will not be used in any report.

Voluntary participation:

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. There is no penalty for not participating.

Right to withdraw from the study:

You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. You do not have to answer any question you do not wish to answer.

Whom to contact if you have questions about the study:

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Whom to contact about your rights as a research participant in the study:

UFIRB Office, Box 112250, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL, 32611-2250;
ph. 392-0433

Agreement:

I have read the procedure above. I voluntarily agree to participate in the procedure and I have received a copy of this description.

Participant: _____ Date: _____

Please check this box if you agree to be audiotaped.

Principal Investigator: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX D
EXAMPLE OF AN INDIVIDUAL CASE MATRIX

ID#	Child Gender and Age	Marital Status	Age	IFI Score	Work hrs/Week	Occupational Level	Educational Level	SES
1	1 female, 1.5 years old	Never-married	24	4.53	30	4	5	36

Definition of the ideal father

- Provide economic support (1st)
- Be a role model
- Provide emotional support
- Provide discipline
- Spend time w/children
- Teach boys to be men and girls to be women

Barriers (Number of Barriers-5)

- Custody arrangement
- Anger with the mother
- Distance from the child's home
- Child's age (child is very young)
- Blended family causes confusion about household rules

Social Supports (Number of Social Supports-3)

- Pictures, videos on his cell phone
- Thinking of the bright future that he has
- Father's mother is supportive

Strategies (Number of Strategies-2)

- Let the past go; peace is better
- Got another woman pregnant; has a home now with a father, mother, and child

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

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