YOUNG AFRICAN AMERICAN FATHERS: AN EXPLORATORY QUALITATIVE RESEARCH STUDY

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Abstract

This exploratory study examined the experiences of young (age 18-27) African American fathers and their transition into fatherhood. A qualitative analysis of ten interviews was completed using a grounded theory approach (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). For the past 15 years, academics, such as psychologists, social workers, anthropologists and economists, have paid close attention to fathers and issues related to fatherhood (Nelson, 2004). Such increased attention has resulted in greater government funding, the creation and sustaining of programs to support fathers’ transition to parenthood, and given rise to a national conversation about responsible fatherhood and healthy families. The media commonly engages in portraying African American fathers as “absent,” “non-residential,” “non-custodial,” “unavailable,” “non-married,” “irresponsible,” and “immature.” While this stereotype is not true for all African American families, demographic data reveal that the majority of African American children in contemporary society do not live in the same households as their biological fathers, or reside with them only periodically (Connor, 2004). Although households devoid of biological or legal fathers present are a growing concern across all ethnic groups in America, the situation is particularly alarming in the African American community (Deave & Johnson, 2008).

This study explored the experiences and needs of young African American fathers and their transition into fatherhood. Participants related their experiences as fathers, identified who they turn for help, and described the parenting skills, if any, they had learned prior to becoming a parent. In addition, participants identified the topic areas they felt should be included in future fatherhood programs and what they enjoy most about parenting.

Results from this study indicated various themes related to African American fathers’
experiences, such as peer and family support, preparation for fatherhood, positive advice for future fathers, unplanned parenthood, fatherhood involvement, and the definition of fatherhood. Implications for future research with regard to fathers, parenting programs, and mental health providers were also discussed.
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Chapter I

Purpose of Dissertation

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of young (age 18-26) African American fathers and their transition into fatherhood. Learning more about young African American fathers’ thoughts, feelings, and experiences may provide mental health, social work, and child health agencies with a clearer idea of their strengths, what they may lack, and supports that may benefit this population. Males who participated in this study discussed their experiences as fathers, identified who they turned to for help, and related the parenting skills, if any, they learned prior to becoming a parent. By understanding the experiences of young African American fathers, agencies may be better able to support them. Furthermore, this is a population about which little is known and it needs to be studied. Consequently, this dissertation will guide future mental health providers in the process of creating a sustainable program for a unique population’s needs. For those interested in culturally appropriate methods of intervention, it will model how to reach out into the community for resources to address the psychological needs of clients, and expand the scope and delivery of psychological services to those who would not otherwise seek mental health services.
Chapter II
Review of Literature

For the past 15 years, academic fields such as psychology, social work, anthropology, and economics have paid close attention to fathers and issues related to fatherhood (Nelson, 2004), yet little research exists discussing how males prepare for becoming a father, identifying their needs as expectant fathers, or analyzing the factors that distinguish males who are willing to take on the responsibility of fatherhood from those who are not (Hinckley, Ferreira & Maree, 2007). Qualitative data suggests that even when an unplanned pregnancy occurs, low-income minority expectant fathers greet the news of a potential child with some degree of excitement (Nelson, 2004). It would be useful to identify strategies to assist these males with transitioning into fatherhood.

This dissertation will review findings about the experiences of young African American fathers. The next three sections will discuss family formation, a historical perspective of fatherhood, and how the role of fatherhood has evolved over time. Lastly, the needs of young African American fathers and the impact of father absence within the African American family will be discussed. It is clear that father absence within the African American family can have negative consequences for children. Thus, it is useful to identify the needs of young African American fathers and how those needs may be addressed so that they may remain present in their children’s lives.

The media appears to reflect a popular perception of fathers as uninvolved, in denial, or only providing tangible support to their children (monetary, transportation, etc.). However, even this grudging acknowledgment of the father as breadwinner is eroding as various sitcoms, reality television shows, and cartoons have replaced the
traditional family structure with the presence of dual income, single-parent, blended, and extended family households (Kelly, 2009).

The transition to fatherhood and family formation is a major developmental period for which first-time fathers are often underprepared (Deave & Johnson, 2008). Trends of family formation have changed over the past several decades. Child Trend’s study (as cited in Fagan & Bernd, 2007) found recent data suggesting that 18% of children are born to women younger than 20 years of age. In addition, the younger the man is when he becomes a father, the more likely it is that the transition to fatherhood is unplanned (Astone et al., 2010). This information is alarming because younger parents tend to experience more stress and young fathers tend to be less involved, whether due to financial difficulties or feeling ill-equipped to fulfill the role of fatherhood (Fagan & Bernd, 2007).

Parenting programs designed to assist with decreasing adolescent fathers’ stress and increasing their involvement with their children (Fagan & Bernd, 2007) are likely to prove to be successful, since most young fathers are motivated to maintain a relationship with their children and their children’s mother after the children’s birth (Deave & Johnson, 2008; Deslauriers et al., 2012). Unfortunately, of the many efforts and programs geared towards parenting, most are targeted towards mothers—and a significant gap exists between the supports available for mothers and those for fathers. In the “information age,” a great deal of parenting education is offered in the form of books, magazines, internet, and television; however, here too, the focus is often women entering motherhood (Hinckley et al., 2007). Pots (2000) states, “Since the Great Depression, government efforts to help the poor have mostly targeted poor mothers with young
children” (p. 22). Consequently, it is important for parenting programs to ensure that adolescent expectant fathers understand the importance of their role prior to their child’s birth (Fagan & Bernd, 2007), and have a strong involvement before and after such birth.

The literature has shown that involving both parties can have a more sustainable effect on parenting (Fagan & Bernd, 2007). While there is no lack of existing programs to prepare expectant parents for their new role, fathers can be treated as an after-thought: neglected and left out of these preparations, efforts, and prevention interventions. Manifestations of the neglect can come in the form of gender-specific brochures or language geared towards the mother, or relegating the father to passive participation in prenatal or postpartum classes. The communication of such attitudes may imply to fathers that the antenatal stage is solely of concern to mothers and may lead to lessened involvement of fathers throughout their children’s lives (Fagan & Bernd, 2007). Such service providers’ and social institutions’ focus on preparing women for motherhood versus fathers for fatherhood (Hinckley et al., 2007) contradicts the seemingly most effective model for raising a child—collaborative parenting.

The responsibility of the father in contemporary times has expanded from primarily an economic role as breadwinner to encompass nurturing as well. Fathers play a significant role in shaping family life and greatly shape the developmental trajectory of infants (Hinckley et al., 2007). A father’s interaction with his children will influence how his children in turn interact with their own children (Forste, Bartkowski & Jackson, 2009). Unfortunately, the growth in single-parent households over the past several decades suggests that an increasing proportion of men may not be performing either the traditional or contemporary functions associated with fatherhood—they do not live with
their offspring, pay any or adequate child support, or even maintain contact with their children (Nelson, 2004). Deslauriers et al. (2012) stated:

Many young men believe that the father’s primary role is to be a good provider; any inability in this regard heightens the internal conflict they feel when they realize that they may have a hard time meeting the expectations placed on them. (p. 67)

As the genesis of the single-parent household is often due to the father being young, he and his partner being unmarried, and a lack of financial stability (Nelson, 2004), it is important to assist young African American fathers with employment opportunities, maintaining a positive relationship with the mother of his child, and helping him prioritize while motivated to accept his paternal responsibility.

Motherhood can appear intuitive for females and, in many cases it is more expected. This can be ascribed to instances such as childhood play, mothers modeling motherhood roles to their daughters, and a biological connection between a mother and her child (Hinckley et al., 2007; Rotundo, 1985). On the other hand, for fathers, formal learning may be necessary, especially given the widespread nature of female-headed single-parent households in which young fathers may feel disregarded and ill-informed from the time of their child’s infancy (Hinckley, 2007). Young males living in these households may miss out on the opportunity of having fatherhood modeled for them. This absence may lead them to look to negative or misleading role models as a reference for fatherhood or manhood, such as gangs and/or media figures and images. Karen Guzzo (2011) describes the modeling hypothesis wherein an individual’s behaviors can be learned from people who are important to him. Based on the modeling hypothesis, a
young man can use his experiences with his father representing a key figure in the household as a model to interact with his children in the future (Guzzo, 2011).

The positive impact of father presence in his children’s lives is beneficial for fathers as well as children. Parental involvement with children may help to promote the father’s psychological development, contribute to his self-esteem, and strengthen the father-child relationship (Fagan & Bernd, 2007). Despite the vital roles that fathers can play in children’s development, they are often uninformed and uneducated about what is expected of them, frequently resulting in their entering their fathering roles poorly or not at all (Hinckley et al., 2007). The transition to fatherhood can become overwhelming and often produces anxiety (Fagan & Bernd, 2007). When men feel underprepared to accept their fatherhood role, their ability to ask for information may be hampered by their pride and fear of embarrassment. Consequently, it would be beneficial for programs to clarify the role of a contemporary father, what his responsibilities as a father entail, what he can expect as a dad, and the positive consequences of staying involved in his child’s life.

The literature concerning fatherhood has established many negative outcomes that stem from the absence of a father, ranging from increased poverty—fatherhood absence makes children five times more likely to be poor, repeating the pattern of teenage parenthood, lowered educational outcomes, and a greater likelihood of going to prison (Pots, 2000). Despite the excitement and eagerness expectant father’s experience, efforts to capitalize on such heightened motivation have not been pursued (Nelson, 2007). In addition, regardless of the initial enthusiasm and desire to be a good father most males feel when anticipating a child, research suggests that the quality of parenting can be compromised if no adequate preparation is done prior to the child’s birth.
Premodern Fatherhood

At the beginning of American history, families consisted of a mother, father, and children, wherein fathers maintained the role of head of the household (the “nuclear family”). Fathers were depended upon to provide the financial support for their family, and often took on the role of assisting children with growth and development. According to Rotundo (1985), the majority of men during the time period of 1620-1800’s were farmers whose efforts fed their families and provided for a limited amount of trade for their neighbors.

According to Rotundo (1985), a major source of the father’s power was his ownership and control over all family property, thus allowing him to direct when his children would or would not get married and when to grant male children independence (Rotundo, 1985). The father was also the family disciplinarian (Rotundo, 1985). During this time, roles were strictly differentiated and daily activities were pre-determined based upon gender (Rotundo, 1985). Mothers taught daughters basic motherhood and wife skills, such as cooking and nurturing children. On the other hand, the son learned from the father basic farming and business skills. Although imparting to children skills needed for survival was divided on gender lines, fathers bore the responsibility for both his sons’ and daughters’ spiritual and moral growth and development (Rotundo, 1985).

Fathers often showed a keen interest in their toddlers and infants, but it was the mothers who fed, nurtured, and established relational bonds with the children. Fathers became more involved with their children when they were around the age of three, teaching them about moral values. In addition, gender roles became more solidified, as fathers began to work more with their sons and mothers with daughters (Rotundo, 1985).
According to Rotundo (1985), as time progressed, patriarchal norms began to decline. As the amount of land available decreased, a father could no longer promise his son a farm of his own at adulthood. Furthermore, a new notion of womanhood emerged, with women being perceived as more spiritual, endearing, and moral than men (Rotundo, 1985).

**Modern Fatherhood**

According to Rotundo (1985), at the end of the 1700’s and the beginning of the 1800’s, the economic unit based in the household began to change as the home-based agricultural lifestyle expanded. Many farmers in the northeast started to participate in the market economy, producing cash crops for consumers beyond the borders of their own villages. Eventually staying at home, working one’s own land, and the family-focused economy were replaced by businesses as the heart of the economy (Rotundo, 1985). Fathers who had engaged in farming the family land passed in and out the house many times during the day. The new middle-class father—the clerks, lawyers, and the businessmen of the 1800’s—became less and less a presence within the home as he pursued work in offices and other places of business (Rotundo, 1985).

Mothers stayed at home with their children and served as nurturers, providing them with their education and spiritual uplift. Despite the decline in patriarchy, fathers still remained the head of the household due to their role as breadwinner (Rotundo, 1985). This remained the status quo for a long time.

**Postmodern Fatherhood**

As the economic pressures on the family accelerated, reaching a peak in the 1970’s with the combined factors of rising inflation and male unemployment, women
were being pushed into the workforce in large numbers (Rotundo, 1985). Under these circumstances, it began to be more difficult to sustain the father’s claim to be the most knowledgeable member of the household with his worldly skills, and his role as head of household began to disappear. Furthermore, as more women were in the workforce, the need became greater for fathers to participate in taking care of children (Rotundo, 1985). Another component to the shrinking role of fatherhood within the household arose with increased divorce rates (Rotundo, 1985). It became even more difficult for a father to carve his space out in a home in which he did not live.

As American values began to change over time, particularly with the advent of the Women’s Movement, a new concept of fatherhood began to emerge—a form of child-rearing wherein the father is more engaged in the day-to-day lives of his children, and involved in a more expressive and intimate relationship with his sons. Rotundo (1985) labeled this “androgynous fatherhood,” a pattern which encompasses a substantial recasting of American manhood, womanhood, and family life. It demands new emotional styles, entails different notions of male and female, and requires men to surrender authority to their wives in return for a greater measure of involvement with their children (Rotundo, 1985). Furthermore, as time progressed, fathers began to play a large role in the socialization of their children that fathers were often disconnected from during the premodern and modern stages of fatherhood.

**Young African American Expectant Father Needs**

The media commonly engages in portraying African American fathers as “absent,” “non-residential,” “non-custodial,” “unavailable,” “non-married,” “irresponsible,” and “immature.” While this stereotype is not true for all African
American families, demographic data reveal that the majority of African American children in contemporary society do not live in the same households as their biological fathers, or reside with them only periodically (Connor, 2004). Although households devoid of biological or legal fathers present are a growing concern across all ethnic groups in America, the situation is particularly alarming in the African American community (Deave & Johnson, 2008).

A critical turning point in life occurs when a man becomes a father (Connor & White, 2007). Guiding and caring for children is not only developmentally and psychologically important to the child, but is central to the father’s psychological growth and well-being (Deave & Johnson, 2008). Pruitt (as cited in Connor & White, 2007) uses the term “fatherneed” to describe the powerful physical, psychological, and emotional force that pulls men to children (related or not) just as it pulls children to men to shape, enrich, and expand each other’s lives.

According to Pruitt, fatherneed is central to the father’s growth and happiness: there is a deep need in men to provide fathering, paralleling the need in children to experience fathering. When fatherneed is unfulfilled because of father abuse; alcoholism; father absence; or emotional distance between children and biological, social, or surrogate fathers, children experience an emotional void, characterized by emotional emptiness and psychological scars, which may be carried into adulthood (Connor & White, 2007). When childbirth education fails to acknowledge the needs of men and recognize their role, everyone misses out—fathers who are deprived of knowledge, couples who lose an opportunity to strengthen their relational bond, children who suffer as a result of lack of father involvement, parenting educators, and society (Lemay, 2010).
In addition, the direct involvement of the father in the process of childbirth will allow them to feel included rather than to serve just as witnesses. Thus, it is important for fathers to be incorporated within the prenatal process so that they will have a better understanding of the process and transition of becoming a parent.

Despite their vital role in children’s development, fathers are often uninformed and uneducated about what is expected in their role, frequently leading them to enter their fathering careers poorly prepared. According to Hinckley et al. (2007), fathers often feel that they are insufficiently aware of a wide range of important issues they will encounter, for example, a woman’s mood swings during pregnancy, what a father should expect during labor, how to cope with postnatal depression, what to do when babies cry, basic information about breastfeeding and bottle feeding, as well as when to resume sexual intercourse after the birth of a child (Hinckley et al., 2007). Supporting expectant fathers by educating them with regard to such topics would empower the father, allow him to be of more assistance to the expectant mother, and permit him to carve his space out in the prenatal process with the expectant mother. In addition, increasing the opportunity for fathers to empower themselves allows them to see that they are not alone in seeking guidance on parenting, thus mitigating the embarrassment that may surround asking for help.

**Effects of Parenting Education and Programs for Fathers**

More interventions are being created to educate expectant and new parents in parenting skills, coping with stressors, promoting positive interactions between partners, and stimulating child development (Pinquart & Teubert, 2010). In their meta-analysis, Pinquart and Teubert (2010) included 142 studies on interventions which started during
pregnancy or in the first six months after birth, and found that most interventions commenced after birth. The majority of these included only mothers, who averaged 24.3 years old. The main goals of the interventions were teaching infant care, promoting prenatal sensitivity and responsiveness, promoting cognitive stimulation of the child, counseling and discussion of future family planning, health promotion, prevention of child abuse, and promotion of couple adjustment/marital adjustment.

After-birth interventions and high women participation continues to be the trend. To improve preparation for both male and female parents, however, interventions targeted at educating parents and/or preventing negative parenting behaviors ideally should begin during the antenatal stage and include a strong component which incorporates fathers (Pinquart & Teubert, 2010). The latter has the potential not only to help fathers, but to lessen the conflict that arises when differences in parental responses about caring for a baby take place.

A father’s emotional state can affect his ability to father (Halle et al., 2008). When describing the attitudes, expectations and feelings their participants had regarding fatherhood, Halle et al. (2008) stated, “The majority of young fathers were overjoyed and pleased when they learned of their partner’s pregnancy and nearly all fathers felt this way well into the pregnancy” (p. 60). Early interventions—taking advantage of a father’s desire to do the very best within the period from conception, prior to childbirth and through the early months of fatherhood—will facilitate fathers becoming proactive versus reactive participants in parenthood, provide young fathers with reinforcement that their fathering skills are improving, and help to mitigate any stress a father, especially a first-time father, may have with regard to parenting (Halle et al., 2008). Fathers need help
learning how to feed and soothe their baby, cope with severe sleep deprivation, and
develop emotional support within their family, and so on.

As discussed previously, the main focus of antenatal education is usually directed
toward the needs and experiences of women during labor and delivery. Literature and the
media are increasingly acknowledging, however, the contemporary father who has
ventured beyond the sole function of breadwinner and provider. This contemporary father
wants to share his experiences of fatherhood and demonstrate that he is highly involved
in his parenting role. As both wisdom and the literature suggest that fatherhood
involvement is beneficial for the family and children’s development and well-being
(Berger & Langton, 2011; Halle et al., 2008), there has been an increased societal
investment in establishing programs promoting responsible fatherhood over the last two
decades. Such programs vary in terms of the target population and outcomes they are
designed to affect; however, the common goal is responsible fatherhood (Tinkew,
Burkhauser, & Metz, 2012).

In their study, Tinkew, Burkhauser, and Metz (2012) review key evaluation
findings from a non-exhaustive list of twelve rigorously evaluated fatherhood programs.
They concluded that an effective fatherhood program should incorporate teaching
methods appropriate to the culture of the populations, experienced and empathetic staff,
high staff-participant ratios, an emphasis geared towards core issues, use of theoretical
approaches, individual support for fathers, participation incentives, mentoring, and
interactive service delivery (Tinkew et al., 2012).

Although the authors were able to outline a list of fifteen promising practices for
the design and implementation of fatherhood programs, they noted the limited evidence
base on effective interventions for fathers. Few of the programs they reviewed met every
criterion for rigorous evaluation. Another issue of concern is that few of the programs
developed for fathers have been replicated, which may be due to the unique needs and
characteristics of each father within a specific population.

Tinkew et al. (2012) suggest that researchers and health and mental health
professionals need to begin focusing on strengthening implementation of fatherhood
programs consistent with the orientation by policymakers and researchers toward
evidence-based programs in human services. This requires such researchers and
implementers to help facilitate program replication and ensure that programs fit criteria to
succeed a rigorous evaluation within a well-designed control trial.

A well-designed randomized control trial clearly describes the intervention
including who implemented it, who received it, and at what cost; how the intervention
differed from what the control group received; and the logic of how the intervention is
supposed to affect outcomes (Norcross, Beutler, & Levant, 2006). Furthermore, a well-
designed randomized control trial is valid: the study accurately measures the true
outcome that the intervention is designed to affect (internal validity), and the study can be
generalized to other people or settings (external validity). Besides the quality of the
study, as described above, an intervention is considered to display “strong” evidence
when the trials prove to be effective in more than one site of implementation. This is
important because a single sign of effectiveness within an intervention can occur by
chance. While randomized control trials are used as the gold standard, this type of design
also has limitations, such as external validity and the cost to conduct the study.
Consequently, it may be useful for Congress to allocate funds towards the sustainability and replication of fatherhood programs.
Chapter III

Methods

Participants

A network sampling approach was used in order to acquire participants. The subjects of this study were young African American fathers, between the ages of 18 and 27 years of age. The participants were 10 African American males between the ages of 22 and 27 years old. Twenty percent of fathers who participated (two fathers) had two children, while the majority of participants (eight fathers, 80%) fathered only one child. Most participants (six fathers, 60%) fathered daughters, while the other 40% (four fathers) fathered sons.

Due to the qualitative nature of the study and the in-depth design of the interview, the sample size was small. Many of the men can be considered of low socioeconomic status; some were jobless, live with parents, and/or receive public assistance, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), etc. Lastly, these men all valued some aspect of the role of being a father and were open to improving their skills as parents.

Procedures

The researcher met with each potential participant of the sample. The researcher introduced himself and provided a brief overview of the study. Each was given consent forms to complete. The first 10 males to return their consent forms were selected to participate in the study and a date to complete the interview was scheduled. A waiting list was established for those who submitted consent forms after the first 10 men. In the
event that someone selected for the study was unable to be interviewed, the researcher pulled from the waiting list in the order that forms were received.

**Consent Form**

The researcher collected each consent form completed by the participants. The consent form explained the purpose and procedures for participation, risk and benefits of the study, confidentiality and limits to confidentiality, and provided contact information for all individuals affiliated with the study. (See Appendix C.) The consent form also explained that the study is completely voluntary and participants had the right to decline participation at any time during the interview process. The consent form also asked for permission to audio record the interview, although participation was not conditioned upon consent and participants could decline audio taping the interviews with no penalty.

**Background Information and Interview**

Prior to the start of the interview, participants were asked to take a few minutes to fill out a background information form (see Appendix A), which asked questions regarding the participant’s age, educational attainment, and ethnicity. Participants also provided their initials on the background information form. Later, the researcher assigned a code for each participant. The interview was broken into three parts: Fatherhood Experience, Fatherhood Emotional Encounters, and Fatherhood Need (see Appendix B). All participants gave permission for the interviews to be audio recorded and participants were informed that the interviewer would also be taking notes as responses were provided, to ensure accuracy. Participants were given the opportunity to ask questions at the end of the interview and thanked for their participation in the interview. Finally, each
participant was informed that he could call the researcher if he had any concerns or questions about the study.

**Treatment of Data**

**Consent and Background Information Forms**

The consent forms were kept in a locked storage file cabinet at the home of the researcher. Data from the background information form was used to categorize participants based on age and ethnicity, and each participant was assigned a code in order to keep his name confidential.

**Interview Data**

Hard copies of interview data and audiotapes were stored in a secure location (locked file cabinet) in the researcher’s home and no one other than the researcher has access to this information. Once the data was transcribed, the information was transferred into a password protected computer database at the researcher’s residence. Three years after completion of the research, all documents with identifying information will be shredded and the researcher will erase any audiotapes after publication. (See Appendix D.)

**Data Collection**

This study utilized interviews as the method for obtaining data from subjects recruited based upon the aforementioned methods of recruitment. The length of the interview ranged from 45-70 minutes each and no subject was interviewed more than once. All participants received the same interview questions. The questions were both closed and open ended and, at the close of the interview, participants had the opportunity
to address any related issues that were not covered with the structured interview questions. (See Appendix B for a list of interview questions.)

Data Analysis

Once all the interviews were conducted, this researcher used the Strauss and Corbin (2008) method of analyzing the data. This method does not use statistical procedures or other quantification methods to interpret findings. Their method is based on grounded theory, in which the research generates hypotheses based on the data collected from the interviews. The data was analyzed according to grounded theory, which involves several steps in coding data from the interviews. Open coding examines the interviews in their entirety, and information is broken up to identify conceptual categories. This provides a foundation for understanding the data and further coding procedures. The next level of coding, which often overlaps with open coding, is axial coding. Axial coding in grounded theory is the process of relating concepts and categories to each other based on inductive and deductive thinking. This involves collapsing the concept categories by finding connections and relationships between the different concepts obtained through open coding. The final step in the process is selective coding to generate a core or central category based on all the responses and coding procedures (Strauss & Corbin, 2008). This researcher used this strategy with this study. The responses from the interviews were broken down first by specific concepts, then these concepts were developed into more refined categories, and, finally, themes of the interviews were identified.
Chapter IV

Results

In this section, the responses of the participants will be outlined. The interview was structured into three major sections: fatherhood experience, fatherhood emotional encounters, and fatherhood need. There were several interview questions that followed each section and were organized within the results accordingly.

Fatherhood Experience

This segment of questions focused on exploring participants’ experiences before and after becoming a father. The following experiences were discussed: pre/postnatal childcare, advice for future and current fathers, childhood reflection, parenting skills, and fatherhood preparation.

Experience with Children Prior to Becoming a Father

When asked what their experiences with children and childcare were prior to becoming a father, the majority of fathers (six responses, 60%) stated they had little to no experience taking care of children prior to having their own. Although respondent 3, age 24, had limited interaction with children prior to his own, he did enjoy children’s company. He stated, “Children were always fun, but you could always give them back when they’re not yours. I never really disliked kids before I even had one. I used to play with kids all the time.” Although limited, respondent 2, age 22, enjoyed interaction with children during family holiday gatherings. Respondent 2 stated, “I haven’t had much experience….Here and there at holiday events with younger cousins, but that’s pretty much it.”
Four participants (40%) stated they had experience taking care of children due to babysitting. Respondent 1, age 26, stated, “A lot of my friends have kids, so I was always around children. I love kids; I’m every kid’s uncle and I try to help out as much as I can, being that I saw parenting was a stressful job and now I’m in the fire myself.” Four interviewees (40%) had experience taking care of children, such as their siblings or family members. Respondent 8, age 22, stated, “My sister was basically like my baby.”

Similarly, respondent 4, age 25, stated:

I had a lot of experience. I have a lot of younger relatives from like ages 16 to a couple weeks, so I’ve always been around kids. My mom had six other brothers and sisters, so it was always a bunch of relatives, a bunch of kids. At one point, it was a time when it was only me and I had two younger cousins, and now it’s about like eight or nine of them now. Every year, it’s another kid being born, and there will be a gap of like one to two years, and then someone else is popping out a kid. I have a lot of experience just being around them; having to watch them.

Three respondents (30%) stated they did not like interacting with children other than their own. Respondent 5, age 24, stated, “Besides my son and my goddaughter, I am not big on kids. I didn’t really have much contact with children before having my own, and I never put myself in the position to be around children, such as babysitting.” Similarly, respondent 7, age 22, stated:

I never really liked being with kids too much. They’re cool, especially if they’re your family, but besides that, I’m not going to go to a playground to be with a bunch of kids; never really liked them that much honestly.”
Of these responses, the most frequent response among participants revealed that they had little to no childcare experience. Respondent, 9, age 23, spoke about his lack of childcare experience and his dislike for children:

I didn’t like kids. I still probably don’t like kids. As a father, I can sit back and admire the relationship between a parent and a child, but, prior to that, I did not want anything to do with kids. I didn’t want to hear kids, hear noise made by kids, hear conversation about kids. I just didn’t have any tolerance for kids.

**Prenatal Experience**

Participants were asked to describe their experience as fathers-to-be and taking care of the mother of their child(ren) during the prenatal stage. Five of the participants (50%) stated they felt unprepared and inexperienced during the prenatal stage. Respondent 6 stated, “Everything was all instinct.” This sentiment was shared by at least half of the participants within the study. Respondent 2 described his experience during the prenatal process. He stated:

When my girlfriend and I went to classes, they weren’t really geared towards men. They try to make sure that you’re engaged in the process as much as possible but, essentially, it is geared towards women. I was kind of just sitting there for the most part. They really don’t say that much to [fathers]. For instance, they say when the women are breastfeeding you can rub the child just so they know you’re there also; just to have you a part of it somehow.

Three fathers (30%) who maintained little knowledge about the prenatal process stated they read books or watched television to learn more about the prenatal process. Respondent 1 didn’t attend parenting courses with his girlfriend; instead he read a book
to learn more about the prenatal process and parenting. He still felt unprepared nevertheless. Respondent 1 stated:

I read the book *What to Expect when Expecting* (Murkoff & Mazel, 2008) and I saw the movie when it came out, but it didn’t necessarily teach anything. Reading the book helped because it helped you get a perspective of all the things that could happen to a woman, [but] there’s nothing a man can really do but try to be there. We just try to be there and be helpful as much as we can and that’s pretty much it. You read, you ask questions—“Are you taking your vitamins?”—things of that nature, because that’s all you know. That’s all you hear.

Similarly, respondent 3 stated, “I bought a book called *First Years*” (Jones & Jones, 2007). Respondent 10 described his girlfriend encouraging him to learn more about the prenatal process. He stated:

Prior to [my girlfriend’s pregnancy], I didn’t know, but I…more like she bought me a book (laughs) and I read it. I learned that prenatal care is more emotional and hormonal than anything. You can avoid taking all of the vitamins and drugs if you keep a balanced diet, and balanced emotional state. I did not go to any prenatal courses, just her doctor’s appointments.

Three fathers (30%) stated they felt prepared to assist and be involved in the prenatal process with their child’s mother. Respondent 5 stated, “Once she told me about the pregnancy, I would ask her about prenatal vitamins, and check in regarding her doctor appointments, things like that.” Similarly, respondent 7 stated, “It wasn’t too hard making her feel comfortable. I always asked her if she needed water because the doctor had said that she needs a lot of water.”
Although respondent 4 did feel prepared for the prenatal stages of his baby’s mother’s pregnancy, he often did not foresee the other difficulties that a pregnancy may bring, such as hormonal changes and increased financial need. Respondent 4 reported:

I did feel like I was prepared as far as the prenatal standpoint, but it was times where I felt like I wasn’t living up to her expectations because we would have a lot of arguments about finances. Financially we would have a lot of run-ins, because when she was pregnant she was so angry at me. But I had never gotten anyone pregnant before. It never got that far to see the symptoms. I didn’t think it was true that when your girl gets pregnant you gain weight. I’m like, that’s nonsense, but I actually see myself gaining weight, and then aside from her being pregnant and arguments, I wasn’t happy with my physical appearance, so that just added to the depression, and then money wasn’t coming in fast enough, and it was just like, how am I going to do this, and the third. At that point, I was able to get food stamps to add up. Every Sunday, I was going to BJ’s and getting a lot of food just to take to her house so she could eat whatever she needed.

Two fathers (20%) did not participate in the prenatal stages of their child’s birth due to their not being informed of the pregnancy or residing in a different state. Respondent 8 stated, “I actually didn’t know she was going to have a child. I didn’t know I had a son until the day of his birth and didn’t have a [paternity] test to know he was mine or not. A year before he was born, I had nothing to do with her at all.” Respondent 9 stated:

That’s something I am looking forward to experiencing with my next child. Because I was in the academy for border patrol, so I couldn’t be there for most of it. But the situations that happened while my daughter was still in her mother’s
stomach…we just didn’t have that type of relationship. I don’t even think I really wanted to be involved with that.

**Postnatal Preparation**

Participants were asked to describe their experience taking care of their child and the mother of their child during the postnatal stage. Six fathers (60%) felt prepared to care for their children during this stage. When asked about his postnatal experience, respondent 8 simply stated, “Yeah, I did all that stuff.” Respondent 3 reflected on the tasks that he completed, he stated:

It wasn’t hard to feed the baby, it was just bottles of Similac and pour it in the bottle, and that was that. That wasn’t too hard, but like the cereal and stuff where you have to measure out how many teaspoons or all kinds of nonsense, it wasn’t that hard to cook from the box, but you know what I mean. Feeding her was easy, more of the burping and changing Pampers was difficult.

Respondent 2 felt more involved during this stage. He stated, “After my daughter was born, the doctors were talking more to both of us [Respondent 2 and girlfriend] rather than just the mother. [W]hen we go to the doctor, I feel like I am more a part of the conversation.”

Of those fathers who felt prepared, two (20%) stated they had previous postnatal experience with siblings and/or family members. Respondent 5 explained:

My sister’s kid is about the same age as mine, so she let me practice on him. I brought a lot of books to read, and I learned how to change my son, feed him, burp him, and how to calm him down when he cries.
Similarly, respondent 1 stated, “I was already familiar with that because I have a younger sister that I am ten years older than, so I was changing diapers when I was 10.”

Three fathers (30%) felt unprepared to care for their children during the postnatal stage. When respondent 10 was asked if he felt prepared for postnatal care, he quickly exclaimed, “Oh no!” Respondent 6 often relied on his female family members. He stated, “Well, I know how to feed a kid but changing diapers, no. My nephews are usually around, but I didn’t have to change diapers for them.” For respondent 9, postnatal care was a totally new experience. He stated:

It was all new. I think I kept it a secret right until I couldn’t keep it a secret anymore. I wasn’t getting any advice from my dad or mom, it was just, “Hey dad, come over….I have a baby over here.” My aunt she actually knew….Everything was just going as it was. I remember the first time I saw my daughter and I picked her up, and she just had this look on her face like, “You know, you don’t know anything about holding no baby.” I didn’t want to even touch her, because I thought I might break her because she was so small. I just learn[ed] everything as I went. Even in my family, my cousins and all of us, we all grew up around the same age, so we didn’t have any experience with babies. So, I didn’t really know anything at all.

Although he felt prepared, respondent 4 still felt a sense of discomfort. Many of his skills were learned over time. Respondent 4 stated:

I was more scared when he was so young. He was so fragile, so sometimes I wouldn’t want to touch him. I was so paranoid, when he would be asleep, I would hear a cough and I would jump up wondering what’s going on. When he
was younger, he had really bad acid reflux, so anything he ate or drank he was throwing up. At one point, it was so bad we had to take him to the hospital. It was a lot of thoughts running through my head, between that and you hear about sudden infant death syndrome. After a while, once his mom started working, he was about 3-4 months, there was times where I was just left alone with him for like 8 hours, and I used to be paranoid like nah, I can’t do this. He would be crying, and I didn’t know why he’s crying, and I would text her and she would be like, I’m at work, you have to figure it out. But after about 6-7 months, I kind of had it down, even a little younger than that. I kind of got used to it, but I forced myself to be there every day, like I got to figure this out. He started to develop a pattern, so I know when he’s hungry or when his diaper needs changing.

**Fatherhood Preparation**

Participants were asked if they prepared for fatherhood physically, emotionally, and mentally. Their responses were separated by each of these three topics.

**Physical preparation.** Five of the fathers (50%) reported that they did not prepare physically for fatherhood. Respondent 3 simply answered, “I didn’t.” Similarly, respondent 6 stated, “I don’t think I did anything.” In addition, respondent 5 stated:

I didn’t. By the time I figured out that I was having a kid, I had to tell my mom, dad, my girlfriend, that I was having a kid with another girl. My best friend, his daughter was born two months after mine, and I was like, “Well, I guess we can go through this thing together.” We kind of just fed off of each other and shared our experiences. It was fate that it worked out that way. We both told each other and were shocked and just laughed about it.
Lastly, respondent 9 stated, “I can’t really say I prepared at all. It was something that….I guess, physically we know how it got there, but that’s pretty much it. I can’t really say I prepared for anything physically.”

Two fathers (20%) stated that they exercised for physical preparation. Respondent 1 stated, “I had to stay in shape (laughs), because I don’t want to be that dad.” Similarly, respondent 8 stated, “I worked out a lot.” Respondents 2 and 4 (20%) stated they prepared physically by improving their money management skills. Respondent 2 stated, “I guess my mindset started to change as far as how I handled money or how I planned things. I don’t know if this counts as physical, but clearing my mind on everything except things that dealt with her.” Respondent 4 also tried to put as much money aside as possible. He stated:

Physically, between just trying to put my pennies to the side, not putting myself first anymore, trying to work on my own issues [of being angry or my mental state], just trying to zero in and put that thinking cap on of a father even though I never really knew how to do it.

Although somewhat ambivalent regarding his preparation, respondent 7 stated that he focused on his time management skills. He stated:

I don’t think there was a preparation. Everything was time management; asking myself ‘What am I going to do with my time now?’ I would try to make sure I was there for my girlfriend for whatever she needed, and taking care of whatever I needed to do as well.

Respondent 10 reported he prepared for fatherhood by searching for a job. He stated:
I can’t say that I prepared per se. I think it was more so on job preparation. It’s more so rearranging your sleeping habits, and rearranging your personal habits, such as when you want to watch TV, when you want to go get something to eat, and incorporating another life. That’s probably the most difficult part; always remembering that it’s not just you.

Similar to fathers who stated that they did not prepare, fathers who did identify a form of preparation still felt somewhat unprepared or ambivalent about their preparation. Those who expressed ambivalence questioned whether or not there is a true way to prepare for fatherhood and, admittedly, stated that they were unsure if they knew how to prepare.

Respondent 1 stated:

I mean there really isn’t anything you could do to prepare. It kind of helps that my sleeping patterns are off because most newborn sleeping patterns are too, so there are days that I can be up longer than others to help out.

Similarly, respondent 4 stated:

It was more of a learning process, even still right now, it’s still like everything I know right now of being a father, was all just from making mistakes; like a trial and error. Just trying to do what I thought a father was supposed to do, and taking a little bit of insight from other fathers that I did speak with, and even my mom from having to raise me for a while by herself. There was only but so much [my mother] could tell me. It was pretty much learned how to do what I do now.

The question of how to prepare was common among fathers. Respondent 6 stated:
How do you prepare yourself to be a father? How can you prepare yourself? You just have to step up or be one of them other b*tch dudes who like, “Aw sh*t she pregnant; I’m about to leave.” I stuck around; you just have to man up.

**Emotional preparation.** Four fathers (40%) stated that they did not have any emotional preparation. Although fathers reported that there was no emotional preparation, most fathers used words which would imply that emotions were involved when thinking about their fatherhood role. Some emotions reported included joy, fear, anxiety, and excitement. Respondent 2 stated, “I don’t think it’s taken too much of an emotional affect. It’s just a feeling….It’s unexplainable, but it’s just a grand feeling when she looks at you or smiles. It’s something that I could have never imagined before.” Respondent 3 stated, “To tell you the truth, I thought it was going to be worse than what it was. I thought it was going to be a crying baby all night and my hair going bald.” Respondent 6 described his emotional connection with his child developing over time, and stated:

   Emotionally, I mean, I’m not going to lie, while she was pregnant with the baby, I mean, probably a lot of fathers feel this way too. While they’re pregnant as much as you love the thought, “that’s my baby in there,” or you have a doubt but you like, “you know, that’s my baby in there,” or that’s the mother of my child, so I’m going to be there, but you don’t have that bond with the baby yet. There is no emotional attachment to that baby. There is none. To me, there wasn’t any until she came out and I had to deal with her for the first two weeks. When my daughter was born, my girlfriend had a migraine, like a spinal headache. She couldn’t do anything for like the first two [or] three weeks, nothing! She stood up, problem, she walk, that’s a problem, light is on, problem, she like “aaah,” that’s a
problem. So I dealt with my daughter for the first two weeks of everything, whether it was feeding, I knew her schedule. I knew everything about that little girl. And that’s it right there, I mean, I don’t know. All you got to do is man up to it. I wasn’t ready before to do that sh*t. I didn’t know anything about changing no little girl. I didn’t know anything about feeding; know how to do it, how to do it this way; it’s instinct.

Similar to respondent 6, respondent 10 didn’t maintain an emotional connection during the prenatal process. He stated:

I don’t think I had the chance to, to tell you the truth. It was more, that I was young so it was just happened. I kind of just dealt with it. I didn’t really think of the emotional side of it at the time.

Three respondents (30%) stated that they became more reflective of their past and thought about preparation for the future. They also expressed a sense of heightened emotions. Respondent 8 noticed that he isolated himself from others more often. He stated:

I actually sat down with myself and had a conversation with my conscience, and told myself that your life has officially changed, without you even trying to prepare for it. When it came to knowing that I had a child, I really locked myself away from a lot of people. I don’t party anymore. I had to leave behind friends because they’re not adding to my life, they’re subtracting from it, and I don’t want my son to see that.

Respondent 5 described a similar experience as respondent 8. He stated:
I just sat there and thought for hours. I actually thought that my life was over and I could not do anything. I thought I would have to find a new career, and I wouldn’t be able to do the things that I wanted to do, but clearly I was wrong. That was where the anxiety was from.

Respondent 1 stated:

It’s an emotional thing to find out that you’re going to be a dad, but naturally I’m not really an emotional person in a bad or sad sense. I’m like funny emotional or really angry. It’s one extreme or the other. I’m a Libra, so it’s kind of like tipping the scale one way or the other. I think for a lot of men that are fathers, it doesn’t hit you until you find out what the sex of the child is, that’s when the emotion comes in. I kind of got emotional when the doctor said it was a girl, and I was like, “really...could you double check?” She’s like, “I have four girls. I think I know what I’m looking at.” So, I think when I found out that I was having a daughter...that’s when you kind of straighten up and reflect about all of the dumb stuff you did as a male, and you’re like, oh my God I have to be ultra protective because I don’t want her to get hurt, or do anything like that.

For most fathers (emotionally prepared or not), fatherhood appeared to be a difficult experience to cope with emotionally. Two respondents (20%) who sought out support from family and friends indicated that this support was beneficial, yet still found emotionally preparing for fatherhood to be tough. Respondent 9 stated:

It was tough because this was something I was going through alone. I didn’t tell anybody because I was ashamed of what my parents or people would think, especially since the mother of my child ain’t all of that anyway. I was thinking,
“Man this is rough.” I can’t even say that I had a chance to prepare. It was just more of me being able to deal with things, accept certain things, and let go, and move forward. My best friend definitely helped me out a lot. I’m pretty sure we went through the same thing at the same time for a reason. We learned a lot together. As serious as it was, we made light of the situation because we went through it at the same time. I don’t remember any preparation. I just remember reacting to the aftermath of everything.

Respondent 7 stated, “At first, I was scared, and I wasn’t sure if I was ready for this, but after sitting down and speaking to my family, and finding out that they supported me, everything became a lot smoother after that.” Respondent 4 became more self-aware of his actions and how he presented himself in front of his child emotionally. Respondent 4 stated:

I always believed that a baby can feel when an adult is going through something. I would really just try to be that nurturer twenty-four/seven. When I’m around him, I could be mad at the world, but I would still smile and I would still play, because even with him being 1 now, he understands a lot. I could hate his mom, hate her guts, but I can’t take it out on the kids, and can’t let him see that.

**Mental preparation.** Three respondents (30%) stated they did not prepare for fatherhood mentally. Those who stated they did not prepare often described themselves feeling nervous and unable to grasp the magnitude of their new role. Respondent 10 stated:

Mentally, I don’t think I completely understood like the gravity of having a kid at the time. I didn’t understand that he would grow up to be like me. Not exactly like
me, but, you know, just an overall sense that he was going to become a person, just like I am. It didn’t really hit me at that particular time that that’s what having a kid was, and now I understand that.

Respondent 9 also had difficulty mentally coming to terms with the fact that he was going to be a father. He stated:

I went through a couple of phases. There was, “Oh sh*t...I’m done!” Excuse my language. I am going to make her get rid of it. I already had these schemes of how she was going to get rid of it. She’s probably lying, and, “Oh man. I remember the last time we had sex, so I know it’s probably mine and I’m going to be stuck.” I’m going to be on child support. It was a mess. I was thinking I didn’t want to be with her, and I don’t want her taking my money. You go through these progressions. There’s the panic, and then there’s the calm, and then there’s the okay, the baby is coming you have to do what you have to do to make it work….Maybe it won’t be so bad. Maybe we can try….Then there’s this ludicrous idea that even though it didn’t work before, once the baby gets here, everything will be “la-di-da.” I think I definitely went through a lot of regret, remorse, fear, panic, anger, and I think the changing moment for me was seeing a picture of her when she was born. I think that just changed my whole outlook on everything.

Respondent 1 summed up his experience by stating:

You’re always scared, nervous, paranoid (pause). I think you just…mentally….I just know myself so I just go in to it. I just go into it and hit the ground running.
It’s really not much you can do; you don’t until you’re there, until the child arrives.”

When preparing for fatherhood mentally, three respondents (30%) stated they became more reflective about life. These same three respondents (30%) also stated that they became more self-aware. These fathers tended to prioritize their actions, thought more about their past behaviors, and attempted to live better lives for their children.

Respondent 2 stated:

Mentally, she is my focus now. Every day I wake, I know that every decision I make is one that could adversely affect her life. It comes down to spending my money a certain way, or making sure I put some aside for her, or not buying the new this or that, or saving money for her college, or whatever she wants to do with her life.

Of these same respondents, respondent 5 stated that he read more books. He stated:

I just did a lot of reading, and thought about the father that I wanted for myself, and the father that I wanted to be for my kid. I just put things in perspective that way, so I could be there for him.

For respondent 4 and other respondents, becoming a father invoked a new sense of maturity. He stated, “[I have] to remove myself from certain situations and the foolishness you can’t be getting caught up in. What I thought used to be fun, I can’t do it anymore.” For respondent 3, the sex of his child impacted him mentally. He stated, “The only mental thing about it is, is having a female. You have to slow down with all the b*tches and hos. If I had a boy, I’d be hype off that.”
Two respondents (20%) stated they turned to family for support. Respondent 7 stated:

You want to have everything in place and try to prioritize perfectly. At first I was scared, and I wasn’t sure if I was ready for this, but after sitting down and speaking to my family, and finding out that they supported me, everything became a lot smoother after that.

Similar to respondent 7, respondent 8 called on his family for help. He stated, “I talked to my pop a lot, what he had to go through with me. He schooled me on a lot.”

Respondent 6 thought about his finances more often. He stated:

It isn’t anything you can do mentally to me. When my girlfriend first told me she was pregnant, the first thing I said as soon as she said she was pregnant was, “Hey I have to get this money then.” You have to work; if we’re going to struggle we’re going to struggle together; we’re going to get through it. I don’t know what stress is, not anymore.

**Feelings of preparation.** Fathers were asked how prepared they felt when becoming a father. The majority of respondents (70%) stated they did not feel prepared.

Respondent 10 stated:

I didn’t really feel prepared at all. I felt as though my support system was there. I was still in college. I still lived on campus at the time. I was more so dependent on my mom and my family to help out, to make sure that everything was going to be okay. That was as much preparation as I felt I had.

Similarly, respondent 5 stated:
I didn’t feel prepared at all. I kind of just winged it. If this works, it works; if it doesn’t, it doesn’t. A lot of people tried to give me advice, but I didn’t take it. My mom tried to give me advice, but I saw how her advice worked with her children, and that’s not how I wanted it to be, so I didn’t take it. My son’s mother tried to give me advice and I thought to myself, “I’m pretty sure that’s been illegal since 1930.”

Respondent 4 described his preparation in percentages, he stated:

Out of 100%, I would say, honestly speaking, I would say about 40%. I would say 40% because it was like time didn’t wait for nobody, so it came faster than I thought; it came so much sooner than I thought.

Three fathers (30%) stated that they felt prepared. Respondent 7 stated:

Yeah I did. Once she was born, I didn’t feel as if I was meeting a new person, I felt like she was always here for some reason. When she was born, I was more comfortable than I was before.

Respondent 6 described himself taking responsibility for his actions. He stated, “I think I did feel prepared….Like I said, it was either man up and stay, or just get the f**k out of there.” Respondent 1 felt prepared due to his sibling care and babysitting his friends’ children. He stated, “I think I had a lot of basic training with all of my friends.”

Although not prepared, four of the seven respondents (40% of the study participants) welcomed the new role of fatherhood. Respondent 4 stated:

It was like, I remember when she first found out, I was actually happy, and the next thing you know, it’s like, wow, she’s 6 months, and then it’s like, she can barely walk, and then, next thing you know, I’m getting a call like, yo, I’m on my
way to the hospital, like wow, it all just came so fast. I even kind of documented it
to an extent. I would record when we would go to the doctor’s, and record it
secretly. Sometimes she wouldn’t even know, I would record it, like I just want
the footage for later on. I want to compile a whole piece together for just when
you were pregnant, to when we had arguments, even when you were in the room
giving birth, even now, so, like I have a bunch of footage I want to put together
and just be, like look at this. I definitely don’t think I was prepared at all.

Three respondents (30%), who stated they felt unprepared, took the initiative to
get some form of preparation for fatherhood from family, parenting classes, or friends.

Respondent 5 stated:

If it wasn’t from my sister, something I read, or something that I tried on my own,
I would be careful on what advice I took from other people. Just because
something works for someone’s child, doesn’t mean it’s going to work for mine. I
don’t think I was prepared at all.

Although respondent 8 did not feel prepared, he reached out to his father. He stated, “Not
fully. Although I talked about my dad and what he hasn’t done, he’s done a great job thus
far. I don’t think I could have done the job he’s done.”

Not every father welcomed the news of fatherhood with excitement or took
initiative to prepare for fatherhood. Respondent 9 stated, “I wasn’t prepared to be a father
because I didn’t want to be a father. I wasn’t prepared at all.”
Difficult Experiences

Fathers were asked what their most difficult experiences were since becoming a father. Three respondents (30%) identified dealing with a change in sleep patterns.

Respondent 2 stated:

The most difficult part I would say was the beginning when [the baby] just didn’t want to sleep. Because she has to eat every couple of hours, and, you know, she is always peeing or pooping, and all of that stuff. That adjustment was difficult, but since she’s been balancing out a lot more, it’s become a lot easier.

Similarly, respondent 7 stated, “I have not had any negative or bad experiences, except that when I’m with her, I don’t get much sleep.”

Three fathers (30%) stated that dealing with the separation between them and the mother of their child or their child was the most difficult. Of these responses, two fathers (20%) cited the actual distance between them and their child was the most difficult.

Respondent 8 described his most difficult experience as “always being there, because [my son] lives 3 hours away.” Similarly, respondent 9 stated “I think the most difficult experience thus far is being so far away from [my daughter].” These separations were often noted to be due to discontinuation of relationships and/or legal custody conflicts.

Respondent 10 stated:

My kids’ mom and I separated. We broke up, and she moved to North Carolina, and she took my kids with her. So I had to deal with the separation from November until almost June. My kids not being here every day, me having to call them on the phone, me having to get on video chat with them, or having to go
down there to visit them. That wasn’t something I was prepared to do, so I feel like that was probably the most trying time I faced while being a parent.

Respondent 4 had a similar experience to respondent 10. He stated:

We had to go to court because she said she wanted to get full custody, but she wanted like sole-legal, and she wanted more. It was more embarrassing than anything. At this point I thought we were good, we had our little feuds but every family has something to say. We had our arguments and her mom said she thought it was best that we weren’t communicating, I’m like how could this be, and he’s only 2-3 months. It all stems from when he was first born, they had moved to Harlem from Jersey City.

One respondent stated the separation occurred due to him and his girlfriend not being able to resolve their differences concerning how they wanted to raise their child.

Respondent 5 stated:

She and I grew up two different ways, so we wanted to raise our child two different ways. If I say one thing, she says the other, and splitting the time we see him, but we’re actually pretty good about that. We not being together kind of created a rift, because he doesn’t understand that mommy and daddy aren’t together.

Three respondents (30%) stated that their child’s mother’s hormonal changes during pregnancy was the most difficult experience. When asked, respondent 3 bluntly stated his most difficult experience has been “dealing with a pregnant woman.”

Respondent 6 went into a little bit more detail. He stated:
The female’s insecurity; females are pregnant, they think you are attracted to every other girl because they’re fat and pregnant. That’s probably the biggest thing I had to deal with. Other than that, there were no issues. I wasn’t worried about where the money was coming from, I wasn’t worried about how she was going to eat, and I wasn’t worried about who’s going to help, if I needed the help. I wasn’t worried about none of that. I don’t look for help. I can do it all myself anyway. I don’t even think about her helping me with stuff. I think about me doing it by myself.

Respondent 1 stated, “Besides the lack of sleep, dealing with a pregnant person.”

**Life Change**

Fathers were asked how their life changed when they became a father. Seven respondents (70%) stated they focused more on their child. Respondent 2 dealt with the change by focusing more on his family. He stated “It’s just my whole mind state of things changed. I put my sole focus on my family and [my daughter].” Of those seven responses, five respondents (50%) described an increased level of responsibility. Respondent 3 stated, “I just had to man up; more responsibilities, somebody depending on me now.” Of those five responses, two fathers (20%) stated they also focused more on finances. Respondent 4 stated:

Oh, it changed, it changed a lot. Now I can’t do everything I want to do, not even a bad thing. I can’t just come and go as I please. If I do, when he is with me, which is a lot, if I have to work, my mom will watch him until I come back from work. I’m coming from work and going back to another job to be with him. Also, it opened my eyes to, speed up the process of thinking about the future.
When are you going to start putting money aside for college? He needs this, he’s one now, he had his first birthday in June, he’s in daycare, and you have to pay for daycare. It totally switched gears for the better and sometimes, not saying it’s on the kids, but it brought other issues on that would have never happened if I didn’t have a kid. But overall, I wouldn’t change anything.

Four fathers (40%) described an increased amount of maturity. Respondent 5 summed up his life change by stating:

I went from having fun and going out, to having to go home and feed my kid. I actually stayed on campus still, when we first had the baby. So it definitely matures you quickly. I always tell people that I wasn’t prepared to have a child, but after having my son and seeing him always keep one eye open, and finally opening the other eye, and realizing both of them work, and being able to recognize me, I said to myself that I was going to be able to do it. It was the “aha” moment for me.

Respondent 6 also stated that he partied less and began to calm down more. He stated:

I don’t hang out as much. I don’t chill with most of the people that I used to chill with. I’m not as crazy as I used to be (chuckles). I stay home with the kid, and that’s really what I do….All I did was go party, party here, party there. I would go to three parties in the same night; like that was me!

Besides hanging out less, two respondents (20%) stated that they focused on their time management skills when they became fathers. Respondent 10 stated:

It was more so the time management; time management became a major factor. I learned that it’s just not my time anymore. I have to wake up and eat breakfast at
a decent time, eat lunch, etc. All those things that I took for granted: “Oh I’m not really hungry right now, I’ll skip it,” or “I don’t really feel like hopping in the shower right this second, I’ll skip it.” All of those became actually important issues. If I don’t hop in the shower, I have to put him in the bath and then I have to get in last after all that. If I don’t make something to eat now, I’m going to be getting knocks on my door, “I’m hungry, I’m hungry, I’m hungry.” Or my child telling my mom, “I’m hungry, I’m hungry.” Those things seem small, but it’s big.

Similarly, respondent 7 stated:

It’s not just me anymore; it’s me and my daughter. That’s a big change, just knowing in the back of your head that you have a little person that you have to take care of. Another big change is, what I do with my time now; instead of doing stuff with my friends on the weekends, I go to her mom’s house and chill with her until school.

Respondent 9 became more reflective. He realized he would like to help other males who have shared similar experiences as him. Respondent 9 stated:

(Laughter) On a good note, it slows you down. I think having my daughter made me more responsible, because now you have to worry about someone else. There’s a mouth that needs to be fed and you’re the one that has to feed it. You have to be a little more careful with what you do, because you have to make sure you come home at night. Having my daughter also made me more financially responsible. I wanted stability for myself, so my daughter could have stability. So I could put money away, so she could go to college. As a parent, however good you had it, you kind of want your child to have it better. There were mistakes you
made that you don’t want your child to make. So, on a good note, it made me more responsible, and it made me think ahead. I think having a daughter makes you think about some of the BS we do as males and say, “Man I hope my daughter don’t ever meet nobody doing the stuff I was doing.” It softens you up. I don’t care how tough you think you are, it just gives you a new perspective on a lot of stuff. It makes you more caring, and causes you to think about stuff you never thought about before. It’s definitely an experience that you can’t put a price on. On the flip side of this, the fact that this wasn’t something I planned for, or the deceit that was involved in it, I feel like a lot of things were taken from me. Now I want to help people, especially young males, I want to warn them about things I was warned about, but in a different light. If I could make a difference in a couple of young men’s lives, then that would be cool with me.

Respondent 8 worked on improving his parenting skills by reading books. He stated, “I started reading a lot more. Even though I listen to my pops a lot about his experiences, we’re two different people. I had to start reading and building my own knowledge.” Respondent 1 began to focus more on his well-being. He stated:

My life changed instantly, because I was mentally trying to get prepared like you said but there’s nothing you can do, but you just try to say, “Okay. I need to calm down. I need to do this.” Like two days after my child was born, I sold my motorcycle. I said, “You know what, I need to relax.” A lot of people are getting hurt like family, friends, or you see it in the news.
Parenting Techniques

Fathers were asked to think about how their parenting techniques would change if they were to have an additional child. Three respondents (30%) stated they would be more involved in the prenatal stage of their child’s mother’s pregnancy. Respondent 2 stated, “I probably would’ve spent a lot more time with my girlfriend prior to the baby being born.” Two fathers (two responses, 20%) often felt that they should provide increased support to the mother of their child if they were to have an additional child. Respondent 4 stated:

If I had another kid, it would totally be different and this is going back to when [the mother of my child is] pregnant. As far as understanding how mentally unstable, I guess that’s the right use of words, I don’t want to offend them, but them being unstable. Just being there for her; it was times when I thought, “she’s just trippin,” but in actuality she really needed me. There was times when she didn’t want to be bothered with me, but I didn’t know that I should have forced myself and said, “I’m going to be here whether you like it or not.” I took those opportunities of her not wanting to be bothered, as “Okay, F it then.” You don’t want to be bothered and I took it the wrong way.

Similarly, respondent 9 stated:

First off, I am going to be married when I have my next child. I want to fully enjoy the conception of the next child. I want to sit down with my wife and decide we are ready to start a family. I wasn’t able to buy certain stuff, set up the baby’s room, go to prenatal appointments, or see the ultrasound, rub her stomach, rub her feet; stuff you’re supposed to do with your wife and the mother of your child. The
perception that I view the mother of my daughter in is not the view that you should have of a woman carrying your child. Other than that, I would be more knowledgeable about parenting. Knowing what the baby needs, what the mom needs; all stuff you should know that I didn’t know once my daughter got here. Three fathers (30%) described the importance of parents remaining in a relationship and stated if they had an additional child they would like to stay in a relationship with the mother of their child. Respondent 10 stated:

I don’t want to sound cliché, but probably the most important thing is both parents having a relationship. Like the parents having that relationship with each other, an understanding, where they can still continue to work together and be parents. Or best case scenario, they are still in a relationship together. But I think that’s the most important thing, because I have had enough time and experience to notice that [he’s] a different kid when he is just with you, or he is just with his mom, and when he is with both of us, he becomes a completely different kid. For instance, my son, his personality came out completely when his mother and I were together. He was expressing himself; he wasn’t scared to talk. When we weren’t together, you didn’t see any of that, even though he was around the same age, same cognitive ability, but he wasn’t expressing himself as much, which is being himself. But when we were together, I guess he felt more comfortable because he was with his mom and dad. That right there had a big impact on them. It’s not so much through circumstances and experiences, you can’t change the way you feel about a person, but you could understand that it’s much better if you’re with that
person. As far as with your kid, developing with your kid, I think that’s the most important part.

Respondent 8 shared the same sentiments as respondent 10. He stated, “My second child would be with the woman that I will be with for the rest of my life. I would actually have to be in love with her. We will get married, and do it the right way.” For some fathers, having an additional child meant a decreased level of anxiety and being more prepared, due to their having experience with parenting their first child. Respondent 6 stated:

You realize that you don’t have to stress as much. With the first one it’s like, okay boom, I’m down to my last $10. I need to buy diapers. Okay, I’m going to buy the diapers, but how the f*ck is she going to eat? After my first, I understand the first one you stress a little bit or get a little nervous, you get anxiety because you, like damn, I never had a kid before.

In addition to those who felt that they would have less anxiety with the second (or third) child, respondent 5 stated that he would be more prepared. He stated, “I would definitely be prepared the second time around. I would have the diapers, bottles, formula, etc. I would just be more prepared. It would be a totally different approach with the second child.” Respondent 3 stated that he would use contraception more often, while respondent I was unclear how parenting would change for him. He stated:

Well, this is still new to me, so I am still learning technique. My child is two months old as of two days ago [10/2/12]. So I’m still learning technique, I’m still new to this stuff. I’m still trying to develop different things, patterns. I still don’t know what I’m going to do here and there.
**Father Involvement**

Respondents were asked if their fathers were involved in their lives and, if so, how the involvement has influenced their decision to become a father. Three fathers (30%) described their fathers being involved in their lives and having a positive influence on their decision to become a father. Respondent 7 stated:

My dad is a perfect model of being a father. I know we hear a lot of African Americans do not have fathers, but my father was always there. As a father, I want to be exactly like him. He just always seemed to know what to do, especially raising kids and making sure they don’t fall to the influence of the streets. It’s mind blowing to me. When it comes to being a father, I want to mirror what he did.

Respondent 1 summed up his father’s influence by stating:

You just try to emulate. It’s almost like your favorite athlete, because I knew what I had. I knew I had a good father who was there, a good role model, and taking on his responsibility. So I want to do that, if not better, and I am sure that he wants the same thing; and hopes that he taught me the right things, so I can take his advice and pass it down.

Respondent 9 described his father as being one of the major reasons he’s in his child’s life. He stated:

It’s definitely been a big part. It’s almost as if the roles have been switched for me. Most Black males often talk about their mom but, for me, it was the complete opposite. For me, I didn’t have a mom. I had my dad. He taught me everything I know. He taught me discipline, your word, hard work, being fair, and taking
responsibility. There was a time where as a boy I used to cry for my mom because I couldn’t understand the situation. I often wondered where she was, because she would say that she was coming to get me. The older I got, I realized I don’t know where or who I would be if it wasn’t for my dad. The stuff he taught me, the beatings he gave me; all of that made me into the man I am today. If he didn’t come down to the school when I was acting up, and knock me out in front of my teachers and friends, who knows what I would’ve been doing. This was in sixth grade when he came to the school. By seventh grade I was on the honor roll; I was not getting into any more trouble. I remember being five or younger moving back to Trenton and him dropping me off to preschool. Before he left he would say, “You go to school to do what?” and I would say, “To learn.” He would tell me I was a leader and not a follower, and these are things that I will carry with me for the rest of my life. These are things I tell my daughter. When I ask her, she tells me, and she tells other kids, “You have to be good and you have to be a leader.” It touches my heart.

Three fathers (30%) stated that their father was not involved in their lives and this also influenced their decision to become a father. Respondent 4 described his desire for his father to be involved in his life and the impact the lack of involvement caused. He stated:

It had a big effect, because it was a lot of things I never knew, and I felt like it was not wrong, but almost, I felt like I was cheated to not learn certain things when I should have learned. As simple as when she’s pregnant, being there for her, of course she’s saying it, and you’re hearing it from people. But you’re like,
do I really need to be there, like that, when she’s complaining and moaning? Should I brush her off? Well, it’s too late to say I didn’t have a father figure. That’s the easy way out. He didn’t teach me this, that, and the third. You have to deal with it, you figure it out now, it’s like you’re being fed to the wolves. Your father let you go too early to show you how to hunt on your own, I feel like that all the time. That’s why deep down inside, I have some issues.

For some respondents, their father’s lack of involvement was used as an opportunity or motivation to do their best as parents and provide their child with the love and care they believe they missed out on. Respondent 5 stated:

I want to be involved in everything [my son] does. I missed a lot of things living on campus and working. I want to be involved in anything he’s doing. I’ve been to every doctor’s appointment since he’s been born, PTA meetings, and stuff like that, and those are all things that my father missed. I lived in Virginia, so my dad would call every once in a while. That was our relationship, a phone call. Sometimes he would come to Virginia at 11:00 at night and leave around 2:00 a.m. and I would be disappointed. For me, I would definitely like to be more hands on. That’s how you can help [my son] develop as a man.

For others, their father’s lack of involvement inspired the motivation to never emulate their fathers. Respondent 6 stated, “My whole thing was to never be like him; to be opposite of him.” Similarly, respondent 3 expressed, “I don’t want to look like him, act like him; nothing, no parts of him.” Three participants (30%) stated that their father, was partially, although not fully, involved and that had a positive influence on their
decision to be involved in their child’s life. Respondent 2 described his father’s involvement. He stated:

He was involved but not majorly. He was around a lot, but I was really raised by my grandparents. They kind of did all of the caring, but he was around. I think that being that he was around, but not there for the caring aspect of it, it’s definitely made me want to do that for [my daughter]. And it has made me want to learn about that. I haven’t really had experience with my dad caring for my sister and me. It’s making me learn more about how a father does do that, because I had my grandfather. He’s my father, but not my (biological) father.

Similarly, respondent 8 stated, “For the most part, yes. It made a big impact; seeing what he used to do and still does, and hasn’t done, showed me what I need to do in order for my son to get what I didn’t have growing up.” One respondent felt that his father’s involvement had no influence on his decision to be in his children’s lives. Respondent 10 stated, “To tell you the truth I don’t think it did because I can’t name any one particular experience. When my dad was alive, I was young. It was just so much stuff that has happened since then.”

**Parenting Advice**

Respondents were asked to provide advice for both young African American expectant and current fathers.

**Expectant Fathers**

When asked what advice respondents would give young African American expectant fathers, four fathers (40%) stated that young expectant fathers should “get focused.” Of these responses, three fathers (30%) also described an increased level of
responsibility and need for support from others. Respondent 3 stated: “Buckle up. I mean, it’s a lot of responsibility, it’s gonna be hard. But the good thing was I had a family to help me, because if I didn’t I don’t know how I would’ve made it.” Respondent 1 stressed the importance of getting focused and spending time with your family. He stated:

Get focus[ed], get on point. Just because you’re a dad doesn’t mean you can’t have fun. You just have to alter your fun, have fun in different ways. Find fun within your family and kid, and then every once in awhile mom and dad needs to go out and have fun. I think that’s what my advice would be.

Respondent 6 described the importance of doing whatever needed to be done to provide for your family. He stated:

Man up! Don’t worry. Do whatever you can to make money. If that’s the case, if money is your biggest issue, do whatever you can to make money. If it’s got to be McDonald’s, if it has to be scrubbing the floors for a little bit, even if it has to come to you babysitting for other people’s kids a little bit.

Respondent 10 described the importance of setting a positive example for your children. He stated:

Get on the ball! Get a job. If you can’t get a job, go to school. You want to try to make yourself an example for your kid. That’s the number one thing that I think African American fathers need to understand. We have a problem in our community where our kids don’t really see themselves as anything. History books don’t really tell them about anything that we did in the past. We don’t really learn anything culturally. All we really know is like Hip Hop and sports. It’s up to the father, I believe, to set like an example of how a black male should be, and I think
that’s the most important factor right now. It may not continue to be that way forever, but for right now it’s just setting the example, a positive example. A black man can be positive, he can be productive, and it’s not corny or anything like that. It’s not going to interrupt with anything that you think is fun. That’s what you got to do. It’s what is most important….Having kids is much more than just money and food. It’s setting an example, and talking to your kids, and just telling them that they’re important and they mean something. That really affects your kid, whether you believe it or not. Telling your kid that they’re going to do great things; stuff like that gives them that extra drive, that extra boost to keep them going with a positive mindset, because they’re going to remember that stuff growing up. Like, “Yeah, my dad said I could do whatever I want.” If you never make that statement, they can never reference that statement growing up.

Three respondents (30%) described the importance of being involved in their family’s life. The involvement described included supporting the mother of the child, being patient, and being present. Respondent 2 stated:

Try to support the mother as much as possible. It is a very emotional time. We tend to focus more on our emotions with that. But it is a very emotional time for them. They may seem all happy because they’re pregnant and their belly is growing, but inside they are very emotional. Their hormones are on fire. So just being there and supporting them in every way is helpful and beneficial for the child. Keeping the mother as happy as possible is going to give you a better experience with the child. Or at least I feel like I’m having a better experience with the child.
Respondent 4 described the importance of supporting and listening to the mother of your child while she is pregnant. He stated:

Always hear the mother of your child out. She could be telling you the sky is red; try to figure out why she’s telling you the sky is red. It’s so much easier to tell her that she’s bugging, brush her off, or get into arguments not knowing that you’re mentally breaking her down. At the end of the day, that stress is hurting your kid. Be there for [your child], even if you have no money. You being there for him, she would see that and be like okay. There was a point where I was there for her, had no money. There was a point where I would bring her stuff that she needed. I would just tell them, be there for her and if you can, save as much money as possible.

Respondent 9 described how one should interact with the mother of their child. He stated:

If you’re expecting a child with a woman you love: enjoy it, don’t take it for granted, understand your woman, and know that her body is going to go through changes she can’t control. Understand she is going to get on your nerves, and enjoy that she is getting on your nerves. Enjoy your kids. Be the best example you can be for them, because no matter how young they are, you’re their first role models. What they learn, they learn it from you. Start saving for college and educate yourself about what’s best for the baby. If you did not plan for a child, or do not want a child with the woman that you got pregnant, don’t touch her. Get a pregnancy test.

For respondent 7, it was important to identify a support system to assist him through the process. He stated, “Check to see if you have a support system, because not everyone
does; you just have to do what you have to do.” For respondent 8, it was important to work smart instead of working hard, and focus on finances. He stated:

Actually I would rephrase “working harder.” I would rephrase it to “working smarter.” Whatever money you used to spend on small stuff, that money should be saved up to go towards your child, whether it’s on junk food or buying weed, buying the latest kicks, anything like that, that money should be saved up, because if you’re working genuinely hard and smart with your life, plus providing, you’ll get what you deserve in the end; and that’s how I see it.

Respondent 5 stressed the importance of staying calm and learning how to take care of your child. He stated:

I would first tell them relax. The news is very shocking. It’s something I thought about every day. It would also be important to do some research on the child’s development physically and mentally. Depending on the relationship you have with your significant other, having a child could definitely bring you closer together, or divide you. If you guys grew up differently, you may want to raise the child differently. The first thing a woman says is that she’s the one who pushed the baby out. It takes a lot to be a father.

**Current Fathers**

When asked what advice they would give current young African American fathers, seven fathers (70%) stated that their advice to fathers would be to “be there” for their child. Of those responses, four fathers (40%) also stressed the importance of taking care of one’s responsibility. Respondent 1 stated, “Take care of your responsibility and don’t be a stereotype. Don’t live what you see on TV.” Similarly, respondent 3 stated:
Like the Navy says, “Be all that you can be.” Just sit there, support your child. I mean, it’s not always about who’s the breadwinner and all of that, just spending time with your kid as much as possible as you can. I mean you go to work, you go to work; you can’t really talk to the child as much, other than that, instead of f**king partying on Friday nights, sit yo a** in the house and play with the damn baby.

Respondent 2 stressed the importance in being involved in your child’s life. He stated:

Be there as much as possible for the child, like make sure they see and know you. At this stage, the first few weeks, this is where they figure out who is who. I didn’t know this before, but they can respond to you if you’re there a lot. Like my child, she knows us very well, so if she sees us, and we go away for a couple of hours and come back, she smiles. But if it’s someone she doesn’t know, she will give them a small frown and eventually warm up to them. So you want to make sure that they know you initially.

Similarly, respondent 4 described the importance of spending time with your child. In addition, he described the importance of maintaining a positive relationship with the mother of the child. He stated:

It’s so important to spend as much time as possible with your kid. As bad as you may want to go out that Friday, Saturday, Thursday, just stay home and chill with your kid. The feeling to just see that your child is smiling and just living his little life puts you in a whole another state. If they argue with their kid’s mom, just do what you can to make it work, because as happy as I am for having a kid and seeing him smile, at the same time, I’m equally saddened to see that we’re not
together. I didn’t have a father there, she didn’t have both parents in the house, her father wasn’t there, and she had a twin brother, but her mother was left to fend for twins.

Three fathers (30%) went further with their advice and stated that current fathers should not just be involved in their child’s life, but should set a positive example for their children. Respondent 9 summed up his advice by stating:

Teach your child right from wrong, and be selective of what you expose your child to, and value your time with them. Make the most of parenting. Do as much as you can with your child while you can. Regardless of how you feel about the mother, you have to let it go, because you’re only giving her power to control how you feel. When it comes to the child, it’s not about you two, it’s about the child.

Respondent 8 described what’s at stake if fathers don’t set a positive example for their children. He stated:

Your child is a sponge. And whatever you do, that child’s going to watch. Whatever interaction you and the mother of your child have, that child is going to watch and see. Whether you think that they’re taking it in or not, they’re taking it in. Whatever they see, they’re going to see, they’re gonna—not duplicate but they’re going to remember, and it’s going to be embedded in them. Whatever they see, they’re going to remember.

For respondent 7, it was difficult to provide advice because he felt he was new to fatherhood. He stated:
I’m young in the father game. Fathers should probably be giving me advice. I really can’t say. I know for me, I’ll always be there for my daughter, and I wouldn’t want to mess up the relationship her mom and I have because my daughter’s mom and I are pretty cool. She understands my situation, she understands that I’m in school, and I have to finish. She doesn’t really stress me that much. She just wants me to be there when I can, and that’s enough for her.

Respondent 10 provided advice for those fathers who are in financial hardship or having difficulty interacting with the mother of their children. He stated:

If you can’t support them financially, be in their lives. Talk to them, spend time with them. I know a lot of parents, a lot of Black fathers out here, feel alienated due to the fact that they can’t support their kids monetarily, but you can’t let that affect your entire relationship. Although I’m not going to lie, the money issue does play a major factor in how Black women and Black men relationships go. That’s a major factor in how those relationships play out and what happens with them, and a lot of times money is the main reason why a man won’t come around. If she bugging him about money, he doesn’t want to hear about it, so he doesn’t come around. I think that’s one of the key issues that Black fathers have to get around. Alright, you don’t have any money; explain that to her. Watch your kid all the time, so they don’t have to go to daycare. Teach your kid some stuff. It’s a lot of things you can bring into the fold without having money. You don’t have to be just a donor parent, you could just be a parent. Be a parent. It’s not all about the money. A lot of people think that that’s what it is. You don’t have money, you can’t be a parent; you can’t be around. It’s really way more important than that.
[Reasons that] fathers don’t come around: “Oh she put me on child support, I don’t want to do this”; “Oh, she mad at me because I was messing with this girl, so now she want me to pay this amount of money. Forget it. I just won’t come around.” You can’t be like that because your kid is still there, your kid is still going to grow up, your kid is still going to need the same influence as if you were there. You’re inhibiting him or her by not being there, by not showing them that, “yeah, there is a black responsible man in my family”; “there is a black responsible man taking care of me, helping me out, talking to me.” Even if you can’t buy anything; talking to them, making them feel loved is just as important. Things like that are extremely important. It’s also not just on the black male, but the black females to understand that it’s not easy out here for a black guy. I’ve been to several job interviews, thought I had the job, and never got a call back. I call back, and they gave me the run around. Sometimes I had employers call me in for jobs. I go in for the interview, turns out that they don’t really want me. I don’t know what it was for, maybe because I was black, I don’t know. It looked like I lined up for the job and, all of a sudden, I’m not qualified. Who knows? You can’t always chalk it up to being black, but I know those things are not just happening to me. And I know that I may be able to go on to the next interview or opportunity, but you never know if the next person is going to give up. The monetary issue is really insignificant when it comes to how you really want your kids to turn out, because you want your kids to grow having integrity and character and all those things. None of that is connected to money at all. It’s
connected to having healthy relationships with parents and other loved ones. The only way you have that is if your parents are around.

**Useful Information**

Participants were asked to share the most useful information they received regarding fatherhood. These responses were similar to the responses found within the previous question. For some fathers (four, 40%), the most important information received was to “be there” or be in their child’s life. Respondent 4 stated:

> Just being there. I can’t stress that enough. Spend as much time with your kid as you want. You think as a baby, he/she doesn’t remember, but you’ll see, and I was able to see from 6 months, to 8 months, to when he turned 1, that he started remembering, like he can see [and] he knows who’s who. He knows when we go back to my house. He knows when it’s how I go about things and how his mom goes about things, and he picks and chooses. It’s kind of funny, because there’s certain things that he doesn’t do at my house but he’ll do at home.

For two of the men (20%), getting advice from others regarding being a parent was not an option. Once becoming a father, respondent 6 became more independent. He stated:

> I don’t even listen to people’s advice. My way and your way are two different paths. Like I’m going to do sh*t the way I want to do it anyway. I’m just, that’s just the way I am. I’m going to rebel against what you say. I’m going to do sh*t the way I want anyway. I haven’t gotten any advice from fathers.

Besides general advice, two fathers received advice regarding self-care and budgeting. Respondent 2 was told, “When the baby sleeps you sleep, because when she’s up, there’s
no way possible you’re taking a rest.” Respondent 7 recalled a conversation he had with his father about buying supplies his daughter needed. He stated:

When I first told [my father] I bought a crib, he asked me, “Why did you do that?” because she’s smaller and she didn’t need a crib immediately, and I could have bought a bassinette and saved money to buy more things she needed immediately. He went back to when they had me when he was younger and he and my mom didn’t have much. He just explained that right now my daughter does need everything, you can get the minimal within your financial means, and my daughter will be fine.

For respondent 9, encouragement and optimism were important to keep him focused on his child and his responsibilities. He stated:

Things won’t always be how they are now. For me, there were situations that were kind of messed up because the girl committed a deceitful act to get what she wanted. It wasn’t the best circumstances, but I was constantly reminded that things will get better. Regardless of what her mom does, as my child gets older, she will be able to call me on her own, and not have to go through her mom to be able to talk to me.

**Emotional Encounters**

This section focused on exploring participants’ feelings upon hearing that they were going to be fathers, identifying their support systems, and whether or not parenthood was planned for by the fathers.
Fathers were asked if they made a conscious decision to have a child. Almost all (eight responses, 80%) stated that they did not intend to get the mother of their child pregnant. These fathers often attributed pregnancy to the lack of use of contraception or the misuse of contraception. Respondent 7 stated:

My girlfriend was supposed to be on birth control, but I don’t know what happened with that. I used to play in back in my head and wonder if she got pregnant on purpose, because we were going through a rough patch in our relationship, in order to trap me or keep me around. I could think that, but I didn’t see anything useful keeping those thoughts. I had already had an abortion with her a year ago, and I did not like the feeling at all. At least this time around, I am in a better position. The first time it happened during my junior year of college.

For respondent 2, pregnancy just happened. He stated:

We knew at some point we were going to do something like that. It was casually talked about and sometimes even joked about, but when it happened we were like, “Oh….Wait” [laughter]. It wasn’t a decision that we outright made….It just happened.

Respondent 5 stated:

I didn’t want kids at all prior to having my son. Her and I were actually together prior to having our son. We broke up and I later saw her again after not seeing her in awhile, and we had sex. She later told me that she was pregnant months later, and I had to explain that to my new girlfriend. This was six months later when she
reached out to me, so I asked her to prove it and she sent me a picture and I saw that she was definitely pregnant.

Respondent 9 described his experiences when finding out he was going to be a father. He stated:

She calls me and asked, “When is the last time we had sex?” She later let me know she missed her period, and I responded and told her I would bring a pregnancy test. Instead of giving her the pregnancy test, I believe[d] she was pregnant and I wasn’t going to tell her to get rid of it. She decided to get an abortion, we later had unprotected sex and thought since she was getting an abortion it didn’t matter, but she later changed her mind. I was upset and told her to contact me when she found out the sex of the baby. Once 5-6 months passed, she should have been able to find out the sex of the baby, but she kept making excuses as to why she did not have an ultrasound. I accused her of not being pregnant and she got upset. I later left for the academy and she finally confesses that she lied and was not pregnant when she said she was pregnant.

Few fathers (two responses, 20%) stated that they planned their fatherhood. Respondent 1 described his planning. He stated:

When I say I planned it, it wasn’t like we were trying to have a baby every day. It was one of those during “the event” we knew what could happen if we do “this” [sex without a condom], and she said, “go ahead,” and I said, “okay,” and we both knew and understood that if this happens we would have the child. You still have an option after “the event” to decide if you’re going to have the child, you have plan b, the morning after pill, where it doesn’t affect anything. And at that point
we said, “Yeah...we’re going to do this....We’re going to have a family.” And that’s why I view it as planned.

Respondent 4 described the feelings he and his girlfriend experienced once they decided to have an abortion prior to having their first child. He stated:

The first time, when she aborted, no, but the second time it was once she noticed and came to the sense that she really aborted. She was depressed, between her being depressed and the traumatic car accident, she was going through a lot. She actually went and was seeking help and seeing counselors, but she came to me and was, like, they can’t help me for what I’m really going through, and then we would still have her friends’ kids, and after awhile she would be, like, I want to have a kid.

Each time respondent 10 found out his partner was pregnant (more than one child), he felt obligated to raise the child. He reported:

I’m not a Republican or like an antiabortion guy, or anything like that, but I do believe that if you get a girl pregnant, then that’s life you have to take care of. You got to do what you got to. I don’t feel like you can run to a clinic and just get rid of a baby anytime it’s convenient for you. It took me back to a guy that told me this story one time. He was saying that there was this man and wife. They just had a kid and the kid was about to be a year old. The woman gets pregnant again. They go to the doc. She [is] about two months pregnant. Doctor is like, yeah, you’re pregnant. She says, I don’t think I can handle another baby. I just had this baby. I don’t know if I can do it. I’m thinking about abortion. So the doctor looks at her and say, are you sure you want to do an abortion. She says, yeah, I just want
to do the thing that is most safe for me and the baby. So the doctor says, here is what we’re going to do, give me the baby in your arm. The lady looked at her like why. You said you want to do the thing that’s most safe for you and the baby. This is safer for you and the baby. I’m going to take the baby and it’s actually going to help you out more. I’m going to take the baby that you have now. I kill this baby. That way you don’t go through a normal pregnancy. You can have a night’s sleep, and rest, and all of that, because it’s going to be more healthy for me to take this baby from you, than for me to take that baby out of you. Then the lady looked at him in horror, like what do you mean? The doctor said, exactly, you doing the same thing to the baby in your stomach. What’s the difference between the two? That changed my entire perspective on abortion. It’s like you can’t weigh life. You weren’t put here to weigh life. You have to deal with it if you have it.

**Decision Making**

Participants were asked the determining factor for their decision to stay in their child’s life when informed of their partner’s pregnancy. A majority, six fathers (60%), cited values as the reason for staying in their child’s life. Of those six fathers, four of them (40%) stated they felt obligated to take care of their responsibility. Of those fathers who cited values as their reason for being involved in their child’s life, three fathers (30%) also cited their personal relationship with their father, positive or negative, as a factor that influenced their decision. For respondent 1, not being in his child’s life was not an option. He stated:
Me being in my child’s life wasn’t a question. It wasn’t a factor. I had no choice, I wasn’t raise[d] like that. I know better, and I wouldn’t do that to any kid. So that aspect of it was a no brainer. As far as my reaction, finding out weeks later, I mean it’s a shock.

Similarly, being absent in his child’s life was out of the question for respondent 5. He reported:

There was never a doubt in my mind that I would be involved, just based on the upbringing I had with my father. There was never any question about leaving. After my child was born, his mother was asleep, so it was just me and him, having a whole conversation. He didn’t know what I was talking about, but after I saw him open both of his eyes, I knew I wasn’t going anywhere.

For two fathers (20%), it was how they would be viewed and how they would view themselves if not involved in their child’s life. Respondent 2 stated:

I didn’t want to be that guy. That guy being the dad that wasn’t there. I’ve heard stories and personally met people, especially girls that did not have their dad in their life, and have seen how it has affected them, and I just couldn’t imagine not being there for her and not being able to support her 100%.

Similarly, respondent 3 could not view himself being absent in his child’s life. He stated, “I just did it man. That’s your flesh and blood. I really wanted kids, though. I never thought in this day and age right now; maybe later on in life when I had a steady job.”

Like respondent 2 and 3, respondent 8 just “felt like it was the right thing to do.” He stated:
It wouldn’t be fair to him as a human being for him to not know who his father was, or is, for that matter. The way my life is going right now, I feel like I’ll become a leader at one point, on TV somewhere. I don’t want his mother to be like, “That’s your dad,” he doesn’t know who I am. So, at the end of the day, I want him to know that he has a father. I don’t want anyone else taking the place of me. And that’s just a pride thing with me. Regardless, I feel like doing the right things set you apart from everyone else.

Two participants (20%), who did not have their fathers in their lives, saw their new fatherhood role as an opportunity to turn their negative experiences into positive ones and support their child. Respondent 9 reported:

> At no point was not being in the baby’s life an option because I was not raised that way. I wouldn’t feel right knowing there’s a little person out here that doesn’t have a father, all because I didn’t want to own up to the choices that I made. I know what it’s like not to have a parent and, interacting with women, I know what it’s like for a daughter not to have a dad. I feel like the absence of fathers affect young black children today. I noticed the difference between women who have a father and those who don’t.

Similarly, respondent 6 stated:

> When she told me she was pregnant, I already knew I was going to be there. Whether she and I were separate or not, I knew I was going to be there for the baby. This is because of my relationship with my pops. He wasn’t always there.

Even though respondent 4’s father was not heavily involved in his life, he maintained a level of optimism when finding out he was going to be a father. He stated:
Besides me not having a father figure there, I always thought for years, as young as I could remember, I always thought kids were a beautiful thing. They’re innocent and they didn’t ask to be in any situation that they are in….Their nurturers put them in the situation they are in. So I always was pro kid, especially if you feel like it’s with the right person. We can’t control, [well] to an extent, we can control where we are at in life in that time being. I was like, I’ll be graduating college soon, have a decent job. I was projecting getting a really good job with the radio station. She was working at the time. I spoke to my mom about it and she was like, whatever you need, I’ll definitely help you out, and her mom was like that as well, so we had the support system, just like over and beyond, so we just felt like we were really comfortable with making this happen. I didn’t second guess it at all when she got pregnant. I’m like, we can make this happen. This kid will never be like, yoo, we can’t buy him diapers. I never had an issue like that, so that’s why I’m like, I’m with it.

For one father, it was the chemistry and length of time he was with his partner.

Respondent 10 reported, “We were already together for two years when she became pregnant, so we just decided to keep it.”

Feelings

Participants were asked to describe their feelings when hearing that their partner was pregnant. Three fathers (30%) stated that they were shocked at first, Respondent 1 stated:

I was in shock. I was a little bit happy, but I was nervous. (Sigh) I was wondering what I was going to do, but I was still happy. I was like, wow. And I’m
young…I’m 26, so technically I could still live a little wild, but it didn’t bother me as much.

Respondent 5 was also in disbelief. His first words to his partner were, “No you’re not.” He stated:

(Laughter) I couldn’t believe it. I then thought my life was over. I asked how I was going to tell my family, my girlfriend, and all these other people. And then I thought I would never get another girlfriend again because I have a kid. I was just in shock and was thinking, “This can’t be happening right now.” I never planned to have kids.

Similarly, respondent 7 stated, “My first feelings was, ‘damn again?’ but after that she offered to get another abortion, but I told her that I didn’t want her to get another abortion, and she said, ‘Okay.’” Similar to respondent 1, respondent 3 (20%) stated he felt “happy” when he found out he was going to be a father. He stated, “I thought, ‘oh, time for a shot.’ I was good with it, I figured sooner or later it was going to happen, because we don’t use condoms, but I didn’t plan it. I wasn’t scared, I just eased into it.”

Similar to respondent 5, respondent 9 described feelings of disappointment when he found out he was going to be a father. Respondent 9 described it as, “probably one of the worst days of my life. My daughter’s birth was the best day but that was the worst.”

Respondent 10 was anxious. He often wondered: “What is my mom going to think? Am I going to be able to stay in school? How am I going to take care of the baby? Those are the main things that plagued me until I found some answers.” When respondent 2 found out his girlfriend was pregnant, he stated he was “extremely scared, and a little upset with her.”
For respondents 6 and 8, hearing the news did not immediately evoke specific feelings. Respondent 6 stated, “I had no feelings,” while respondent 8 tried to maintain optimism. He stated:

It was in a gray area, I say unknown, because I don’t know what it was like. I knew, before me becoming a father, I knew that I wasn’t going to be a failure because of my mission, because of my drive for life. Like I said, I feel like I’m an emotional guy, and I think about life 24/7. And I feel like me doing something can’t stop me from getting to where I want to get in life.

Fatherhood News

Participants were asked to describe who they shared the news of fatherhood with first. Six of the fathers (60%) stated they told their friends they were going to be fathers first. Respondent 1 recalled the first people he told that he was going to be a father were his two roommates/fraternity brothers. He stated:

I think the first person I shared the news with was…I lived with two of my fraternity brothers and I think it was them. I lived with them, and I was like, Yo…guess what? And they were like, “Get out of here!” I didn’t even tell my dad, because that’s one of those things you have to brace your parents for and practice your speech.

Similar to respondent 1, respondent 9 revealed to his friends that he was going to be a father. He stated:

The first person I shared the news with was my best friend. It’s funny because we are definitely friends for a reason. Only he and I could go through something like
this together. When I told him, he was shocked, and then said, “Don’t worry I had sex with a girl and she’s due in August” (laughter).

Two participants stated they informed their fathers when they found out they too were going to be fathers. Respondent 8 recalled his first time telling his father the news. He stated:

I called him. It’s crazy because he said, “What’s wrong?” (laughs) when I called him. It’s funny when someone’s not there as much, but they know so much. With him, it was always like he knew; even when I was growing up. He always came somewhere at the right time, so with him, he was like, you know what you got to do. And with him, he was thinking the same thing I was thinking. You need to get an abortion because I’m not ready. We’re not ready.

Two participants (20%) also stated they first notified their mother about the news of fatherhood. Respondent 4 stated:

Once she found out for sure, even though we planned it, I told my mom. I went to my house and told my mom, showed her a paper like, read this real quick for me, and she’s like reading, and like, why ya’ll playing? I’m like, we’re not playing, we’re serious. She’s like, oh wow, congratulations. She was happier than we were.

Fatherhood Defined

Participants were asked to provide their definition of a father. Many of the definitions provided by participants overlapped with other participants. Six fathers (60%) defined a father as one who is a supporter or is supportive. Respondent 2 described a father as “someone who is there physically, emotionally, and mentally, to support, love,
care for, and be there for their child. Someone who is there to call on when in need; someone who you trust and will keep you safe.” Similarly, respondent 3 stated a father is “a man who provides, supports, and does what he has to do for his seed. Anybody can be a daddy; just not everyone can be a father.” Similar to these definitions, respondent 7 stated that a father “provides and supports their children financially, emotionally, especially little girls. They need a male presence in their life.” Six participants (60%) described a father as a provider. Respondent 10 defined the role of fatherhood by naming roles the father has to fulfill. He stated “provider, protector, teacher, backbone of the family. A father is someone who takes care of his family and has his family’s best interest at heart; not his own.” Five participants (50%) stressed the importance of being present and being visible to their children. Respondent 4 stated:

My definition of a father would be a nurturer; someone who’s there. Your presence surpasses anything, even financially. The presence and just being able to take what you have and what you know and to pass that knowledge on. I think my definition of a father may change as my son gets older. I think it will change, not completely from the basics, but that definition will expand and it’ll be other things, like once he gets to grade school and to the preteens, being able to talk to him about stuff like that, so I think it’ll expand. But as far as the basics, a nurturer, a provider, and just being that support system definitely.

Similarly, respondent 6 described a father as:

A man that’s there financially, mentally, and physically, just to be there for their kids. That’s what a father should be, always there for their kids. Even if you’re
out all night and out all day, you make sure that your baby sees you every morning.

Four participants (40%) described the role of a father by using the word or describing the responsibility of a teacher, while four (40%) of participants defined a father using the words “protector,” or one who is “reliable.” Respondent 8 stated, “A father is not just the sperm donor. A father-figure is someone that is of manly deeds who can lead, whether female or male, on the right path and guides them the right moral way.” Three fathers (30%), when defining the meaning of the word father, stated “anybody can be a daddy; just not everyone can be a father,” or some variation of that statement. Respondent 1 explained:

To me, a father is a sperm donor. There’s a mother and father by genetics. So, if you have a kid you’re a father. I believe a dad is something different. I believe a dad is someone who’s there all the time. I’m not just a father, I’m dad….You know what I’m saying? Fathers come and go. You can see your father once in a blue moon. Your dad is there all the time. Your dad is someone you can talk to and they have your back. Your dad is someone who teaches you simple stuff: how to ride a bike, tie your shoe, play a sport, or whatever the case may be. The dad is the disciplinarian—the person you fear, but also a person you know you can go to. So I believe there is a difference between a father and a dad.

Similarly, respondent 9 stated:

A father is a name or a title. It’s how we identify the male who contributed to the baby, as is the mother. A dad is a term of endearment, and who teaches you what
you need to know, plays catch with you, who you aspire to be. Anybody can be a father. Dads protect you, teach you, and provide for you.”

Respondent 5 described compassion as an important characteristic of a father. He stated, “You do not have to be a biological person to be a father, if you’re a stepdad you can be more of a father than the biological father. You have to show compassion, provide for him and the family, and talk to him.”

Fatherhood Advice

Participants were asked who they turn to when they have questions about their fatherhood role. Of the respondents, 40% stated that they do not consult anyone with questions about fatherhood. Respondent 2 stated:

I don’t think I have been in contact with too many fathers since becoming a father. I have casual conversation here and there. When people see me walking around with my daughter, people will drop some knowledge or advice here and there, but I have not asked for any help or pointers from anyone. There may not be a reason why, but I just have not done it.

Similarly, respondent 5 stated:

Nobody really. I do a lot of reading. I find myself getting more spiritual, so I read the Bible. I need my son to believe in something. I grew up in a strict religious household. I don’t care what my son’s religion is, but he has to have some set of morals and some set of goals. I usually figure it out on my own. I look how others raise their child, and how I want my child to be raised, and it doesn’t always match. How you present yourself is how you will be perceived.
Respondent 10 explains in detail his rationale for not asking others questions about fatherhood. He states:

No one. I feel like most things in life are just a matter of trying to understand what’s going on, and when it comes to being a dad, I just try to address the underlying factors before I ask for someone’s help; simply because I feel like my issues are unique. I feel like everyone’s issues are unique, and I feel like the best way to address your issues is to first start out with trying to figure them out yourself before you talk to someone else about it. It’s always good to talk to somebody else, but it’s also good to have a point of view and stance of how you feel if things might be able to change if you decide to talk to somebody else. I try to have my own opinion about things—try to figure them out by myself before I go ask a lot of questions.

Two of the fathers (20%) stated that they turn to their father when they have questions about fatherhood. Respondent 1 stated:

The first person I would turn to is my father, because I think it’s better to ask him too, because not only does he know how to be a dad but he knows who I am, because he raised me. So he would know exactly what I would do before I would do it, or what I was thinking beforehand. He might say, “Okay. Son, you can’t do that, I already know what you were thinking.” I think that would be the first person I would go to.

Similarly, respondent 7 stated, “My dad has kids and two step-kids, so he knows about being a father. I feel like he’s the best person to go to. I would not go to just anyone.” In
addition, two of the fathers (20%) stated they turn to their mothers when they have questions about fatherhood. Respondent 9 identified his best friend. He stated:

I think I learned a lot about fatherhood from my best friend. His son is only two months older than my daughter. He is very knowledgeable, he reads a lot, and the little bit of time he has I can reach out to him and ask him for advice, or he will just give me suggestions or advice. There’s a lot about fatherhood that I’ve learned from him, such as reading to our kids. I think I reach out to him most in regards to the immediate future. Anything that’s further down the line, such as health plans and saving for college, I look to my aunt.

Respondent 8 identified his cousin as a source “because I don’t know many fathers that are doing what they are supposed to.”

**Support Network**

Participants were asked who helps them and how. Four fathers (40%) answered that their friends help them. Respondent 1 described how his peers support him:

I think my fraternity brothers hold me down as far as my peers, we can all relate to each other and they’re fathers. And there’s nothing more comforting than seeing who you’re cool with, like your friends, going through the same thing you’re going through, or they beat you to the punch already. So you can say, “he definitely knows what to do...so let me ask him.” I might ask what you did here or there. They keep me grounded and leveled. Family always has your back, you know what I mean...support. But what I think, with me, some of my family members and fraternity brothers are merged, they’re like synonymous. I would consider them family because we hold each other down financially We’ve held
each other down emotionally, including before and after we’ve had our children. We may ask each other to watch our kids for a moment please...whatever. If you have a good team, they’re going to merge. Good people are going to merge, no matter who’s around you at that moment.

Similarly, respondent 8 stated:

One of my friends. He’s younger than me but he has an old soul, he actually just bought my son some sneakers for me because he works at Foot Locker. So he got a discount and stuff like that. Another friend of mine, he’s like my best friend. He’s going to buy my son an electric car that he can drive. Stuff like that, small things like that really help, because that’s the thing about being a male. You show your son having good surroundings can help you in life, because if you have bad friends, whether if you’re a good kid or not, that stuff tends to rub off on you. Whether it’s immaturity, or friends that are in gangs; stuff like that starts to rub off on you somehow, someway. So having good surroundings is always good.

Respondent 5 also identified his best friend as his support network. He stated, “We’re the same age and we’ve known each other for most of our lives. That’s my moral support. We went through the same things with our child’s mothers, and we give advice to each other.”

The results showed that 30% of fathers identified their mothers as a form of support. Respondent 10 described how his mother helps him with his children. He stated: My mom watches my kids when I go to work, or when I come home from work and I’m still tired. If I need something from the store, she’ll bring them some milk or some juice or candy, or something like that. Just small things I need her to do.
Similarly, respondent 6 stated:

My mom is someone that will just come out of nowhere and drop off a big bag of clothes, or a big bag of peppers, and a whole bunch of formula and say, “Here, this for you all.” And lots of times she wants to take the baby. Whenever she wants [the children] she wants them, but, other than that, I’ve never asked for help; never wanted no one’s help.

Additionally, two of the participants (20%) identified family as their support network.

Respondent 3 stated:

I get plenty of help. My mom, sister, grandma, everybody. They buy her clothes once in a while, whatever she wants from the supermarket, toy store, Pampers, soaps, whatever. Basically every time they go out, they grab her something. They just have to come home with something for her.

Similarly, respondent 2 stated:

My girlfriend’s mom helps out a lot because that’s where we’re living right now. So she will come in and take my daughter, so we can have some time together.

For the most part, my girlfriend’s friends are my friends too. They will come over and visit us or watch our daughter, too.

**Fatherhood Need**

This segment of questions focused on exploring participants’ needs as young African American fathers. The following topics were discussed: fatherhood preparation, program design, and identified resources that participants felt they needed to be successful fathers.
Fatherhood Preparation

Participants were asked to discuss topics regarding parenting that they felt underprepared for or would like to learn more about. Three participants (30%) stated they would like to learn more about how to discuss puberty with their children. These participants also expressed concern about overall communication with their children.

When thinking about the task of discussing puberty with his daughter, respondent 3 stated, “Yeah, I don’t know how I’m going to deal with that.” He had concerns about discussing the menstrual cycle and the development of breasts with his daughter.

Similarly, respondent 4 felt unprepared to discuss puberty. He stated:

Talking to my child about sex, drugs, just day-to-day life. I can only provide him with what I’ve been through. I would love to provide him with another story from what was passed on to me, who knows, maybe I would have lived my life a little different when I was younger. I’m just going to do the best that I can to show him, and just tell him what I’ve been through, and to not make my mistakes.

Respondent 9 felt that he would be more comfortable discussing puberty if he had a son rather than a daughter. He stated:

Sometimes I think about how I will talk to my daughter about having sex. I feel like I know how I would talk to my son if I had one. I would like to teach her to have respect for herself, and know her worth and not define herself by any man’s definition.

Respondent 2 was more concerned about overall communication with his child; more specifically, about family traditions and holidays. He stated:
I know there’s a time in their lives where they need to be kids, but when is the right time to bring some light to them. For instance, my girlfriend and I had a conversation the other day about Thanksgiving. We all know the whole story about when America was discovered, the massacre, the slaughter, and rape and all of that stuff. And the story of the Pilgrims and feast is not 100% true. So how to teach them right from wrong and when is the right age to shed light on them.

Two fathers (20%) expressed concern about school preparation—they wanted to know how to select the best school for their child. Respondent 10 stated:

Getting your kids ready for school and daycare. That’s not an easy task, and that’s probably the most difficult thing cause that determines the type of job you could have in terms of hours and stuff. Diet issues like feeding your kid the right food. I see people feed their children all types of stuff, give the kids juice, all types of stuff.

Similarly, respondent 5 stated:

My son’s three right now, so he’s in a rapid stage of development, so I would like to know how I could be involved with that as much as possible. I don’t want him to be the bad kid at school. So, I guess, just preparing him for school and preparing him to be around other people, because he sometimes deals with separation anxiety.

Respondent 1 had a different perspective regarding planning for parenthood. He stated:

I don’t know what I feel underprepared for. I feel like everything is different when you’re dealing with this. You know? You can’t really prepare. The only thing you can really prepare for is monetary. That’s the only thing you really have
control over is saving and getting money. You can control how many jobs you’re going to work, but, other than that, there’s not much you can do to prepare mentally. Some people tell you, you can learn patience. Patience you can learn, and how to have patience with this, and what to do when your kids won’t sit down, and how do you cope with that. But again, what he or she may tell me may not work with me because I’m a different person. That stuff is a case-by-case basis and each child is different, you know? What you may find cute, I may find annoying. Prime example, my sister and I are different. So, if someone asked my parents what would you do to prepare for your next child and based it off their first child, which was me, it was completely different. They didn’t have to do the same things for my sister. I was up and running around and I was a boy. I’m a people person and like to be around different people. My sister, she can sit in the house all day and you wouldn’t even know she was home, and when you have a kid like that you don’t even have to do anything. You don’t have to watch her. She can watch herself (laughter). It’s a case-by-case basis.

Two participants (20%) felt they would like to learn more about childrearing. Respondent 7 stated, “I would like to know more about kids developmentally and making sure not to spoil my child….Thinking about their needs versus their wants, and how the child grows up developmentally.” Respondent 8 stated he would like to know “how to raise multiple children.”
Advice

Participants were asked to reflect on their experiences thus far, and provide advice to themselves based on their experiences. Two participants’ (20%) advice was to “stay focused.” Respondent 8 stated:

Stay focused on the task at hand. As a father, this is what it’s about. As a father, stay focused on the goals you have. Don’t get sidetracked because, I mean, the times are getting rougher and rougher, whether we have technology to help us or not. The times are going to get rougher, and you have to stay focused on whatever task you have to get done. Like I said, it’s a step closer to what you need to get accomplished, and to show your child that discipline. Focus is what I would keep telling myself, to stay focused.

In addition, respondent 1 stated:

Just stay focused. Focus on the child and the rest of the cookies will crumble in the right place. The pieces will fall into place. If you keep your child as your number one at all times, as your goal, then everything will come through.

Respondent 7 reflected on him and his baby’s mother’s relationship. His response was, “keep my daughter’s mom and my relationship how it is or improve it.” Respondent 5 focused on the importance of the fatherhood role. His advice was:

You’re the parent just as much as she’s the parent, and don’t let her tell you otherwise. As an African American male, I’m stereotyped to fail and not be in my child’s life, and I have to tell myself that I am in my child’s life, and I have to stay in my child’s life.
Respondent 3 stressed the importance of doing your best to support your child. He stated, “Do what you have to do man, just keep supporting your child. I don’t care if you have a dollar in your pocket, you better give that dollar up for some Pampers.” Respondent 2 described why it is important to be a positive figure in your child’s life. He stated:

Each day-to-day decision affects your family, even how you drive or interact with people. You want to set an example that distinguishes right from wrong. Even though she is young, children are so smart and soak up everything. They notice everything you do, so you need to be mindful of your day-to-day actions.

Respondent 10’s advice to himself was “to focus on developing a stronger relationship with my kids,” while respondent 6’s advice was “not show so much tough love.”

Fatherhood Preparation

Fathers were asked what they felt they needed in order to become a father. Three fathers (30%) reported that they needed money in order to become a father. Respondent 6 stated, “Just a little more money. That’s the only thing. Money’s an issue. I want another baby, but my pockets don’t!” Two out of three of these respondents who stressed the importance of money also stressed the importance of having a job. Respondent 9 stated, “I did not know how I was going to make ends meet. Luckily, things just happen at the right time. I found a good job, had insurance, but that’s all I felt I needed.” Similarly, Respondent 7 described his needs using a card game analogy. He described what a “good hand” would look like for someone who is becoming a father. He stated:

The best hand would be if your parents were millionaires (laughter). If you have a job with benefits that seems like a good hand that is dealt to me. If you can provide for your family, doing the exact same thing you were doing before, that’s
a good hand to me. There’s no real part of your life that is hit with stress. You may chill with your friends less, but I think chilling with your child is way more fun to me.

In addition to a car, respondent 10 also identified the following things, “A place, job, and a peace of mind; those were the main things.” Respondent 2 also identified a steady job and financial security as important. He stated:

Before [my daughter] was born, I wasn’t really steady in my work situation, so that was a need that I fixed. A place to bring her home to; to raise her. It’s not the situation I want to be in, but it’s an okay situation for right now. I needed to start saving money, so I could put things aside for her. I needed to clear my mind, so I could begin to focus solely on my daughter.

Respondent 3 described himself as needing family support. He stated, “I needed my mom. I know I needed my family members, basically somebody who had a little bit more experience than I did, that just showed me the ropes.” Similarly, respondents 4 and 5 (20%) described themselves needing a father figure to assist them with preparation. Respondent 5 stated, “I didn’t have a father figure and I think that would have helped me cope with having a son. My father and I tend to disagree a lot about how to take care of my son.” Respondent 4 stated:

I needed a male figure to pretty much warn me what a male goes through from preteen to teen to young adult to adult. I needed that talk. But I also take it with stride and hold my head up high to know that without that nurturer, that father figure, I think personally, I still panned out to be a pretty decent guy. I’m not perfect at all but I feel like to have gone through what I went through, and then
just from all the craziness, I panned out to be a pretty decent person. I didn’t go
to jail, I didn’t kill anybody, so it’s like, I guess, it’s the positive.
Respondent 1 could not identify a specific tangible object he needed in order to prepare
him for fatherhood. He stated:

I don’t think there is a tangible object that someone could give me besides a
comfortable pillow (laughter) to get some sleep. I mean, people give me advice
like when a child sleeps you’re supposed to be asleep, or get your naps in while
you can. Like I said, the hardest part about this whole thing was dealing with a
pregnant person. You can’t control a pregnant person or pregnant people. If you
like order and organization, which is a form of control, then, dealing with
something that is irrational or emotionally out of control is crazy as hell. I think if
someone tells you, expect the worst then….If I was to go in expecting the worst
then….I mean if someone told me that....Again, this is supposed to be a happy
joyful situation, and I mean not everybody’s is....So if someone told me to expect
the worst then I would’ve been like okay....I would’ve been fine. Then it wouldn’t
have been so much of a shock for me.

Need Fulfillment

Based on the needs that fathers identified within the previous section, they were
asked to describe whether or not their needs have been met. Four participants (40%)
stated that their needs have been met. Respondent 1 stated:

Yes, they are, but that’s because my child is only two months old. She’s so young
[and] that’s why. There’s a lot more that I got to learn, but as far as needs right
now, yeah, they’re being fulfilled. I mean, I love every moment of it.”
Similarly, respondent 2 stated:

> For the most part, yes. In terms of having a place to live, we are living with my girlfriend’s mom right now, so it’s been fulfilled, but not necessarily what I envisioned. We are getting our own place, so it is slowly coming together.”

For two other participants (20%), their needs have not been met. Respondent 6 stated, “I’m not stressing about it, so it’s alright I guess. It could be better, definitely could be better. Any more money could be better.” Similarly, respondent 3 expressed his feelings regarding his needs not being met. He stated

> I don’t think nobody in this world can tell someone exactly how to be a father. Everybody is different. Maybe some of my experiences will not be the same as somebody else’s. For an example, everybody doesn’t have the same support as everyone else.

**Program Design**

Fathers were asked what they would include if they were to design a program for young African American fathers. Half of the participants (50%) stated they would include a workshop on managing one’s finances. Respondent 7 stated:

> I would include something that would have to prioritize their needs now, and what they’re able to purchase later. You don’t have to get everything immediately, especially if you’re on a budget. Being there for the mother, so the mother doesn’t feel that the father is never there. Helping the fathers to prepare for the worst, such as the mother placing you on child support. Fathers should document their spending, or if they give money to the mother, they should always write it out in a form of a check, so there’s a record of it.
Respondent 6 also identified job preparation and money management as important topics for a fatherhood program. He stated:

Work studies or whatever it is to prepare a guy to work; to prepare the guy to have money and manage it. You have to balance out the family time. You want to hang out with your boy, that’s cool, but you have to have a balance.

Two respondents (20%) described mentoring as an important area to include within a program on fatherhood. Respondent 9 stated:

It would include an environment where the men could spend time with their kids together. Fathers could come together to discuss their experiences. There would be information about all aspects of fatherhood, such as how to talk to your children about different topics, knowing your custody rights as a father, because a father’s rights do not just include paying child support, reading to your child, and saving for college, and having an inclusive program that discusses what we as Black fathers experience, such as dealing with gangs, or drug use, etc.

Similarly, respondent 4 stated:

For a Black father, I would want the program to consist of fathers-to-be, fathers that are in that postnatal process, even as well as fathers that currently have kids, because then it’s like we can actually sit there and have a full range of the spectrum. You being this guy that your girlfriend or your wife is 2-3 months, or you just found out yesterday, to this guy that he’s 6 months into the game, he gained a couple pounds, so this guy that just had his kid and he’s not sleeping at night, to all the way down the line where we have fathers that are trying to help us understand why, or currently dealing with, let’s say, his kid is locked up from
making a foolish decision, and it may be asking for a lot, but having fathers there to where they had a kid, and they went to college and became successful. But I also want to show them that other side, to where that father that was there for his kid day 1 up until whenever, and this kid decided to make a decision that put him away for years, or whatever the case may be, so I don’t want to paint this pretty picture, but I want it to be almost a reality check for everybody.

Two participants (20%) identified prioritizing as an important topic for fathers. Respondent 1 labeled it “focus and priorities.” He stated:

Focus and priorities—because that’s the thing that screws a lot of people up, is their priorities; and understanding that your life is not over, it’s just shifted. You can still have fun, but you have to alter your fun. You can’t do the same thing that you used to do. Point blank and simple. That’s like with anything. You get a new position in work, you can’t do what you used to do before you got promoted. You might have more leniencies, you might have less...you never know. You got to accept the reality and the ability to sacrifice and set goals. Being selfless not selfish. You have to sacrifice for your child and set goals for you and your child.

You’re no longer one by yourself, you’re one with child.

Similarly, respondent 8 stated:

There are more young parents now than it has been. Especially African-American males, I would have a class for them to take, I would show them how to: (1) Like I said, stay focus on the task for their child first, and what I’ve learned from my cousin is, be about your money, which means getting not one job but a stable salary job and see if you can get other multiple jobs to help you provide for
yourself and your child. (2) Having business etiquette and tactics to do it the right way, and not being on the street selling drugs and stuff like that.

Respondent 2 identified strengthening the relationship between the mother and father of the child as a potential topic. He stated:

The major thing I would include would be having a relationship. It seems like many young black fathers are not having a great relationship with their baby’s mother. So, I think I would include a way to help communicate. That’s a major aspect of having your child feel that there is still some sort of similar thought process of raising a child. They may not be together, but they’re together to raise their child.

Respondent 10 stated he would like to include technology as a topic within the program. He stated:

First, I think that it should include skills, like adult education, teaching them Microsoft Office, advanced grammar, and how to type on a computer. I think that they’re important [skills] for black males to have. Also a program that teaches monetary maturity, because a lot of people just waste money.

Respondent 5 discussed breaking stereotypes as a potential workshop. He stated:

I think breaking the mold of a stereotypical African American father. It’s hard to break that stereotype once it’s on us. It’s important to be in your child’s life. My son has taught me about myself just as much as I am teaching him. He has taught me my strengths and my weaknesses.
Resources

Participants were asked the most important resource one could have when becoming a father. Two fathers (20%) cited another male figure or a father in their life. Respondent 6 simply stated “other fathers,” while respondent 4 went into more detail, and stated:

It would have to be that fatherly instinct, that protector, and that nurturer. It goes back to being that quote end quote, stereotype, even though it sounds corny, but that quote end quote stereotype of being a father; being that provider, being a nurturer, and being there. It sounds corny but it’s the truth. Of course, each one of those topics has a bunch of branches that you can branch, but the most important thing would have to be being able to be there, because if you aren’t there, you would never know.

Similarly, two fathers (20%) stated a support system is an important resource to have. Respondent 7 stated, “Honestly, a support system. Even if you have all of the money in the world, everyone can benefit from some guidance.” Respondent 9 identified a job and support system as important. He stated:

A job and a support system. Someone you can talk to, guide you, and make light of the situation. I don’t know where I would be without my best friend. We still share the same experiences from our child’s birth up unto now.

Similar to other participants’ responses, 20% identified family as an important resource to have when becoming a father. Respondent 3 stated:

Family—there is no way in hell somebody is doing it on their own. They’re not doing it on their own. You’re going to need somebody who has experience
already. A brand new father, it’s even harder when you have a female. You need family, support, comfort, the whole nine yards.

Respondent 3 identified a job as an important resource to have as a father. He stated:

Probably a job. Not just for the monetary value, but if you don’t have a job you can’t provide for you or your child, and you begin to think about other ways to make ends meet like turning to the streets. It also teaches your child the importance of responsibility, work ethic, and your willingness to step up to the plate and take care of your family.

Respondent 1 identified baby supplies as important. He stated:

Onesies, Pampers, wipes, and bottles (laughter). There it is….And you can throw an occasional pacifier in there to make it equal the “fab five.” Yeah….I think that’s the main things you need to survive. You may not have a crib or bassinet [but] if you have a bed; you just have to be extra careful. I didn’t have a crib when I was born, my parents didn’t have it like that. So…I’m here, I’m okay with no injuries. But you have all the rest of the things; the feeding, the cleaning, and, you know, and something to soothe you good.

For respondent 2, it was important to be able to do research on parenting independently. He identified access to parenting books and websites as important. He stated:

I would say read a lot, but honestly, a lot of the websites and books I read, they don’t really give you much to go on. A lot of the stuff I read focused on mothering. The take-home message I got from a lot of things I read was “be there” in order to support the mother. Follow her footsteps, what she says goes,
and when she needs help, help her. I would say if it was something out there to help, it should focus on fathering, rather than what to do for the mother.

Respondent 10 identified gaining understanding as important. He stated:

It’s probably intangible. The most important aid you could do is gain understanding. Every time you have a kid, it’s honestly a new experience, because it’s a different person altogether, so it’s more about understanding. I think that’s the most important thing.

**Fatherhood Enjoyment**

Participants were asked to describe what they enjoy most about fatherhood. The majority of fathers (80%, eight responses) stated they enjoyed watching their children grow up most. Respondent 8 described this experience as seeing himself grow up again, while respondent 7 stated he enjoyed “seeing her smile, knowing that she’s happy, knowing that everything that she needs I provide it for her.” Similarly, respondent 10 stated, “watching them grow; my older son growing up and saying things that I like, watch the same shows I watch, like the same superheroes I like. It’s just mind blowing, but it’s fun. There’s nothing better than it.” Similar to respondent 10, respondent 9 stated:

I enjoy it all. Just watching how much my child grows, seeing my child not being able to hold their own neck up to terrorizing my house or talking to me or telling me what to do. I love when she sings me songs on my voicemail. What I really like the most is watching her brain grow. If you tell her something, or she sees something one time, she will remember it. There’s nothing better than seeing her learn and develop. It’s priceless.
Similarly, respondent 5 stated:

I enjoy it all. Spending time with my son is the best, because he is three and he is silly, and we get to have a good time together. He’s energetic and off the wall.

Watching him learn something that you taught him is fun, too.

Respondent 6 enjoys observing the similarities and differences of both of his children. He stated, “Watching them grow up. Actually watching the difference from where my youngest one is now to wherever my daughter is now. It’s crazy to see the personality difference, how it changes, how they get more independent, if they’re independent.”

Respondent 2 enjoys knowing that his daughter depends on him. He stated he enjoys:

All of it. Even the days of not sleeping; just being there and knowing that this little person in the crib is counting on you. She looks at you, like you’re here for me. Especially, when she gives you that smile, she just lights up.

Having a child made respondent 1 amazed by the function of biology and genetics. He stated:

I guess seeing…it’s surreal….This specimen has 50% of my genetics (laughter), and seeing her do some of the things that I do; that is crucial, seeing her make the faces that I make as an adult or I’ve done all my life, or sleeping the same way that I do, that’s crazy. You’re really a combination of two people, and you do a combination of two people things.

Similarly, respondent 4 stated:

Just knowing that a liquid created this being. It sounds crazy, but it’s the truth.

It’s like you think about it, like wow, really. I created this kid, to seeing her
stomach grow, to seeing him come out the womb, to even now seeing him have his own personality. It’s just amazing and I wouldn’t change it for the world. Sometimes, I’ll just stand there and watch him, like he’s just living his own life, you know. He’s innocent and it’s just like I wouldn’t go back regardless of all the arguments her and I had, I wouldn’t change it. Just knowing that I contribute to the whole fact of evolution. Even though I would love to be around to see that he has his own kids, if I died today, at least I know my legacy has continued. I’ll be in my grave, like wow, at least I know I have a kid out there, even though he may be lacking. I didn’t live long enough to give him all the tools and the means to go about life, because at this point I’m still learning how to go through life myself, but at least I can, he’s taken and he’s just making it happen.

**Family Relations**

Participants were asked to describe their current relationship with the mother of their child and her family. Six of the fathers (60%) stated that they have a positive relationship with the mother of their child and her family. Respondent 2 stated, “It’s growing, and there’s definitely a support system between us. It’s been good, especially with us preparing for a wedding and everything. It’s fun, but at times stressful. Seeing her excited makes me excited.” Similarly, respondent 6 stated, “We get along and her family comes around often.” Respondent 1 described how he and his girlfriend deal with conflict. He stated:

I think I had a good relationship with my spouse’s family when I found out she was pregnant; no problem. No intimidation, no threats, nothing crazy, like “you ruined her life.” Now, it’s a little different. Like I said, dealing with someone
who’s pregnant isn’t always easy so when you’re going through things, other people see maybe a reaction versus what’s really going on, and they formulate their own opinion and also, you know, it’s their relative, and they go into defense mode, and at the point you have to cut that out and remind yourself what your main focus is, because I’m not going anywhere, and they’re not going anywhere. We’re all family whether we like it or not; I don’t entertain it. There’s really not much to entertain. Nobody says anything to me; I think [my girlfriend’s family’s] way is passive aggressive and my family is hands on, in your face, raw. I’m going to tell you how I feel, when I feel, type of people. That’s not the case over there [with my girlfriend’s family]. They will just not say anything at all or ignore the situation.

Two participants (20%) described a negative relationship with the mother of their child’s family. Respondent 5 stated:

Her parents and I never got along. Her mom is like a career criminal. When I first met her mom at 17, she was driving a BMW and I asked her what she did and she told me she was a “pharmacist.” I was thinking pharmacist, they made a lot of money, and I should work at Rite-Aide. Later I realized that her mom was a kingpin (Laughter). Her parents think I’m “bougie” because I am very law-abiding and went to college, and I work in federal law enforcement. Anything that is illegal, I don’t want my son around it. Her family and I don’t really converse unless I’m picking him up.
Similarly, respondent 9 stated:

Oh, I can’t stand her family. When you’re a kid and you say to your parents that you want to go over a friend’s house, and they tell you that they don’t know the friend’s parents, it makes sense. You know everything about your partner based on their parents. If I knew then what I know now, I would’ve looked at her family and parents and said, “No sir.” They’re just trash, I don’t know how else to call it. They don’t like the fact that I am a by-the-book guy. I will say that things have gotten progressively better, because we both understand that we have to do things for my daughter. When she asks about me, they will call me and let her talk to me and I appreciate that. Once we got past the fact that we don’t have to like each other [the family], everything has been good. I do not always agree with the examples they set for my daughter, but things are getting better.

Respondent 4 described getting along with the mother of his child’s family, but not the mother of his child; however, his relationship with the family varies from person to person. He stated:

I’m actually really cool with her twin brother. He and I are really close, and I’m really close with her mom as well. Her mom and I speak on a daily basis. Sometimes [the mother of my child] and I don’t even speak, but I speak with her mom. She has a younger brother that I’m really cool with. He’s only 10, so I’m really cool with him. Her father, when I see him, we don’t speak, on some we text, but when I see him I show him respect, hey what’s going on, how’s everything going on. Even her grandparents, I’m cool with her grandparents as well because, even her aunts, like I’m pretty much cool with everybody. I’m not
as close with them as her mom, but it’s never like it’s an issue if she’s at her grandparent’s house. They live out in Long Island, it’s never an issue. She has relatives all over the place, she still has relatives that I’ve never met before, but they know who I am and my family is really cool, like they’re really close with her. Over the last year, it hasn’t been so great due to her not coming around. You get into [an argument] with her and she’s like, I prefer not to come around because she feels this type of way, but they all, any of my relatives male or female, she knows if she ever was to ask them for anything they would definitely [look her out].
Chapter V

Discussion

This study explored the experiences of young African American fathers and their transition into the role of fatherhood. Specifically, participants were asked to reflect on their experiences with child care, parenting skills, specific needs, and emotional encounters when informed that they were going to be fathers. This chapter discusses themes which emerged from the participants’ responses to questions relating to their experiences, thoughts, feelings, and needs upon becoming fathers. The themes that emerged from these interviews included peer and family support, preparation for fatherhood, positive advice for future fathers, unplanned parenthood, fatherhood involvement, the definition of fatherhood, the importance of support networks, the needs of fathers, excitement for parenting and fatherhood, the need for fatherhood programs, the use of instinct when parenting, the impact the interviewees’ fathers had on their parenting, and the importance of maintaining a positive relationship with the mother of the child. Limitations of the study and implications for future research, including relevant information for mental health agencies, child care agencies, fatherhood programs, and parents and families, are also discussed in this chapter.

Peer and Family Support

In this study, participants discussed their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors when preparing for fatherhood. For many of the participants, the overwhelming response when presented with the news of fatherhood was to ask someone they knew and felt comfortable with for help. Each father had at least one or two people they could count on, whether a family member or friend. This support was a key factor, because all of the
participants who searched for direction or support from books, television, and parenting courses felt that these sources were predominately geared towards women. Such efforts to seek help, whether ultimately successful or not, displayed the willingness of the fathers to be active participants in parenting, which is consistent with the literature.

Hinckley et al. (2007) indicated that the tendency of expectant fathers to rely on the advice of friends and family is due to the lack of sufficient professional guidance and appropriate role models in society. In addition, research evidences that the social aspect of support systems can be vital because it can act as a buffer against stress for young fathers (Fagan et al., 2007). For the participants in this study, the role of their support network for assistance with parenting was significant. A majority of fathers labeled a support system as among the most important resources a father could have, and one participant’s specific advice to expectant fathers was to identify a support system. Participants credited members of their support network as assisting in many ways, such as offering emotional support, parenting advice, babysitting, providing food for the family, financial assistance, gifts for the participants’ children, and being positive role models.

Participants also stated that the first people they shared the news of fatherhood with were their support networks. Those who described having few members within their support network reflected on their parents’ (many times fathers’) degree of involvement to determine what childrearing techniques they would and would not use, and the extent of involvement they wanted to have in their child’s life. Consistent with the literature, men learn how to be fathers from role models. When such figures are absent, expectant
fathers find it difficult to acquire the expertise necessary for involved fatherhood (Hinckley et al., 2007).

**Preparation for Fatherhood**

In response to a variety of questions regarding preparation during the interview, many participants described themselves as being unprepared for the role of fatherhood, particularly with respect to caring for their partner and child during the prenatal and postnatal stages. Furthermore, the majority of fathers within this study stated they had little to no experience taking care of children prior to having their own child. Participants searched for or identified parenting resources, but in many cases found the resources to be gender specific for women. Very few participants mentioned receiving any assistance from social service organizations. Based on the participants’ responses, it was clear that expectant fathers require more information regarding the topics of pregnancy and fatherhood to be better prepared at the time they enter parenthood (Hinckley et al., 2007).

When asked about physical preparation, many fathers questioned whether there was a real way to prepare for the role of fatherhood physically, while others described their preparation as efforts geared toward job attainment, gaining financial stability, and better habits of time management. The theme of being financially prepared surfaced with many of the participants within the study as they described their motivation to find a new or better job to support their family as a top priority. This is consistent with Deslauriers et al.’s (2012) suggestion that many young men believe that the father’s primary role is to be a good provider. Any inability in this regard heightens the internal conflict they feel when they realize that they may have a hard time meeting the expectations placed on them.
Almost half of fathers interviewed reported they did not emotionally prepare for fatherhood. When discussing fatherhood, emotions such as anxiety, fear, and happiness were mentioned. Fagan and Bernd (2007) described fathers experiencing those emotions often and their having an effect on the father’s involvement with his child. Consequently, it is important to assist fathers with overcoming negative emotions, as they can have an effect on the ability to father (Fagan & Bernd, 2007; Halle et al., 2008). A few fathers described themselves as not having an emotional connection to their child prior to their partner giving birth.

Mentally, fathers reported an increased amount of rumination. Upon hearing the news of fatherhood, participants stated they became more self-reflective and self-aware, and were forced to make difficult decisions regarding their and their new family’s lives. This again suggests some form of emotion preparation on the participants’ behalf. Some fathers found themselves having to make a decision between continuing with their postsecondary education or dropping out and finding a job. Others began to make decisions about whether to make changes within their social network and how often they would hang out with friends.

To assist with preparation, participants often contacted their support networks, read books, and watched television for additional help and guidance; however, fathering based on instinct was a common theme among all of the participants. Participants reported that acting based on instinct and getting assistance from loved ones was useful. In addition, those participants who had experience taking care of children prior to having their own—most often at family gatherings, taking care of siblings, and babysitting their friends’ children—still admitted to feeling unprepared. Nevertheless, the majority of the
fathers within this study displayed their desire to be involved in the mother’s and child’s life. This can be attributed to most feeling that they had a moral obligation to their child, encouragement from their support networks, and their belief that they needed to “man up” and accept their responsibility.

As their children increased in age, participants mentioned becoming more comfortable and confident in their role as fathers, which they attributed to their acting on instinct and the assistance of their support networks. For many of their partners, being a mother and taking care of the child was intuitive; however, for the fathers, support was key in their success (Hinckley et al., 2007).

**Parenting Advice**

When providing advice to expectant fathers, participants made statements such as “get focused,” “man up!”, and “get on the ball,” whereas the continuous message for current fathers was to “be there.” As participants expanded upon the advice they would give other fathers, clear characteristics emerged of what constituted a “good father,” including, among others, one who is responsible, brave, pays attention to detail, creative, maintains a functioning relationship with the child’s mother, acts as a positive role model, and is involved. Fathers stressed that, contrary to media portrayals, one of the coolest things a father could do is spend time with his family. In addition, fathers stressed the importance of gaining financial stability. If one could not find a job, one participant stated that a father should attempt to further his educational attainment. One participant cited money issues as a key reason for fathers’ lack of involvement or visits with their child. However, almost all fathers stated that spending time with the child was most important.
Support was another theme mentioned throughout participants’ advice to fathers. Participants stated that fathers should provide support to their child’s mother throughout the prenatal process—which they acknowledged as a difficult time for mothers. In addition, participants stressed the importance of fathers identifying a support system with prior parenting experience that they could rely on to assist with advice concerning how to take care of children and other matters. This speaks to how much fathers value the help they receive from their support networks and the need for parenting classes designed specifically for fathers.

**Unplanned Parenthood**

Potts (2000) presented alarming statistics suggesting that fatherless homes put children at risk for unprotected sexual practices and early parenting. This research is consistent with the findings of the present study: a majority of the participants stated they resided in a female-headed household and almost all stated that they did not intentionally become fathers. The participants who acknowledged their fatherhood as intentional stated that they made the decision spontaneously while in the process of sexual activity. Those whose newfound fatherhood role was unintentional attributed this predominantly to unsafe sexual practices; inaccurate beliefs that their partners were using birth control; and efforts at contraception that proved unreliable, i.e., condoms that broke, or not pulling out quickly enough. This underscores the importance of using two forms of contraception, and having conversations about parenting prior to engaging in sexual activity. This also raises an important question regarding what type of script is being provided by parents to young African American males regarding sex and parenting. The literature suggests that African American and Hispanic males born to young and unmarried parents are more
likely to become young fathers than their White counterparts and tend to come from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Berger & Langton, 2011; Teachmen, 2004).

**Fatherhood Involvement**

When notified of impending fatherhood, participants often felt a sense of commitment or obligation to remain in the child’s life, and almost all participants decided to maintain a significant presence in their child’s life, despite of their lack of intention to become fathers, as discussed above, and in contradistinction to media portrayals of African American fathers as absent within their child’s life. Participants attributed their decision to remain involved in their child’s life to the values instilled in them when they were children and the relationship they had with their father, whether positive or negative.

Very few participants described their fathers being involved in their lives. Those who did, however, stated that they wanted to emulate their father’s involvement and parenting practices with their children—offering this as the main reason why they remained involved in their child’s life. These participants all shared a story or memory of their father that impacted their lives. Participants whose fathers were not involved in their lives have decided to remain optimistic, and use their negative experiences as motivation to be better fathers and give their child what they felt they missed out on. This desire to do better than their fathers is consistent with the literature. Guzzo (2011) describes it as the *compensatory hypothesis*—men who had unpleasant relationships with their father do not want to recreate the same experience for their own children.
Fatherhood Defined

When asked to provide a definition for the word father, all of the participants provided a list of words which described the responsibilities of the role, the most common of which was that a father is one who supports and/or provides. This is consistent with the literature finding that men believe that they should be providing for their families, in many cases financially, as fathers. There was also a frequent variation of the distinction between being a “father” and being a “dad,” i.e., any man could impregnate a woman and become a biological father, but it takes commitment, involvement, and support for that father to be a dad.

The roles and definitions ascribed to fathers have become much more nuanced than that of the traditional breadwinner or provider. While the necessity of being a financial arm within the household was acknowledged, participants have described fathers as teachers—not just of values as in the past—but of finances, puberty, and playing sports. Additional functions include being a disciplinarian, protector, advisor, advocate, coach, and cheerleader, all of which should be guided by compassion. One participant suggested that as he and his son got older, the definition of fatherhood would evolve as well. This evolving definition of fatherhood is also suggested in the literature (Rotundo, 1985).

Support Networks

It is clear from the participants and literature that the assistance that fathers receive from their support networks plays an instrumental role in helping them cope with fatherhood. Based on what has been said by participants, I have defined their support network as family and/or friends who love them; have experience with a particular area
of need; and are ready, willing, and able to assist them with that need when necessary. Within the support network, family and friends have been described to be synonymous. Both groups love and help in a variety of ways that participants found to be equally important. Participants who reported a strong relationship with their father stated they turned to their fathers for advice. Curiously, despite the emphasis on having a support system during the time of fatherhood throughout this study, almost half of the participants stated they turn to no one when asked who they consult for advice regarding fatherhood. This could be due to men feeling they have to appear strong and invulnerable: using services implies that one is needy and vulnerable (Deslauriers et al., 2012). However, when participants were asked “Who helps them?” they immediately started listing names from their support network. This could mean that a portion of fathers receive help from their support network that is tangible, or that upon the participants reporting that they are going to be fathers, their support network begins helping without an initial request for help. Furthermore, it could mean that participants who did not have a strong relationship with their fathers are reluctant to make a request for help. The difficulty with which some men approach acknowledging their need for help should be explored more. Such investigations will facilitate outreach and the framing of conversations with men that can take into consideration their discomfort in order to receive necessary assistance.

**Fatherhood Need**

Most fathers expressed that they felt underprepared to communicate with their children regarding sex, puberty, social norms, and interacting with society. In addition, fathers expressed a need for knowing more about childrearing and identifying how best to educate their children. To prepare for fatherhood, fathers expressed a need for more
money, job attainment, and/or a car, while other fathers expressed a need for guidance from a male figure regarding fatherhood.

The needs mentioned above were also topics that the participants would include in future programs created for fathers. The concern regarding finances and job attainment was echoed throughout the study and is consistent within the literature (Pollock, Amankwaa, & Amankwaa, 2005). The topic of finances varied from spending smart when expecting, to creating a family budget, to creating opportunities for young African American fathers to obtain jobs. This is important because the more financially stable a father is, the more likely it is that he will be involved with his child (Forste, Bartkowski, & Jackson, 2009). In addition, participants described the importance of the opportunity to bond with other young African American fathers and be able to spend time with their children together. Participants underscored the importance of interacting with fathers who are developmentally at different stages within their fathering career. In addition to finances and job attainment, participants stressed the importance of fatherhood programs discussing a father’s parental rights, mainly due to feelings of disenfranchisement when engaged with the court system concerning custodial and/or child support issues.

When asked what the most important resource one could have when becoming a father, the participants’ responses were varied, but referenced the major themes of this study: support, financial stability, and being involved. This suggests that any one of these resources could be identified as most important, depending on the individual. A lack of a support system means that a father is deprived of the opportunity of getting his questions answered. A lack of financial stability may result in a father being too embarrassed to interact with his family on a consistent basis because he cannot provide for them. If a
father is not involved, he misses key milestones within his child’s life and may become increasingly detached from his child.

**Fatherhood Enjoyment**

Almost all of the fathers within this study greeted the news of fatherhood with excitement. Being a father has proved to be a developmental process for the participants, just as much as growing up is for their children. When asked what they enjoyed most, almost every father stated he enjoyed watching his child grow up. They enjoy seeing their child smile, hearing their voice, get excited when they like or do things that are similar to their father, and take pride in the fact that they dispel negative stereotypes and provide their children with a safe and loving home.

Most literature has focused on the effects of father absence on households, increasing fatherhood involvement, the characteristics of a young father, perceptions of good fathering among males, the meaning of fatherhood, and transitioning into fatherhood. While these are all important topics, the voices of young African American fathers who are proud to be parents and the factors that contribute to their remaining involved need to be addressed with qualitative studies. While academic journals may appear to lag in the study of males, especially young African American males, who enjoy being fathers and take pride in having the responsibility of a parent, the media makes virtually no effort to portray the positive image of parenting that was so visible in the attitudes of the young African American males in the present study. There have been only seven television shows which display single African American fathers involved in their children’s life, and of those, only one has remained on the air longer than one year.
Limitations of the Current Study

The small sample used in this study dictates the importance of exercising caution in generalizing its findings from this research to the general population. Additional studies with larger sample sizes are encouraged to confirm or expand upon the findings of this small exploratory study. The study was geared towards young African American fathers between the ages of 18 and 26; however, since engaging young fathers can be difficult and time consuming, the majority of the fathers were between the age of 22 and 26. It may be beneficial to partner with organizations that work with younger fathers in order to gain a broader and larger sample size.

Another limitation of this study is that the majority of the participants resided in New Jersey and maintained a low- to lower-middleclass socioeconomic status. The latter is consistent, however, with research that correlates low socioeconomic status with young fatherhood (Lemay et al., 2007). This further suggests that the findings of this study cannot be expected from all young African American fathers in all areas because there could be other factors, such as location, education, socioeconomic status, etc., that may result in differing experiences in other regions. A majority of the fathers within this study have either enrolled in college or have graduated from college, and this level of education also plays a role in the results of the study. Another limitation to this study is that the voice of the mothers of the participants’ children is not included, i.e., we may be privy to only “one side of the story.” It is expected that the participants’ responses were honest; however, the responses provided by the participants may relate to self-serving bias.

A final limitation of this study is investigator bias. This is due to the researcher being the conductor of all of the interviews and the analyst of the data, and his having a
high interest in the subject matter. The degree of involvement in the conceptualization, design, implementation, and analysis of the information may relate to investigator bias, and should be considered when interpreting the findings of the study.

**Implications**

**Implications for Future Research**

Although the need to promote responsible fatherhood is receiving increased attention from the government, the results of this study suggest that there remains a clear need for programs for fathers on parenting. Variability exists among service providers, as they include mental health staff, labor force and employment staff, and religious and/or community groups. Moreover, these programs also differ in levels of expertise (Tinkew et al., 2012). In this study, the majority of the participants resided in New Jersey and stated that assistance from outside agencies was limited, or only included the mother during the process. This may suggest that there are few fatherhood programs in New Jersey; however, an internet search revealed a striking number of programs on the east coast devoted to assisting fathers with parenting. This suggests that fatherhood programs may need to improve outreach in terms of advertisement and recruitment, and become more accessible to the population they serve. Researchers should explore recruitment strategies that will engage fathers to participate in parenting courses.

As an intervention, participants within this study mentioned that they sought out forms of media (books, television, internet, and movies) to provide information regarding parenting to assist them with taking care of their child. This suggests that media is firmly entrenched in American culture (Kelly, 2009). One study (Pehlke et al., 2009) suggested that a person watching television solely for entertainment value can, nevertheless, be
influenced by the images. This is unfortunate, since most fathers in the media are portrayed as deadbeat dads who are not financially reliable.

Two studies (Morris et al., 1999; StGeorge & Fletcher, 2011) suggest that mother-centered clinic-based parenting programs might use the internet as an alternative approach to engage fathers and facilitate their access to resources outside of the clinic, particularly as clinic staff may not be adequate to include fathers. Future research should explore how to take full advantage of the internet and media to provide services for parenting, and how fathers might participate in this type of service. Furthermore, researchers should explore the settings in which fathers feel most comfortable receiving services, i.e., mental health center, hospital, etc., and the more effective format, i.e., in-person or online.

Although the fathers within this study were educated and well-intentioned, they mostly relied on information sharing in relation to the developments occurring during this phase of their life (Friedwald & Newing, 2005). This was mostly due to participants not having sufficient professional guidance and/or appropriate father role models (Hinckley et al., 2005). The findings from this study make it clear that participants desired to understand how to support their partner in the prenatal process as well as connect with their child during the postnatal process; however, it is unclear what the most effective strategy is to engage young African American fathers to attend parenting courses.

Within the study, participants continuously remarked how instrumental their support networks were in assisting them with preparing for their fatherhood role; however, when the participants were asked who they turn to for help, as discussed above, many fathers stated “no one.” This may suggest that participants’ support networks
volunteered help without specifically being asked by the participants. This reticence toward asking for help, and the small sample size of this study, may suggest that programs for fathers may have difficulty gaining enrollment if a relationship has not already been established, or if fathers’ support networks aren’t involved.

An additional need that was described by participants was learning how to advocate for themselves and receiving legal advice when involved with the court system. Participants shared experiences of their partners using custodial rights as leverage to exact revenge for a relationship that has ended negatively. Programs that incorporate a legal rights component may be found beneficial for expectant, new, and single fathers. In addition, solid research should be done on the custody process and the effect a custody battle has on the father’s relationship with his child.

Fatherhood is already a dramatic event in men’s lives (Forste, Barkowski, & Jackson, 2009). Raising a daughter versus a son seemed to increase anxiety, as expressed by the participants within this study, much of which could be attributed to the difficulty revolving around discussing puberty, sex, and dating with their daughters. Some fathers reflected on their “player” lifestyle and worried about karma. Consequently, researchers should explore differences in parenting techniques used between a son and a daughter by young African American fathers.

Based on this study, there are some common stressors that young African American males experience when first made aware of impending fatherhood, such as finances, insufficient knowledge about childbirth and pregnancy, lack of information regarding caring for a newborn infant, and lifestyle changes. As discussed above, the absence of a father can have a tremendous negative effect on the family (Fagan, Bernd, &
Whiteman, 2007; Potts, 2010). It would be beneficial to know the reasons absent fathers cite for no longer being in their child’s life; whether they ever experienced excitement when hearing the news of fatherhood; and, if so, how long the excitement lasted; and what support, if any, could have been provided to help them remain involved in their child’s life.

Finally, the fathers in this study maintained enough courage, responsibility, and support to remain in their child’s life despite media messages that seemingly convey the impression that a father’s involvement or lack of involvement with his children has no more significance than any other lifestyle choice. As most participants within this study credited the values instilled in them as a child and their support networks as reasons for remaining involved, it would be useful to know who instilled their values and whether the script given to each regarding values by their loved ones was similar or not.

**Implications for Future Fathers**

The results of this study indicate that transitioning into fatherhood is not an easy task, especially when the pregnancy is not intended. Fatherhood should not be experienced alone, but with support networks to assist men in preparing to become fathers before and after the birth of their child, as was the experience of many of the males mentioned within this study. When receiving news that one is going to be a father, African American males should identify someone they know who is affable and knowledgeable about parenting, and locate at least one parenting program with a fatherhood component to attend.

The participants in this study found that being responsible fathers produced a sense of gratification and the satisfaction of producing a legacy (Lemay, 2007),
irrespective of the stress fatherhood entailed. Consequently, fathers should take advantage of the feelings of excitement and gratification and remain involved in their child’s life. Their connection with their children will serve as a model for the next generation to stay connected and invested in their own children—the father’s grandchildren (Forste, Barkowski, & Jackson, 2009). Participants within this study who described a positive relationship with their father as a child often illustrated this with anecdotes; however, those who did not, often described their desire to never be like their fathers.

The relationship the father has with his child’s mother can play a role in how involved the father is in his child’s life (Guzzo, 2011), and it was striking that most of the males within the study wished the relationship with the mothers of their child endured. However, different views on child rearing often eventually led to separation. Thus, it is important for partners to discuss their future prior to making the decision to have a child. Some of the participants were not in a relationship with their partners when engaging in intercourse. Consequently, it is important that young African American males practice safe sex, particularly as they tend to be more disadvantaged and less involved with children than older fathers (Berger & Langton, 2011).

Although the concept of fatherhood has changed significantly within the twenty-first century, what has remained the same, as discussed above, is the strong identification of being the breadwinner or provider as the dominant role of a father (Friedwald & Newing, 2005). Almost all participants identified having a job and financial stability as necessary in order to alleviate the stress of being a good father. All of the participants described a sense of motivation to gain employment or complete their education upon
hearing the news of fatherhood. This is consistent with the literature; consequently, it is important that fathers act on this motivation and accomplish as much as possible (Lemay et al., 2007). According to the participants, males should review a checklist prior to becoming a father: Do they have stable employment, money saved, support from loved ones, a mode of transportation, and a healthy relationship with their partner?

**Implications for Parenting and Fatherhood Programs**

Over the past two decades numerous grants and programs have been produced to assist fathers with parenting (Tinkew et al., 2012). Such increased efforts for fathers may be due to recent public policy developments and the creation of the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse. The findings from this study, however, are consistent with the literature which suggests that parenting programs, health care providers, and social workers generally focus on the mother as the primary parent (Halle et al., 2008; Lemay et al., 2007). Many participants mentioned that they sought ways to improve their knowledge so that they would feel prepared for their responsibilities upon hearing of impending fatherhood. Participants who attended parenting programs described their experience as unsatisfactory because they were treated as more of an observer than an active participant.

This is consistent with the literature as well. The modern father is interested in helping his children learn and would like to maintain an active role when participating in parenting programs (Evans et al., 2007). Thus, parenting programs should engage fathers early in the process, as the earlier onset is associated with more pervasive and sustainable outcomes (Pinquart & Teubert, 2010). In addition, parenting courses should be multifaceted and include a “male only” component so as to encourage prospective fathers
to bond with one another, get comfortable, and build confidence in taking care of a child on their own. The degree of male bonding may be influenced by the venue; therefore, a setting which also lends itself to social or leisure activities may be most effective (Deslauriers et al., 2012). Lastly, conventional parenting education courses will inform the father about what his partner will experience during prenatal development; however, a reciprocal discussion with the female partner concerning the psychosocial stressors the father may experience during pregnancy may also be effective in increasing understanding and drawing couples closer. When reading the literature, it was not clear that fathers receive an opportunity to share their experiences with their partner. Their active participation in studies on parenting and their parenting role suggest that they are ready to do so.

When discussing program design for father-only programs, participants identified key topics that such programs should include: group counseling, economic stability, mentoring, employment support, legal services, and skills training. The concept of skills training is very comprehensive and ranges from resume development to parenting skills. Fatherhood programs currently include interventions such as counseling, skill building, parenting classes, and education and employment support (Tinkew et al., 2012). In addition, these programs have targeted outcomes such as self-sufficiency, co-parenting, healthy couple relationships, and the decrease of recidivism. There is limited information; however, regarding the programs’ effectiveness (Tinkew et al., 2012).

Another area of needed research is delineating evidence-based interventions in programs for fathers and their effectiveness (Tinkew et al., 2012). A major benefit of using evidence-based practices is that guidelines are provided for implementers in the
form of manualized treatment. Manuals facilitate the administration of treatment as they typically identify the materials needed and provide the content of the intervention, as well as steps in its implementation (Norcross, Beutler, and Levant, 2006). This, in turn, enhances treatment integrity (fidelity), internal validity, and the ability for intervention providers to compare differences in the number of sessions, training requirements, and time commitments of various interventions prior to intervention selection (Norcross, Beutler, and Levant, 2006). In addition, mental health providers should familiarize themselves with evidence-based fatherhood programs. Some manuals may provide reliable measures of change which will allow the implementer to monitor progress more effectively. In addition, interventions are selected for inclusion specifically because they have produced a specific outcome for a specific population, thus, practitioners may have a greater degree of confidence that if they implement the program within a similar context and population, the outcome will likely be more effective for their clients.

Current programs should undergo evaluation to determine effectiveness, i.e., whether or not the programs have the correct desired effect on attitudes, knowledge, and behavior (Tinkew et al., 2012), and if replication is feasible. Based on fatherhood programs that were evaluated and shown to be effective, the following components should be incorporated: teaching methods appropriate to the culture of the populations, experienced and empathetic staff, high staff-participant ratios, programs geared towards core issues, use of theoretical approaches, individual support for fathers, participation incentives, mentoring, and interactive service delivery (Tinkew et al., 2012).

Unlike the traditional parenthood support group geared to the interests of mothers, it is suggested that those for fathers be designed to be responsive to those needs most
saliency within the community served, as issues of concern differ widely among diverse
groups of fathers. In addition to the variety of support offered, the type of organization
providing this support and the level of staff expertise delivering services vary as well
(Tinkew et al., 2012). The specific level of expertise needed to work with fathers,
especially young African American fathers, and be effective should be identified,
although in most instances professionals, such as psychologists and social workers, may
have better intervention skills than laypersons or paraprofessionals (Pinquart & Teubert,
2010).

**Implications for Mental Health Providers**

The findings from this study indicate that young African American males
experience several psychosocial stressors when becoming a father. These stressors
include, but are not limited to, economic stability, maintaining a healthy relationship with
their partner, and meeting society’s expectation of the fatherhood role. They have needs
in regard to their ability to cope with parenthood and obtaining the skills needed to take
care of a baby (Fletcher et al., 2007).

Although they had difficulty coping with the transition, the young fathers within
this study sought out opportunities to improve their situation within the educational,
financial, and skill-based domains. Many young African American fathers experience
judgment and prejudice that are a direct reflection of negative portrayals in the media. It
is important that mental health providers do not project such attitudes when working with
young African American males who seek assistance. Mental health providers should be
knowledgeable and confident in their skills and ability to work with this population by
focusing on the strengths of young African American males and ensuring that they receive the services they need to carry out their role as fathers (Deslauriers et al., 2012).

Implications for Legal Settings

The results of this study and the literature point out that the contemporary father participates in a joint venture with his parental counterpart to nurture and provide for their child. The expectations for this new millennium father are multifaceted. In addition to that of breadwinner, the father’s role is also associated with, but not limited to, counselor, teacher, cook, storyteller, coach, disciplinarian, doctor, and financial advisor. However, the legal field, insofar as custody issues are concerned, has not taken into account the roles contemporary fathers assume to the extent that their policies and judgment relegate fatherhood solely to a breadwinner function.

Fathers who seek custodial rights have demonstrated their desire to support and take care of their child by engaging in this procedure, yet some fathers in this study, when discussing involvement within the legal system, described themselves feeling judged and, at times, temporarily incapacitated. This is consistent with the literature. One study (Deslauriers et al., 2012) described participants within the legal system feeling powerless and not knowing how to express themselves and suffering anxiety levels to the point of full-blown crisis, especially when sensing that courtroom staff was looking down on them. (Although it should be stated that a few fathers in the study described themselves as being proactive and assertive with respect to court involvement.)

Legal staff should be sensitive to the concerns of young African American fathers and be aware that the contentious nature of the legal setting may provoke a reaction from the father that is not representative of his normal behavior, especially when the father’s
history in supporting his child is positive and the impact separation will play on both him and his child is severe.

**Conclusions**

This study sought to provide young African American males with the opportunity to talk openly about their experiences of becoming a father and how it has impacted their lives. The interview method comprised a number of questions and offered participants the ability to explain their experiences freely in their own voice, from their perspective, in order to provide professionals and future fathers knowledge and insight. Although many of the participants offered information that was consistent with the currently available literature, it is clear that there are still gaps in the research related to establishing links between young fathers and human service organizations, understanding which interventions are most effective for young African American fathers, and how said interventions or programs can be replicated.

Although this is a small study that cannot be generalized to the majority of young African American fathers, it is clear that the participants in this study have a strong sense of self, and awareness of what peers similar to them will find useful. In addition, it is clear that these participants understand the benefits and challenges of being a father. When interviewing the participants, there was a general lack of self-confidence in their competence when dealing with challenges, such as supporting their partner during the postnatal period, or mitigating the ear piercing cry of a newborn during the postpartum stage. Such areas of concern for young African American fathers underscore the importance of continuing to develop interventions that effectively educate them about parenthood. From a practical standpoint, policymakers, program planners, and mental
health agencies would be remiss if they did not include young fathers on their advisory committees or obtain feedback from them within focus groups. There are educational resources available, but television or any other form of media cannot be expected to educate and develop successful young African American fathers.

A final conclusion is that one striking aspect of this study was the realization that the young fathers of today are interacting with their children in ways that are drastically different from previous years. The importance of fathers and the encouragement for fathers to be connected with their children has received both national and international attention. Consequently, more fathers are making a conscientious decision to “man up” and be the best father they can be to their child. More young African American fathers, whether advantaged or disadvantaged, are taking pride in being in their child’s life. Ultimately, the effort fueled by the government, researchers, and practitioners has the potential to help support mothers and children as well (Deslauriers et al., 2012).
References


Appendix A

Fatherhood Questionnaire:

Background & Demographics

1. Age (Please List) ______

2. Highest Education Received
   a. Some School
   b. High School Graduate
   c. Some College
   d. Completion of 2 Year College
   e. Completion of 4 Year College
   f. Post Graduate
   g. Graduate School

3. Current Age of Child (Please List)
   a. ______
   b. Other (To Be Born) ______

4. How many children do you have?
   a. 1
   b. 2
   c. 3
   d. Other ______

5. Please list where you are from (city and state)

____________________________________________
Appendix B1

Interview Questions:

Fatherhood Experience

1. Did you have any experience with children prior to becoming a father?
2. Did you prepare for becoming a father physically, mentally, and emotionally?
3. How prepared did you feel when becoming a father?
4. What has been the most difficult experience you have had since becoming a father?
5. When you became a father, how did your life change?
6. Knowing what you know now, if you had an additional child, how would the technique of being a father be different for you?
7. Was your father involved in your life? If so, or if not, how has the involvement or lack of involvement influence your decision to become a father?
8. What advice would you give other young African American expectant fathers?
9. What advice would you give African American men who are currently fathers?
10. What has been the most useful info you have received regarding becoming a father?
Appendix B2

Fatherhood Emotional Encounters

1. Did you make a conscious decision to become a father?

2. When finding out your partner was pregnant, what was the determining factor for you to be in the child’s life?

3. Describe your feelings when hearing your partner was pregnant.

4. Who did you first share the news of fatherhood with?

5. What is a father?

6. When you have questions about your fatherhood role, who do you turn to?

7. Will your support network help you with your child?
   a. Who helps or will help you?
   b. How?
Appendix B3

Fatherhood Need

1. What topics regarding parenting would you like to know more about or feel under prepared for?

2. What advice would you give someone in your position?

3. Who are your support networks?

4. What did you feel you needed in order to prepare for becoming a father?

5. What has been the most useful info you have received regarding becoming a father?

6. Based on the needs you have identified how many have been fulfilled?

7. What programs regarding fatherhood would be beneficial for others similar to you?

8. What is one of the most important resources or aids one could have when becoming a father?

9. As a father, what would you like to be more knowledgeable about?

10. What have you enjoyed most about fatherhood?

11. Is there anything that I didn’t ask you, that you would like to tell me?
Appendix C

Informed Consent Agreement

“Young African American Fathers: An Exploratory Qualitative Research Study”

You are invited to participate in a research study. Before you agree to participate in this study, you should know enough about it to make an informed decision. If you have any questions, ask the investigator. You should be satisfied with the answers before you agree to be in the study.

**Purpose:** The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of young (age 18-26) African American fathers and their transition into the role of fatherhood. Learning more about young African American fathers’ thoughts, feelings, and experiences may provide mental health, social work, and child health agencies with a clearer idea of what young African American fathers lack and what they can benefit from. If you decide to participate in this study, you will discuss your experiences as a father; identify who you turn to for help, and what parenting skills (if any) you have learned prior to becoming a parent. By understanding the experiences of young African American fathers, agencies may be able to support African American fathers better.

**Participants:** This study will use a network sample of approximately 10-15 young African American fathers (18-26) and will be conducted at various setting contingent upon their geographic location. You will only be considered for participation in this study if you return a signed consent form. There is a cap on the number of males that can participate, as this is a small study, so the acceptance into the study is on a first come, first serve basis. That is, the first ten males that return their signed consent form will be offered the opportunity to participate in the study.
**Procedure:** If you participate in the study, you will be interviewed individually during a designated time at an agreed upon location. If you indicate at any time that you want to stop the interview, you will be thanked for your participation, and will be free to go home.

**Risk/Benefit:** There are no known risks associated with your consent and participation in this research study. Participation in this study may not benefit you directly; however you will play a major role in helping other researchers, social workers, psychologists, and others understand the experiences of young African American fathers.

**Confidentiality:** This research is confidential. The research records will include some information about you and this information will be stored in such a manner that some linkage between your identity and the response in the research exists. Some of the information collected about you includes: your name, age, geographic location, and employer. Please note that we will keep this information confidential by limiting individual’s access to the research data and keeping it in a secure location (password protected computer) in the researcher’s residence. All study data will be kept for three years after completion of the research, all documents with identifying information will be shredded and any audiotapes will be erased by the researcher after publication.

If you have any questions about the research, you may contact me, Maurice Ingram at (973) 953-9780 or email me at mtingram@gmail.com. You can also contact my dissertation faculty chairperson Dr. Nancy Boyd-Franklin at boydfrank@aol.com. If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the IRB Administrator at Rutgers University at:

Rutgers University, the State University of New Jersey
Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
I have read and understood the contents of this consent form and have received a copy of it for my files. By signing below, I consent to participate in this research project.

Participant Signature ___________________________ Date ______________

Investigator Signature ___________________________Date ________________
Appendix D

Audio Addendum to Consent Form

You have already agreed to participate in a research study entitled: “Young African American Fathers: An Exploratory Qualitative Research Study” conducted by Maurice Ingram. The Principal Investigator (Maurice Ingram) is asking your permission to allow him to include an optional procedure of audiotape (sound), as part of the research study. You do not have to agree to be recorded in order to participate in the main part of the study.

The recording(s) will be used for analysis by the Principal Investigator (Maurice Ingram) and to ensure that information from the research study has been recorded properly.

The recording(s) will include the responses that you provide throughout the interview. Name and/or address will not be included within the audio recording.

The recording(s) will be stored in a locked file cabinet and linked with a code to your identity and will be destroyed upon publication of study results.

Your signature on this form grants the investigator named above permission to record you as described above during participation in the above-referenced study. The investigator will not use the recording(s) for any other reason than that/those stated in the consent form without your written permission.

Subject (Print) ______________________________________

Subject Signature ____________________________   Date ______________________

Principal Investigator Signature _____________________ Date _________________