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# Understanding The Behaviors And Beliefs Of African-American/black Fathers: A Qualitative Examination

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**UNDERSTANDING THE BEHAVIORS AND BELIEFS OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN/  
BLACK FATHERS: A QUALITATIVE EXAMINATION**

by

**NICHOLAS J. GOMULINSKI**

**THESIS**

Submitted to the Graduate School

of Wayne State University,

Detroit, Michigan

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

**MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK**

2013

MAJOR: SOCIAL WORK

Approved by:

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Advisor

Date

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**2013**

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## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to all parents, and the work they do every day for their children. I hope this work builds upon existing knowledge so it will aid parents in whatever way possible, in light of the role of being a parent only seems to increase in difficulty as time passes.

Personally, this paper is dedicated to my present and departed family, friends, and wife. Your limitless amount of support, time, endearing care and understanding have proven invaluable as I continued to carry on with this extensive project.

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welcomed and needed experience. I hope many future students experience and appreciate your abilities as I did, as you were wonderful to work with and for.

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## **Introduction**

Fathers' involvement with their children has been associated with positive social, cognitive, and emotional outcomes for children in their development from infancy and extending into young adulthood (Cowan, Cowan, Pruett, & Wong, 2009; Florsheim, Burrow-Sánchez, Minami, McArthur, Heavin, & Huda, 2012; Waldfogel, 2002). While fathers play a critical role in the well-being of their children (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999; Sobolewski & King, 2005), much less is known about fathers' parenting techniques and discipline of children compared to mothers (Coley, 2001; Florsheim et al., 2012). It is important to study fathers and their parenting as they are becoming more active in the child-rearing process and caring for their children (Levine-Coley, 2001). Despite a father's influence, there is also a lack parenting programs available to fathers (Cowan, Cowan, & Knox, 2010) and those that are available have had their usefulness questioned (Cowan et al., 2009). Changing existing policy to provide fathers with greater access to parenting programs has the potential to improve children's outcomes (Waldfogel, 2002). An important first step in designing accurate and relevant parenting programs for fathers is to learn more about how men learn to be fathers and about their involvement and attitudes toward disciplining children.

This study will contribute to the extant literature by exploring fathers' perspectives of where they obtain information on parenting. This research will examine the different sources where fathers acquire parenting information. In addition, the researcher is interested in learning more about the disciplinary practices of fathers. For this study, the focus is on a sample of African American/Black men from a suburban Michigan community.

Focusing on the particular needs and insights of Black<sup>1</sup> fathers is important as research shows Black men have different experiences as fathers when compared to men from other racial or ethnic groups. Some of these differences are due to higher rates of multi-generation homes, higher rates of cohabitation (Eggebeen, 2002), and higher rates of non-resident fathers in the Black community (Buck et al., 2004). Men's race, culture, marital status, education and socioeconomic status all factor into their perceptions of their role and involvement with their children as a father (Bronte-Tinkew, Carrano, & Guzman, 2006). Fathers also have been found to differ in how they view and define their roles as fathers (Bronte-Tinkew et al, 2006). As evidence suggests that Black men generally have less contact with their children compared to non-Black men (King, Harris, & Heard, 2004), it is clear that additional research is needed to better understand the attitudes and behaviors of Black fathers.

#### *Traditional Roles of Fathers, Expectations of Involvement*

In the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, families in Western culture have undergone a number of changes. The roles and expectations of parents, particularly fathers, have shifted a great deal. The traditional model of a family has also changed. The old model of family roles held the mother or matriarch responsible for child rearing and homemaking (Gelles & Levine, 1999; Rane & McBride, 2000). The father or patriarch in the traditional model of the family was responsible for generating income for the family and also many times serving as a disciplinarian for their children (Bronte-Tinkew, Carrano, & Guzman, 2006; Carlson & Turner, 2010). Fathers mostly were not involved much more beyond these two roles (Daniel & Taylor, 1999; Lemay, Cashman, Elfenbein, & Felice, 2010).

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<sup>1</sup> Participants in the study used the terms "Black" and "African American," The term "Black," which was used more frequently will be used throughout this thesis instead of African-American/Black,

More recently there has been a cultural shift with the changing views of fathers' roles (Berlyn, Wise, & Soriano, 2008; Eggebeen & Knoester, 2001). Fathers of today are expected to be more expressive and nurturing with their children (Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2006). The idea of an egalitarian view of parenting between mother and father has grown in popularity (Eggebeen & Knoester, 2001). Egalitarian parenting is where mothers and fathers both share income providing roles, homemaker roles (Bronte-Tinkew et al, 2006), and share activities with their children (Sanderson & Sanders Thompson, 2002). At the same time we have also seen the broad views of parenting change as well. Parental involvement has been recently defined along three separate areas: engagement, accessibility, and responsibility (Lamb, 2000; Berger & Langton, 2011; Cabrera et al., 2000; Carlson & Turner, 2010). Engagement refers to the individual contact the parent has with their child (Lamb, 2000). Accessibility is the ability of the child to contact their parent, even if they are not in the same room. Finally, responsibility is the parent's expected role to provide for their child. Responsibility encompasses monitoring your child's health and giving them basic essentials such as clothing and food (Lamb, 2000). Fathers are now expected to be involved in each of these areas.

Today's fathers are increasingly involved in all parts of their child's life (Olmstead, Futris, & Pasley, 2009) and not just as an income provider (Berger & Langton, 2011; Cabrera et al., 2000). These new expectations of fathers now include being a companion, caregiver, breadwinner, teacher, protector and role model (Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2006). Other expectations for fathers include being in the room when their children are born, taking paternity leave from work, changing diapers, taking their children to medical appointments, attending school activities

and school conference meetings, meal preparation (Maldonado, 2005) and helping with personal hygiene (Waller, 2009).

The current expectations of fathers are to be positively involved with as many parts of their children's lives as possible (Marks & Palkovitz, 2004). Despite the change of expectations of mothers and fathers, the mother and child dyad still remains dominant (Daniel & Taylor, 1999). While attitudes regarding male involvement have rapidly changed (Daniel & Taylor, 1999; Knoester & Eggebeen, 2006), the shift in father's actual behaviors has been slow to occur (Bellamy, 2009). Women continue to be responsible for most home and child decisions (Knoester & Eggebeen, 2006) and still are primarily responsible for their children's welfare (Bellamy, 2009). There are also certain parenting activities that fathers are less likely than mothers to be engaged in. Fathers are more likely to be involved in playing and companionship and less likely to be involved in household work and helping their child with homework and study (Berger & Langton, 2011).

One of the primary reasons for the changing family roles and expectations has been women's increasing involvement in the workforce (Anderson, Kohler, & Letiecq, 2002; Cabrera, Tamis-LeMonda, Bradley, Hofferth, & Lamb, 2000). This has contributed to the on-going change and redefinition of parenting by mothers and fathers (Eggebeen, 2002; Gelles & Levine, 1999; Knoester & Eggebeen, 2006). As Cabrera and colleagues (2000) noted, 12% of married women were employed in 1950, and by 1997 this number had increased by two-thirds. According to the most recently published statistics from the U.S. Department of Labor (2012), the percentage of women with children who are employed increases as their children's age increases; 56.9% of married mothers of infants are employed, while 63.9% of mothers of children age six or younger,

and 76.1% for mothers of children between the ages of 6-17 are employed (U.S. Department of Labor, 2012). This shift has placed increased need and expectations of additional father involvement (Eggebeen & Knoester, 2001) due to the decreased time available for women.

Expectations of more father engagement with their children may reflect on the increasing cultural diversity within American families (Cabrera et al., 2000). Race, culture and socioeconomic status influence father's perceptions of their role and involvement with their children (Bronte-Tinkew, Carrano, & Guzman, 2006). Research, for example, has shown that Black men who cannot provide sufficient economic resources for their family generally view their role as a father more negatively (Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2006).

There is some evidence indicating that Black fathers at times are more likely to be more involved than Caucasian/White fathers, believing child care roles should be shared among parents (Sanderson & Sanders Thompson, 2002). When Black men have less firm gender roles of parenting, they can be more involved in non-traditional father parenting behaviors than White<sup>2</sup> men (Sanderson & Sanders Thompson, 2002). Other studies have suggested that Black men often tend to be more controlling of children than White men and spend more time on household chores with their children than White and Hispanic/Mexican/Latino fathers (Head-Reeves, 2010).

### *The Impacts of Father Involvement*

Father involvement has enormous implications for children in terms of their social, emotional and cognitive development. When biological and step fathers, and non-biological fathers are involved directly with children, while having more of an equal role with the children's

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<sup>2</sup> Although some of the scholars cited also use the phrase Caucasian/White, throughout this thesis I use the term "White" for the sake of consistency and simplicity.

mothers, they will have a beneficial impact on the children and their future success (Anderson et al., 2002; Bellamy, 2009), and their family (Berlyn et al., 2008; Bogenschneider, Wu, Raffaelli, & Tsay, 1998; Cookston, Braver, Griffin, Deluse, & Miles, 2007). Fathers who are involved with their children influence their child's academic achievement in terms of grades and enrollment (Marsiglio, Amato, Day, & Lamb, 2000). Many studies have demonstrated that fathers can have a positive influence on the cognitive functioning of children (Cowan et al., 2009). Increased father's involvement with their children has been associated with decreases in anti-social behavior, improved self-esteem and lower rates of depression (Marsiglio et al., 2000). Children of fathers who are involved and promote independence are more likely to have lower rates of anxiety when compared to other children (Bögels & Phare, 2008). Additionally, fathers who are more involved positively impact their children's social behaviors with regard to making beneficial friendships and involvement in activities (Marsiglio et al., 2000). Conversely, when fathers are absent from their children's lives, their children are likely to perform worse in school, engage in more risk-taking behavior, and males are likely to be more aggressive (Bögels & Phare, 2008).

Bogenschneider et al. (1998) also noted that when fathers are involved and are responsive to the needs of their adolescent children, the children are less likely to abuse alcohol and other drugs. Fathers' engagement decreases the likelihood of their children's involvement in criminal activity and delinquency, and negative school behavior (Maldonado, 2005; Marsiglio, Amato, Day, & Lamb, 2000). Overall, warm and available fathers produce children who are less reliant on their peers and their influences (Bogenschneider et al., 1998). However, some factors can act

as barriers and prevent fathers from having a greater positive influence on their children.

### *Barriers to Father Involvement*

One barrier to fathers' involvement with their children is the fathers' income (Johnson, 2001). In American society, fathers are expected to provide financially for their children (Cabrera et al., 2008). If the father is able to support their child, they are more likely to be involved with their child, and also involved with the pregnancy of their child's mother (Johnson, 2001; Kramer & Ramsburg, 2002; Lemay et al., 2010). Fathers who are able to financially support their children contribute positively to the children's emotional development (Maldonado, 2005). When fathers fulfill a traditional provider role, collaboration with the mother can increase due to the fathers performing an expected role (Coley & Hernandez, 2006).

Fathers with lower levels of education and less stable employment experience more challenges in providing for their children. These fathers consequently may be less involved with their non-custodial children than fathers who are better able to fulfill this role (Cabrera et al., 2008). Woldoff & Cina (2007) further suggest that a father's type of employment can influence a fathers' involvement with their children. When fathers are employed legally, they socialize with others and can collect mainstream opinions on fathering (Woldoff & Cina, 2007). The money they receive is also reliable and helps men fulfill the role of being a provider. Some research has shown that this perspective is more strongly held within Black culture (Woldoff & Cina, 2007).

Whether fathers have a positive or negative relationship with their child's mother, and if they are still married, romantically involved, separated, or never married can influence paternal involvement and the child's developmental outcomes (Cowan et al., 2010). If the relationship between the mother and father is positive, then the father is more likely to be involved with their

children over their life, and the father will have a more positive influence on their children (Fagan et al., 2009). Studies of married couples have shown that marital quality is positively correlated with father involvement (Bouchard & Lee, 2000) and the quality of the father-child relationship (Doherty, Kouneski, & Erickson, 1998). Other studies have shown that biological fathers who had a romantic relationship with the mother were more involved with their children than fathers who were not in a relationship with their child's mother (Cabrera et al., 2004). This finding was true regardless of whether or not the father was residential and regardless of whether the father was a husband, boyfriend or friend to the mother. Another study focused on low-income Black mothers found that the quality of the parents' romantic relationship was the strongest predictor of whether the father was involved with their child (Gavin et al., 2002). Breakdowns in the romantic relationship between parents, therefore, can pose a barrier to a father's involvement with his child.

Married biological fathers are often the most cooperative in parenting, but at times are not as engaged with their children as unmarried biological fathers (Berger & Langton, 2011). Married social fathers, or step-fathers that are not biologically related to the children, have more influence on their children compared to unmarried social fathers, or fathers living with the children's biological mother (Berger et al., 2008; Berger & Langton, 2011). Married biological fathers and step fathers are more involved with their children when compared to unmarried non-resident men and unmarried in residence with the child (Bellamy, 2009). However, non-residing and non-romantic partners can still be as effective fathers as biological, residing and romantic partners to the child's mother (Fagan, Palkovitz, Roy, & Farrie, 2009; Fagan & Palkovitz, 2011).

*Lone parents, Single parents, & Divorced parents*

While women's numbers in the workplace have increased in the 20th century (Gelles & Levine, 1999; U.S. Department of Labor, 2012), the amount of single parent homes also increased (Hawkins & Eggebeen, 1991; Knoester & Eggebeen, 2006). Non-marital child bearing and births, also called fragile families, experienced an increased rate over the last half of the 20th century (McLanahan & Beck, 2010).

More than half of fathers will cease contact with their children three years after divorce (Cowan et al., 2010; Maldonado, 2005). Among single parents, fathers are the smallest percentage of being a lone parent, and are increasingly living away from their children (Buck, Pleasence, Balmer, O'Grady, & Genn, 2004; Carlson & Turner, 2010; Moorhead, Sefton, & Douglas, 2004). The overall effectiveness of fathers' parenting has been questioned if they are separated from their children's mother (DeGarmo, Patras, & Eap, 2008), with the thought that these fathers are secondary caretakers (Hawkins & Eggebeen, 1991), and the provider of fun activities and items only (Maldonado, 2005). Some mothers and fathers transition in and out of being a single and sole parent, due to new romantic relationships and marriages (Buck et al., 2004; DeGarmo et al., 2008; Hawkins & Eggebeen, 1991). Non-resident and non-married fathers are at a particular risk of not being involved in the lives of their children (Fagan & Palkovtiz, 2007).

### *Interventions and Policy for Father Involvement*

As uninvolved fathers can have a negative influence on their children's development (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999; Caldwell, Rafferty, Reischl, De Loney, & Brooks, 2010; Berlyn et al., 2008), interventions can be used to assist uninvolved fathers (Caldwell, Bell, Brooks, Ward, & Jennings, 2011; Cowan et al., 2010). The availability of interventions for fathers is important

(Lee et al., 2011), and these interventions are more effective when they are created for and facilitated by men (Berlyn et al., 2008; Bronte-Tinkew, Carrano, Allen, Bowie, Mbawa, & Matthews, 2007).

Programs specifically designed for fathers that are practical, promote involvement, and define and reinforce their role as a father are the most ideal (Daniel & Taylor, 1999; Lemay et al., 2010; Meek, 2007) and are most effective when having flexible hours (Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2007). Fathers are more likely to access services when men expand their support network, when they are available and specific to them, and when the services are rated highly by men (Berlyn et al., 2008; Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2007). The timing of the intervention can be as important as the actual intervention or program. Fathers' involvement at the prenatal period until the age of three has long term positive outcomes for their children (Fagan & Palkovitz, 2007; Fagan & Palkovitz, 2011; Misra, Caldwell, Young, & Abelson, 2009). Father's involvement can also have a substantial impact during adolescence. Therefore it is important to ensure that interventions are available at multiple points in the father's life (Fagan et al., 2009).

Policies also can aid fathers to be more involved by targeting and normalizing the lives of low-income, low job skill fathers, as they can act as barriers to involvement (Fagan et al., 2009). Programs created through policy have also included child support, income support for young men, and positive family relationships (Berger & Langton, 2011; Maldonado, 2005). Father involvement is ultimately important, even during the prenatal stage as fathers can influence the success of the pregnancy of their child (Misra, Caldwell, Young, & Abelson, 2009), and help with their children's health by being involved (Fagan & Palkovitz, 2007; Fagan & Palkovitz, 2011).

*Present study*

Past research on paternal involvement with their children has at times used small, White middle class samples (Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2006), and most often examined the views of mothers on the fathers (Caldwell et al., 2011; Coley & Coltrane, 2007; Hernandez & Coley, 2007). Given that there has been limited research examining how fathers define their roles, and where they obtain information to understand their parental role (Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2006; Caldwell et al., 2011; Lee et al., 2011), the current research aims to add to the limited literature by further exploring men's own views on how they learned how to parent. By focusing on father's own reports of parenting, the understanding of their perspective is increased (Coley, 2001), and can aid in developing interventions addressing the needs of Black fathers (Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2006; Caldwell et al., 2011; Coley & Coltrane, 2007).

Given the dearth of studies on fathers' perspectives, this study will conduct in-depth focus groups with fathers who are involved in raising their children. This research could inform future interventions by exploring what fathers need and would use from a parenting program, and impact funding policies for programs by discussing what fathers feel keep them away from existing programs. This study will examine how fathers define their roles as parents and where they obtain information on parenting. In addition, we explore the types of discipline used by the fathers in this sample.

**Method**

Exploratory research on areas that have received less attention are well suited to using qualitative research (Padgett, 2008). Qualitative methods allow for in-depth exploration of the data. They also allow responses that are outside of the confines of the questions asked, giving the

researcher the ability to infer new or unforeseen directions (Padgett, 2008). Due to the few studies that have examined the first person views of fathers (Coley & Coltrane, 2007), this study will utilize a qualitative approach that provides an opportunity to examine rich content from men's discussions of parenting and the roles of fathers.

### *Participants*

A convenience sample of urban men (n=26) were recruited from a large, predominantly Black church located in a suburban Detroit community. Potential participants were eligible for the study if they were a male aged 18 or older, involved in raising children, and consented to participate in the focus groups. Eligibility requirements did not stipulate that participants needed to be a biological father to participate in the study, as two participants did not have children. This allowed for various types of men to be part of the sample including biological, step, non-resident biological and non-resident non-biological fathers. 17 of the participants were married, and four were single, while another four were divorced, with one participant not responding to the question. However, the participants were not asked if they have step children, or if they were non-resident fathers. The men in the study ranged from 20 to 60 years of age, with the mean age of 42.69 for the participants. All men in the sample (n=26) identified themselves as Black.

### *Procedures*

Participants for this study were recruited using several targeted approaches. The study was advertised during weekly announcements made by a member of the church before Sunday religious services. This member of the church also served as a research assistant and focus group facilitator for this study. Through these announcements, the scope and format of the research and focus groups were explained. Recruitment flyers and emails supplemented the weekly

announcements. The flyers were posted at the church and its buildings, and the research assistant sent out recruitment e-mails to fellow male church members. Participants were also recruited using snowball techniques where church members suggested other potential participants who might be eligible and willing to be part of a focus group. A total of five focus groups were completed, with each group comprised of four to six participants each. For their time and effort, the men received a \$20.00 gift card for participating in the study. Each focus group session took approximately one hour. The focus groups were held in the community center of the church.

The five focus groups were facilitated by six men, with four groups facilitated by an individual person and one group co-facilitated by two people. Facilitators were a mix of graduate students and alumni from Wayne State University. Facilitators were Black (n=2) and White (n=4). This writer co-facilitated the focus group that was led by two people. The facilitators were given a \$50.00 gift card for administering the questions to the groups.

At the beginning of each focus group, the facilitators described the goals of the session and provided assurances regarding respondent confidentiality. These statements followed the interview guide that was provided to each group facilitator. A structured interview guide was used to shape the discussion (see Appendix A). Facilitators closely followed the interview guide's main questions, asking each group the same set of open-ended questions. These questions addressed the following topics: where fathers obtain parenting information from, whether the men are aware of any parenting programs available in their community, the discipline practices that are used in their community, their general attitudes toward various disciplining practices, the perceived effectiveness of these disciplinary practices and opinions on usage of technology to stay involved with children. The scope of the current study is limited to three of these areas:

where fathers obtain parenting information from, their knowledge of parenting programs, their general attitudes toward disciplining children, and the perceived effectiveness of various disciplinary practices (e.g. spanking, timeout). The questions on technology usage for interventions with fathers were not analyzed for this study, and are left out in the results.

In line with requirements for all research using human participants, this project was approved and conducted in compliance with Wayne State University's Institutional Review Board. In addition, all research team members, including this writer, went through extensive training that included modules on confidentiality and handling of human participant data. To protect participants' confidentiality, participants' names, phone numbers and addresses were not collected as part of the demographic surveys. All names and other identifying information were removed from the transcripts of the focus groups. Each participant was provided with an information sheet (See Appendix B) explaining the aim and process of the research. This sheet also explained their rights as participants.

### *Analysis*

The five focus group discussions were captured with audio recorders and were then transcribed verbatim. All transcripts were read by the author before coding to gain an appreciation of the scope of the data set. A comprehensive review of the literature, as summarized in an earlier section, was also completed prior to coding the transcripts. This literature review was performed to learn about subtle concepts that may be present in the data but could be missed if not introduced to the author prior to coding. The transcripts were then analyzed using thematic analysis consistent with the model defined by Braun and Clarke (2006). In this approach, a theme is something that captures an important aspect of the data in relation to

the research questions at hand (Braun and Clarke, 2006). From this examination, the common themes or reoccurring ideas were coded in each of the five transcripts.

Using thematic coding, the data collected was organized and coded into groups where similar patterns occurred. While the thematic coding was organized around the interview template, unexpected answers separate from the facilitator prompts and questions occurred, and were easily identifiable due to thematic coding

Coding was organized to focus on the three research areas that are the focus of this study. Each transcript was read through at least two times during this coding process. Nvivo qualitative data analysis software (QSR International, 2011) was utilized to organize and code the data for this study. The software enabled the researcher to organize and code the reoccurring themes into clear categories. Producing some internal reliability, the data from the five focus groups were also used and analyzed for a different study. Both I and the other researcher compared our codes during their analysis, and we shared a similar coding schema.

## **Results**

The current study explored (1) where fathers learn about parenting, (2) their knowledge of parenting programs, and (3) what types of discipline fathers do and do not use. Within each of these areas, the researcher identified several primary themes. The coding process also produced related sub-themes. The following sections describe the themes, provide outcomes, and state key quotations from the focus groups.

### *Parenting Information Sources*

The participants indicated that they obtained parenting information from a variety of sources. Both fathers and mothers were discussed as a parenting information resource in all of

five of the groups. The men in the study's sample most often reported that they obtained information from their own fathers and step fathers, and this was mentioned in all of the groups. Fathers being mentioned the most by the participants indicates that fathers, and men overall, serve as a vital resource for men learning to be fathers. The participants consistently identified the importance of men in their lives, both growing up and presently.

The following comment illustrates the importance of fathers to the participants as sources of information: "First and foremost, my dad is where I got most of it from. Spent a lot of time with my dad growing up, so I was able to use that experience to kind of help me." Other participants who spent less time or none with their biological fathers acknowledged the importance of stepfathers:

Um, I know from my stepfather I learned... One major thing is, he's always told me there's not steps in this house. I'm his son and that's how it's going to be. So, that's the first thing I learned. Now, that I have a stepson of my own, I taught him that same thing. There is no steps. I'm going to love you unconditionally, as if I gave birth to you.

Mothers were identified as a source of parenting information within three of the focus groups. The discussions of mothers as a parenting information resource produced responses that showed mothers often filled a wide variety of roles. Some participants had their mother as their primary and sole caretaker due to an absent father. Other participants had mothers that were more active in parenting than their fathers, and some had mothers that fulfilled traditional father roles.

Some participants indicated that their mothers were an important source of information as this participant did: "I kinda followed my momma's guide and just trust, trust in God, everything

else will fall into place." This participant also indicated his mom had more of a role in his upbringing: "Yeah, my father was a –I think more the discipline came from my mother."

Another participant indicated that learning about parenting practices from his mother was out of default: "Basically my mom. My dad was killed on my front porch when I was eight. I was right there so basically everything I know come from my mom. Different family members but basically my mom, it's just the mom..." Other participants whose fathers were not involved in their childhood expressed similar sentiments.

Discussing extended family members, participants also described grandparents as a resource for parenting information. For some, these sources were where they learned extra views on parenting. For others, grandparents at times served as an additional parent for the participants. These grandparents either supplemented their fathers and step fathers, or all together replaced absent fathers for the participants.

Some participants felt older individuals were valuable information sources: "I mean you would always take, say somebody older than you, and not just parenting, I'm talking even relationships, just life." For those that cited the influences of older individuals and elders, grandparents were often identified. One participant, for example, described the influence of his grandfather while also mentioning a continuous learning process of being a parent:

I would think I'm still learning. I learned from my granddaddy. Me and him had a long talk cause I'm a young father, and he talked to me about [how to] make sure I stay in her life and stuff like that. So... I learned from my granddaddy.

A different participant stated how important his grandmother was, and the multiple roles she filled for him: "Um, most of my parenting skills, uh, again come from my grandmother, as

well. Um, she was, um, everything, mother, father, sister, brother, aunt, uncle." In addition, friends, teachers, coaches, neighbors and community religious leaders were parenting information resources for the participants. These sources did not replace absent fathers in the way that grandparents and mothers sometimes did, but still served as a valuable source of parenting information. The comments of this father provide an example of the community's impact on fathers: "...from some of the neighbors, uh, in my neighborhood that I grew up in, um, I got a lot of information from them as well. They were very significant people in my life."

Collectively, the various responses from the participants illustrate that fathers receive parenting information from many different sources. While their own fathers were most often identified, the participants did show that parenting information can come from other places, either as additional help and information or reliance on someone else entirely.

#### *Knowledge of Parenting Programs*

With the lack of father focused parenting programs (Bronte-Tinkew, Carrano, Allen, Bowie, Mbawa, & Matthews, 2007), many respondents indicated that they have not heard of any programs specifically for fathers. The participants did mention prenatal programs during the pregnancy for their child, but this was only for education of child birth. This is illustrated by one participant; "I went through the Lamaze, went to every appointment with my wife, but once the babies are born... [there are not] any programs that would involve that, things just seem to disappear."

Although they were not often mentioned, participants did identify some programs and interventions available for men. One was All Pro Dad, which provides a daily e-mail, school based programs, conferences and events, and media such as videos, blogs and articles (Family

First, 2012). Head Start, which is a preschool program for low income and underprivileged children (Garces, Duncan, & Currie 2000), was brought up by the participants as another program they were aware of. Lastly, the participants discussed Proud Dad's Club, which is a local program where fathers volunteer in activities sponsored by their children's school (Berkshire Proud Dads Club, 2011).

Most of the experience the participants had with father specific programs and activities took place through the schools of their children, similar to what was outlined with the Proud Dad's Club. This was identified as things like father/daughter dances and sports. Some of the participants felt that this was an ideal location for parenting programs.

The participants talked about how more programs should be designed specifically for fathers, and primarily offered in their communities. In addition, these programs, according to one participant, need to be flexible at times, with the group members able to discuss various topics related to parenting.

Participants in the study stated that ethnicity, culture and race may serve as a barrier to involvement in parenting programs for fathers. Ethnicity and race were mentioned as a possible reason for not using any services if they were available. For some participants, they felt that asking family members, friends, neighbors and community leaders was sufficient to obtain information on parenting or answer questions.

A participant further supported this point by discussing the difference in regions where they have lived and the amount of involvement in parenting programs. Comparing one area that was predominantly Black to one that was primarily White, this man indicated that there was more involvement in the White community than the Black community. As another individual

specified; "I might be reluctant to seek out that kind of [parenting] assistance because I'm not sure that my brother here is going to be in there to give me some insight from a black person's perspective." Also a participant brought up a possible stigma attached to seeking or attending a parenting group for fathers; "unfortunately, we as African Americans don't think that that's cool, to have a group of dads that come together."

For some participants, the overall feeling was that parenting programs for fathers may be useful, but are not easily accessible. Based on the participants' comments, it was evident that ethnicity and the type of program may make the delivery of father focused programs difficult. In addition, one participant thought that timing of programs and interventions for father parenting is important; "Yeah, I think it starts.... It [intervention programs] has to start early." The programs would also need to be flexible in their topics according to the following participant: "And just by having those rotating topics, more people are going to get involved versus just saying we're going to be talking about teens..."

### *Involvement with Children*

For the participants, it was important for fathers to be involved with their children in any form and any frequency. "Presence is important I think" is what one participant stated. Participants described how establishing boundaries and disciplining their children were important tasks that fathers should be a part of. There are specific forms of discipline that the participants brought up, beyond just involvement in any general capacity. One participant stressed the importance of fathers being involved with their children, and specifically the discipline process:

...as far as why it's important for males to be a part of the disciplinary actions is because the image of a man, um, already is that of, you know, masculinity, of power, of a voice. Um, and I think, I think discipline with leverage can give, uh, the person that's being disciplined another viewpoint of this man.

Further speaking on being involved in discipline with their children, this participant stated the following:

Respect, for them to respect you and to show that you're disciplining them, but you're telling them also in certain words that you love them, but you're trying to teach them how to be a productive adult, but not to do things, not to pull boneheaded stunts or do things that are against the law. You're trying to save their lives, save them, protect them from hurting others.

#### *Discipline Practices Used*

The men in the study's sample described several ways fathers discipline their children. Taking away items or privileges from children, and also rewarding them for good behavior and activity or positive academic results were brought up as discipline practices. Spanking or "whooping" was used for discipline as well, and was the most discussed intervention used for discipline. One participant explained the reasoning for whooping children is:

You need to help them [children] understand, don't do this, because this is what's going to happen after it. They don't say, your parents not just gonna tell you like... 'don't curse', and then you curse, and then they whoop you.

A clear distinction was made with regard to the "right" reason for spanking and the mindset of the spanker, and the wrong reason to spank and wrong mindset to have:

You weren't just getting beat because the guy had a hard day at work and he came home and just decided to beat on everybody. I know my father didn't do that. I messed up enough times to know that you was getting beat for a reason.

While many of the men indicated support of spanking, the responses collected reflect how spanking was considered more as a last resort. According to the participants, spanking should be used after warnings were made to children to stop their current behavior or they would be spanked. There were no responses of using spanking as the first and primary practice of discipline among the participants, either in their usage or what was used for them when they were children.

Differences between mothers and fathers did arise in the groups with regard to spanking. Specifically, some participants thought that women were not the best source to administer spankings. These participants described beliefs that men should fulfill traditional gender roles and be a disciplinarian. As one participant stated: "He [my father] taught me how to be a man, he taught me, you know, just respect and everything that I know" Women were viewed by several participants as inappropriate to corporally discipline their children due to the way they are perceived to parent, as one participant displayed:

And also women are emotional. So, when a female, and not all females are like this, but a majority. If they go into a situation where they're disciplining their child and then they give them those little puppy dog eyes, you know, a woman might scale back and be like, oh I can't do this, this my baby. And I think us as males, you know, we, that, I don't care. It doesn't matter. So, I think that's the difference between a, a man being present in their lives disciplinary wise over a female.

A similar opinion was held by the following participant:

I think mothers are the nurturing factor or, like you say, they're emotional, but they are also nurturing. So, it's been.... It was times when we were first married that my wife blanked. You just whipping him. I had to, I had no other choice. But she would go, come here and let me see baby. Don't do that cause once you start doing that then he'll start going to you.

Despite the participants mentioning that women were "too emotional" to handle spanking, the participants did not discuss women being as effective as men in the discipline of children. Additionally, most of the participants did not discuss men's emotions having an influence on their discipline. They did not elaborate further on why some thought women were too emotional to be involved in child discipline, or what happens in a primarily single mother home. This view indicates that men provide a unique perspective that only men can provide.

Another form of discipline, talking to children or lecturing, was the next most common practice of discipline. It was also discussed by the participants that this method can effectively be used by elders and church clergy that are related to or know the children. One participant stated the preference to talking with his children: "I like to talk and reason with my children and explain things: 'this is why you messed up and how can we correct this so that this doesn't happen again.'" An important distinction was made with an ineffective lecture style, which was yelling at one's children: "Yelling at a child, hollering at a child, threatening a child, that does not work."

With all of the discipline practices, they were consistently stated by the participants to be used on a case by case basis. Some would use timeouts for certain behaviors, and spanking or

lecturing for other behaviors. The participants also found that some discipline practices worked well for some children in certain situations, and not as well for other children and other situations:

... both my wife and I, we've used all different types of, uh, ways of, uh, discipline. We've used corporal punishment. We've used time outs. Um, like I say, I have a daughter and a son. My son... My daughter was an easy raise, but my son was the most... He was the one that gave us the most challenge. So, uh, I've used everything that I could think of, at that particular time that I thought might fit that situation. Um, one of the things I found out that worked the best with him was taking things away from him that he liked to do, like, his cell phone.

#### *Discipline Practices Not Used*

Timeouts were indicated as having mixed results with application and effectiveness with the participants, in particular in the Black community. While there was support for them among other participants, there was a balance created with many participants not using them, or were not used on them as children. As one participant stated;

Yeah, I think it's culturally based, uh, your environment that you grew up in. I mean, I'm just gonna throw this out here, you know, most people in the African American household, the reason why when you made the comment about time out people laughed about it because it, to most people growing up in African American families time out is not an option. That's not an option. But if you go out to the community I live in, which is predominately Caucasians; time out is predominately what's used. So, I think it's really just the environment that you grow up in and how you, you know, you've been raised...

Two other participants supported the lack of time-outs in their background; “I didn’t get time outs. What you mean TIME OUT?’ ‘What is a time out?’”

Some other answers from the participants described forms of discipline that were not effective included spanking and negotiation. Spanking not being effective as children age was stated by this participant: "...spanking worked, as he got older, it started it wasn't working so much because he wanted to know why." Negotiation not being effective was stated by the following participant:

What I believe totally is an ineffective way is this negotiation rule that the parents have now. Negotiating....I'm not gonna take away your hat cuz you're screaming or this, negotiating- he said it earlier, this is-this is a dictatorship.

As this participant mentions, some children need specific direction and cannot make full decisions yet: "we can all negotiate because we independent but when somebody is dependent on you, an independent person can't negotiate with a dependent person."

The responses as a whole for discipline practices suggested that certain practices were applied to certain children and behaviors, but not all practices were used for some children and behaviors, or used at all.

### **Discussion/Conclusion**

Using qualitative research methods, information was collected from men discussing their roles as fathers and what they think men should do as fathers. In particular, this research was primarily concerned with finding out where fathers obtained parenting information from, and what discipline practices they do and do not use. Obtaining information on parenting from men is

lacking according to prior research, with men being a variable in only 12.5% of prior parenting research (Shapiro & Krysik, 2010).

The men in the groups often identified their fathers or stepfathers as the sources of where they learned how to be a parent, and this was the strongest theme found from the data. Even when the participants' biological fathers were not influential, other males in their lives served a similar function. It appeared that men often find a male role model and information source if their biological father or stepfather is not present. These participants discussed many other sources of information, which include grandfathers and elders, church leaders or community, neighborhood men, and fellow men of the same age. Men who do not have a traditional father to obtain fathering information appear to fill in the gap with various other men role models they have in their own lives. In addition, men seem to use their mothers and grandmothers as a source of information, especially if their father or other men are not present in their lives.

The participants overwhelmingly indicated there were very few father focused parenting programs in their community. Consistent with previous findings (Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2007; Caldwell et al., 2011), there were no men in the study that reported participating in a parenting program specifically for men. Very few participants were even aware of any such programs. The participants also did not mention any co-parenting programs for both fathers and mothers, or programs that were for parents regardless of gender. Results of this study are in line with other previous studies (e.g. Bellamy, 2009) that have found that when parenting programs for fathers even exist, engagement remains difficult.

The current study yielded illuminating responses from the participants regarding the stigma associated with seeking out parenting services. Among this group of men, it was

considered very unpopular and not viewed as necessary. The men also questioned the availability and the usefulness of parenting programs and services. The focus groups in this study were comprised of men identifying as Black. It is important to note that traditional methods of program and individual engagement should be reconsidered as they may not be effective in reaching this population. For example, the participants did state that seeking help through a parenting program may not be socially appropriate in their culture, and would not be their first choice of action. This shows that the participants are aware of this stigma, and other ways to engage Black fathers in programs should be considered. The participants also indicated that they did not know other men who were involved with parenting services. The participants felt it was important to obtain services from someone in their culture and someone who understood their perspective.

However, there were two points of common engagement of parenting programs for fathers. Participants did discuss prenatal programs for expecting parents and activities through their children's' schools. These may be potential programs that could be further expanded in order to address other needs of fathers. Even with the opinion that there is a stigma attached to receiving parenting services, these fathers also expressed an interest in services overall. This is an important finding that suggests Black fathers may be receptive to parenting programs that utilize culturally relevant programming and engagement strategies. These findings help to fill the gap in research on fathers compared to mothers (Shapiro & Krysik, 2010) and the lack of parenting programs available for men (Maxwell, Scourfield, Featherstone, Holland, & Tolman, 2012).

Discussing the use of discipline from what the participants stated, the various forms and usage of discipline mentioned were consistent with prior results from a different study (Lee, Yelick, Brisebois, & Banks, 2011). Fathers frequently identify spanking or "whooping" as a common practice and one that is part of raising children. The participants in the study's sample reasoned that spanking children was part of normal upbringing, and was necessary for a positive outcome to child rearing. This practice is contrary to previous research that has found spanking during childhood has a negative impact that can extend into adulthood (Walsh, 2002). An important distinction was made from the participants in regard to spanking, with there being a "correct" and "wrong" reason for the practice. Specifically, the participants stated that spanking should never be used as an anger outlet for a father. Some participants stressed that spanking should be used as a last technique available, and in the most extreme circumstances. If other measures of discipline such as a time out or taking away privileges did not work, then spanking would be considered appropriate. These fathers indicated that their children would know this as well. The participants also made a distinction that fathers are best suited to physically discipline children and mothers should be less involved with discipline because they perceive mothers as too nurturing, emotional, and overly concerned with their children's emotions.

The ethnicity and culture of the participants must be taken into account when examining and understanding the men's support of spanking. Some research has shown Black ethnic groups commonly are more accepting of spanking (Vaaler, Ellison, Horton, & Marcum, 2008).

Throughout the focus groups, the participants stressed that involvement with their children in itself is important. The participants understand that it is important for men to be involved with their children. As the men in this study described their roles as fathers and son, it

was evident that they see men as providing a unique, masculine perspective to their children that is separate from what women can provide. In addition, the participants stressed the role of fathers in discipline of their children being essential.

### *Strengths and Limitations*

Due to the lack of prior father-focused research (Coley & Hernandez, 2006; Lee et al., 2011), this study was intended as an exploratory examination to discover where fathers obtain information on parenting. As opposed to a quantitative approach that involves closed ended questions with exact meanings and direction, the qualitative design of this study allowed for unexpected results and new conclusions to emerge (Padgett, 2008). This can be advantageous considering the lack of prior focus into father oriented research. By collecting data in a less structured format, the results could lead to different directions for father focused research.

Participant samples are usually smaller with qualitative research than with quantitative research (Padgett, 2008; Rubin & Babbie, 2011). This study was not an exception, as it was focused on a sample of 26 men. The size of the individual focus groups were on the smaller extreme of the ideal size, which is between 5-15 participants (Rubin & Babbie, 2011). This could be a desirable outcome, as it allowed for chances for all of the participants to state their thoughts on most or all the questions posed.

Despite the strengths of this qualitative study, this particular study had several inherent limitations. The participants for the data collection were a convenience sample (Rubin & Babbie, 2011), which could have potentially overlooked further participants because of the ease of obtaining the participants. Also, as the participants belonged to the same church, within the five focus groups it is likely that some of the individuals knew each other. This could have possibly

influenced the disclosure of what types of information was revealed based on preexisting relationships in or outside of the church. By using a different sample, this could have been avoided.

It is also important to note that data collection occurred over a relatively short time period (1.5 hours) and in a group setting. Because of the narrow time frame for the topic matter, the focus groups became highly structured and rigid. While all six facilitators of the five groups did allow answers and discussion separate from the question templates, nearly all of the questions were asked to each group. There was little probing to responses, particularly with comments that were different from the questions on the interview guide. The principal investigator's instructions for the group facilitators, including this writer, was that all of the questions should be asked, and redirection should be used to get the groups back to the questions if any different discussions were occurring.

Additional probing by the facilitators would have been beneficial to better understand the comments about elders. It is not clear how much or how little elders were relied upon. In addition, the types of elders are unclear, whether they are primarily maternal and paternal grandparents, neighbors or church clergy. There is also no distinction if grandfathers are more important to fathers for parenting information compared to grandmothers. It can only be anticipated that grandfathers, when present, would provide fathers with more guidance than grandmothers, due to fathers being the primary source of parenting information for men. Without this additional probe however, this cannot be determined.

Another area where probing would have been ideal is the responses related to women being "too emotional" to discipline children. The participants could have explained exactly what

they meant if probed. It would be helpful to know if the men felt there are certain situations or factors that make women less effective in disciplining children.

An additional area that could have been explored was parenting programs for fathers. The participants described a few they knew of, and discussed some perceptions they had of utilizing them. They also discussed the idea that school based interventions could be effective, and mentoring programs could also be helpful. Overall they thought there was a lack of programs available, regardless of their views on the usefulness of them. The facilitators could have explored these responses more. For those participants that did attend a program presently or in the past, and prenatal or after their children were born, the facilitators could have asked about if the participants felt the programs were worthwhile. The participants could have also been asked what they thought would be a useful program, what would be useful in a program, and where a program should and should not be located.

A challenge with the data from this study is the participants were not identified in transcripts, and therefore no individual and all of their responses could be analyzed. This limited the researcher's ability to examine the total body of comments from each participant individually. This also posed a couple limitations in the data analysis. By not being able to group the agreement or disagreement to questions or statements according to participant, it was not possible to perform axial coding. Being able to isolate answers would have been particularly beneficial with the unexpected answers. If more than one individual was providing unexpected responses, it would bolster the results and implications for further study. However, it is unknown if just one individual was providing different answers, or more than one person was. It also

would have been useful to separate commonly divergent answers if they frequently came from the same individual.

### *Future Research*

With the lack of father focused research, additional studies using both qualitative and quantitative methods are warranted. In particular, expanded recruitment methods need to be used. While the participants were all of Black ethnicity, the socioeconomic status of the participants was not diverse. Focus groups that are economically diverse could yield different results. Due to all participants identifying as Black, and the similar socio-economic status among participants, the conclusions are limited to just individuals of similar status and ethnicity. The results could also turn out differently, with perhaps more support for spanking with Black participants, but not as much support with White and Hispanic/Latino/Mexican participants. While there is a continued need for qualitative examination, other studies should employ rigorous quantitative analysis mixed with qualitative analysis. Questionnaires could be administered on a separate occasion after the focus groups, which could provide further mixed methods results and data.

The topic of women being too emotional to be effective disciplinarians is a topic to investigate further with men and women. Also men and women's opinions on the lack of father figure, and this possibly leading a child to being a good or bad father needs more attention. While this was not directly mentioned by the participants, it is a topic that could be investigated further, especially in an exploratory manner.

In both this study and others reviewed, the amount of investigation for father parenting programs needs more observation. There was only one section that asked simply if fathers knew of and would be interested in father only programs. This appears to be the majority of attention

given. However, future studies would benefit the literature to ask fathers not just what types of programs and what would help engage them in services, but also what type of services overall they would be interested in. This participant sample described hesitancy for seeking services if available. Additional research is needed to further examine the reasons behind this, and to better understand what would make services attractive to fathers.

## APPENDIX A

### FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

#### Focus Group Discussion Questions

June 2011

Good evening! Thanks for coming tonight. I am \_\_\_\_\_ and I am a student at Wayne State University. This focus group today is to learn more about fathers and fathering. We are interested in your opinion, even if you don't have children or aren't currently raising children. There are no wrong answers, just different points of view. Please share your opinion even if it differs from what others have said. Keep in mind that we're interested in exploring both positive and negative comments.

My role as the group facilitator is to ask questions and listen. Because we have a number of important topics to address today, I'll be moving the discussion from one question to the next to make sure we get to everything. Because everyone has a different experience, I will ask each person to share their thoughts. It will be helpful if only one person speaks at a time. If you're already said something, I may ask someone else to add their thoughts. We all have name tags so that we can remember each other's names.

Let's begin. Let's find out more about each other by going around the group. Please tell us your name. Do you have children? How many of them are currently living with you, and how old are they?

#### ADDITIONAL POSSIBLE PROBES:

- Would you explain that further?
- Would you give me an example of what you mean?
- Is there anything else you want to say about that?
- Please describe what you mean.
- Tell us more, or what experiences have you had that make you feel that way?

#### TO REDIRECT:

- Thank you, \_\_\_\_\_, does anyone wish to comment on that questions?
- Does anyone feel differently?

#### SPEND ABOUT 20 MINUTES ON THESE QUESTIONS:

1. People obtain parenting information from a variety of sources, including parents, friends, aunts and uncles, siblings, or professionals such as clergy, teachers, and doctors. Where do men in your community [neighborhood] get information or advice about parenting and how to take care of children?
  - a. What kind of parenting information do you get from these sources?

- i. [Parenting information may include discipline, schooling/ education, recreation, medical care, etc.]
  - b. Where else do you or other men you know get parenting information?
    - i. [Probe for formal source of education on parenting and child development: social service agencies, Head Start, pre-school, school, doctors.]
  - c. If you had a parenting question or issue, who would you ask?
2. Are you aware of any parenting programs in your community that are specifically for fathers?
- a. What about other parenting programs that may not be specifically for fathers but you or other fathers might consider participating in anyway?
  - b. What kind of parenting programs would be of interest to you?

SPEND ABOUT 30 MINUTES ON THESE QUESTIONS:

[Keep the discussion focused on the father's relationship with the child, and not his issues/ challenges with the child's mother. If men start to talk at length about the child's mother being a barrier or hindrance to parenting, please gently redirect: "Thank you for sharing those comments. We only have a limited time today, so we would like to keep the discussion focused on the important role of fathers in parenting children. Would anybody like to add anything that hasn't been discussed yet?]

3. Fathers discipline their children in different ways. For example, some fathers may spank their children, while some may use time out; other fathers may use all of these strategies, while other fathers may not use much discipline at all. What are common disciplinary practices that fathers in your community use?
- a. What are some disciplinary practices that are not frequently used by the fathers in your community? Why or why not?
4. Do you think it's important for fathers to be involved in child discipline? Why or why not?
5. How do fathers who don't live with their children stay involved in parenting and discipline?
6. In your opinion, what are effective ways for a father to discipline a child?
- a. PROBE: For example, some people think that spanking is effective because it makes children respond immediately. Do you think that spanking is an effective way to discipline a child? Why or why not?
7. In your opinion, what are ineffective ways for a father to discipline a child?
- a. PROBE: What makes you consider \_\_\_\_\_ to be effective, while \_\_\_\_\_ is ineffective?
  - b. PROBE: For example, some people may find that spanking doesn't work that well if it is used very frequently. Do you think that there are times when spanking may not be effective? When would that be?

SPEND ABOUT 10 MINUTES ON THESE QUESTIONS:

Next are some questions about how frequently you use technology to communicate with others.

8. Do you think that smart phones, twitter, or social media like Facebook would be an effective way to reach fathers? Why or why not?
9. FINAL QUESTION: Is there anything I forgot to ask you about that you would like to share now?

**APPENDIX B****PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET****INFORMATION SHEET FOR FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS**  
**Fathers' Beliefs about Parenting Behaviors & Disciplinary Practices**

Principal Investigator: Shawna J. Lee  
Wayne State University School of Social Work  
Phone: 313-312-4214  
Email: [shawnal@wayne.edu](mailto:shawnal@wayne.edu)

You are being asked to participate in focus group session conducted by researchers from the Wayne State University School of Social Work. This study is being conducted at American Indian Health and Family Services. The estimated number of study participants is about 6-12. The goal of this research is to understand how men think about parenting and discipline of children. In this study, you will be asked to share your opinion in a group setting with other men. As a group, you will be asked in general terms about where you get information about parenting and your beliefs about acceptable and unacceptable parenting practices. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

If I agree to participate in this study I understand that:

- I will participate in one focus group that will take 1- 1.5 hours
- As a participant in this research study, there will be no direct benefit to me; however, information from this study may benefit other people now or in the future.
- My decision to participate in this focus group will not affect the services I receive at American Indian Health and Family Services or any affiliated social service agency. I will not be penalized directly or indirectly if I decide not to participate in this focus group.
- I will receive a \$20 gift card for time spent participating in this focus group.
- My answers to the questions are anonymous. However, there is a chance that some of the other group participants may know me. My identity cannot and will not be connected to any information I share in the focus group.
- This session will be audio tape recorded. Tapes are intended only as a resource for the researchers and for the transcription of the discussion. Since the goal of participation is to develop and refine survey and interview questions through a discussion in the focus group session, only individuals willing to be audio taped can participate. I understand that if I refuse to have the session tape recorded, I will not be able to participate. I understand that audio recorded sessions will be destroyed when this study is completed.
- Tape recorded sessions will be kept in secured files and destroyed once the project is completed. Only authorized researchers on this project are allowed access to the recorded group session.

- To help preserve the confidentiality of other participants, in the group, participants will be referred to only by their first names or a nickname. I agree not to reveal the names of participants to anyone outside of the group.
- All discussions within the focus group are private and should not be repeated to others.
- I am free to answer only those questions that I wish to answer, and I may elect to terminate my participation in the session at any time without penalty.
- Only group data will be reported in any research reports that result from this study.

There are no known physical, emotional, or health risks to participation in this study, however a small loss of privacy may present itself due to the fact that other individuals will be participating in this focus group and may know you. It is also possible that there may be risks involved that are not known to researchers at this time. Furthermore, the researchers are required by law to report to the appropriate authorities if at any time they observe or become aware of ongoing child abuse during the course of the focus group.

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You have the right to choose not to take part in this study. You are free to only answer questions that you want to answer. You are free to withdraw from participation in this study at any time. Your decisions will not change any present or future relationship with Wayne State University or its affiliates, or American Indian Health and Family Services, or other services you are entitled to receive.

If you have any questions about this study now or in the future, you may contact Dr. Shawna Lee at 313-312-4214. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, the Chair of the Human Investigation Committee can be contacted at (313) 577-1628. If you are unable to contact the research staff, or if you want to talk to someone other than the research staff, you may also call (313) 577-1628 to ask questions or voice concerns or complaints.

If you choose to take part in this study you may withdraw at any time. You are not giving up any of your legal rights by signing this form. Your signature on the incentive form indicates that you have read, or had read to you, this entire consent form, including the risks and benefits, and have had all of your questions answered. You will be given a copy of this consent form.

## APPENDIX C

Table 1.

*Focus Group Participants' Demographics and Socioeconomic Status*

Attribute	Frequencies		
	N	%	
Race/ethnicity			
	Black/African-American	26	100
Highest education level			
	High school diploma or GED	3	11.5
	Some college	6	23.1
	Associates degree	2	7.7
	College degree or higher	15	57.7
Annual income			
	\$0-\$9999	2	7.7
	\$10,000-\$19,999	2	7.7
	\$20,000-\$29,999	3	11.5
	\$30,000-\$39,999	2	7.7
	\$40,000-\$49,999	2	7.7
	\$50,000-\$59,999	1	3.8
	Greater than \$60,000	14	53.8
Current employment status			
	Unemployed	3	12
	Employed working part-time	2	8
	Employed working full-time	20	80
	No answer	1	3.8

Table 2.

*Survey of Participants Children and Living Situation*

Question	Response	N	%
Have children?	Yes	24	92.3
	No	2	7.7
How many children?	0	2	7.7
	1	3	12.5
	2	15	62.5
	3	3	12.5
	4	3	12.5
Currently live with children?	Yes	9	34.6
	No	17	65.4
How many children do you live with?	0	2	7.7
	1	4	15.4
	2	10	38.5
	3	3	11.5
Are you the Primary Caregiver to any children?	Yes	18	69.2
	No	8	30.8
Relationship status	Single	4	15.4
	Married	17	65.4
	Divorced	4	15.4
	No answer	1	3.8

**APPENDIX D**

Figure 1.

*Themes of Where Fathers Obtain Parenting Information*

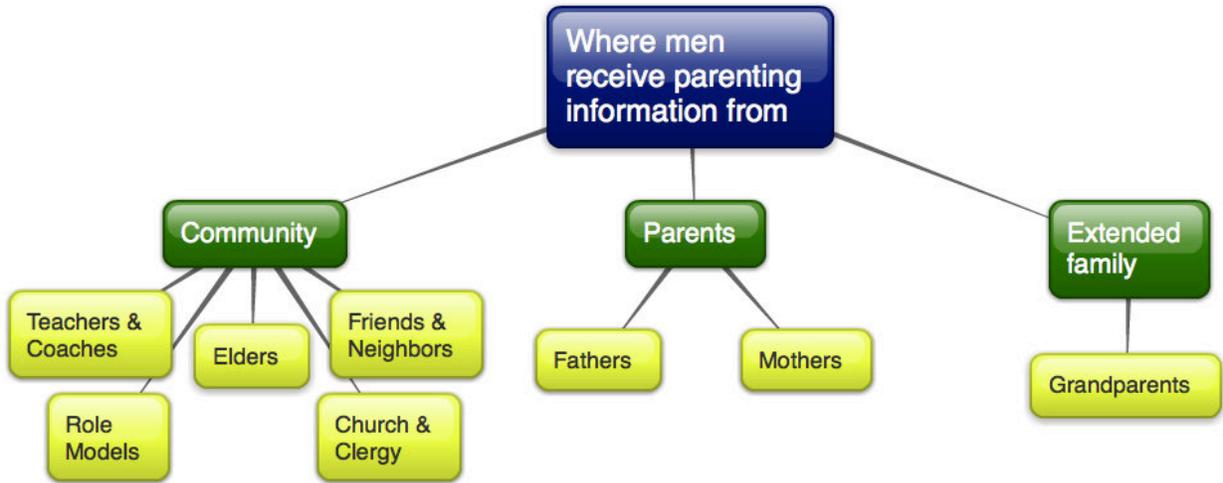


Figure 2.

*Themes of What Interventions They Have Heard of, and How They Feel About Them*

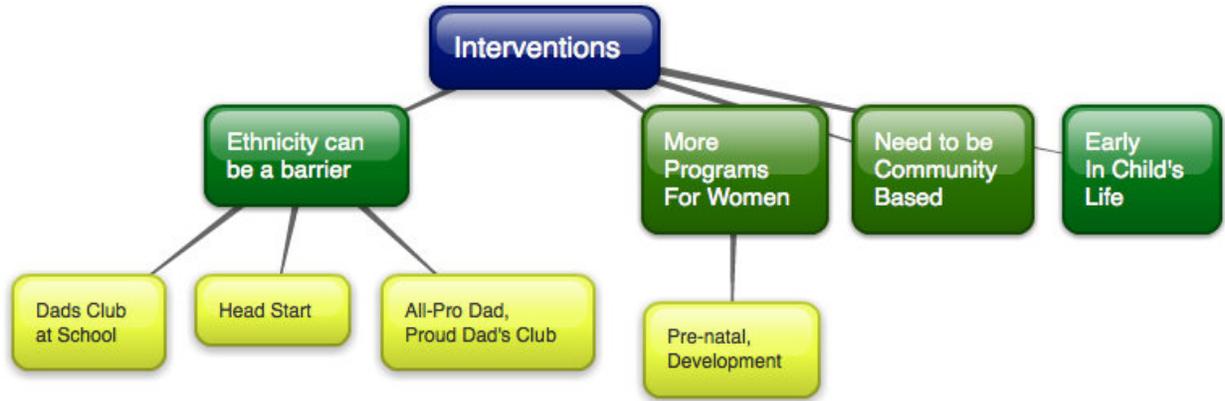
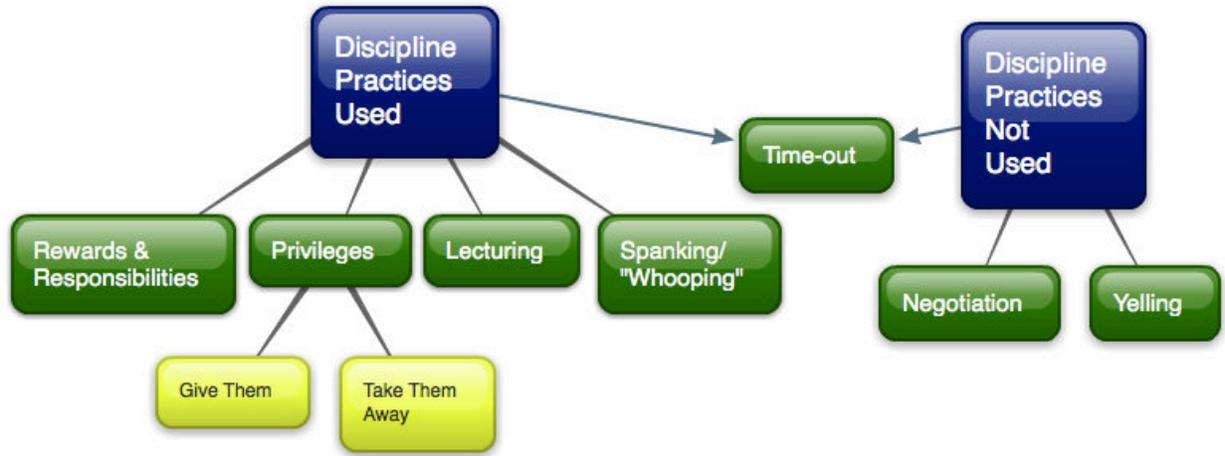


Figure 3.

*Themes of What Discipline Practices Fathers Do and Do Not Use*



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**ABSTRACT****UNDERSTANDING THE BEHAVIORS AND BELIEFS OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN/  
BLACK FATHERS: A QUALITATIVE EXAMINATION**

by

**NICHOLAS J. GOMULINSKI****May 2013****Advisor:** Dr. Stella M. Resko**Major:** Social Work**Degree:** Master of Social Work

The positive influence father involvement has on children has been widely examined and embraced. Despite this, examination of men's beliefs on parenting and where they learn their parenting practices has only recently received attention. This study surveyed African-American/Black fathers in five focus groups (N=26) regarding where they felt they learned how to be a father, and what parenting behaviors they use or believe in. The responses from the participants were transcribed coded and analyzed using thematic analysis. The results, organized into themes, indicated that fathers receive parenting information primarily from their fathers and step-fathers. The participants also used a variety of discipline behaviors that depend on situational factors. Further investigation needs to be done with fathers on a larger scale, and with greater variance than the demographics used for this study.

**AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT**

Thank you again to everyone that has understood and been a part of my life in this next step of my voyage. Conducting my own research has been a goal of mine for several years after helping others with their own. It has been a much harder challenge than I expected, but a welcomed one. Whether a future step involves more research, or more practice instead, this experience has been wonderful on a variety of levels.