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Abstract

Data is limited regarding the cultural and racial variations of fatherhood. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences of eight married African American fathers focusing on their perceptions of father roles and responsible fathering behaviors. Specifically, the study highlighted two critical issues: (1) men's perceptions about their roles as fathers; and (2) how historical characterizations of father roles can serve as a mechanism for understanding males' current perceptions. The researchers identified seven role themes: provider, role model/sex role model, disciplinarian, leader, supporter, teacher/spiritual teacher, and guide. Implications for family science practitioners and researchers as well as suggestions for future research are provided.

Keywords

Father Roles, African American Fathers, Role Perception, Responsible Fatherhood, Phenomenology

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Perceived Father Roles of Married African American Men: A Phenomenological Study

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Data is limited regarding the cultural and racial variations of fatherhood. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences of eight married African American fathers focusing on their perceptions of father roles and responsible fathering behaviors. Specifically, the study highlighted two critical issues: (1) men's perceptions about their roles as fathers; and (2) how historical characterizations of father roles can serve as a mechanism for understanding males' current perceptions. The researchers identified seven role themes: provider, role model/sex role model, disciplinarian, leader, supporter, teacher/spiritual teacher, and guide. Implications for family science practitioners and researchers as well as suggestions for future research are provided. Keywords: Father Roles, African American Fathers, Role Perception, Responsible Fatherhood, Phenomenology

Over the last several decades, research has sought to understand father-child relationships, father influence on child developmental outcomes, and father influence on the family well-being. Specifically, research has shown the importance of father involvement in children's educational attainment (Flouri & Buchanan, 2004; McBride, Schoppe-Sullivan, & Ho, 2005), fewer behavior issues (Flouri & Buchanan, 2003), economic stability of the family, influencing juvenile delinquent behaviors (Coley & Medeiros, 2007), and child development (Lamb, 2004). Positive father involvement has been correlated with secure attachment, regulation of negative feelings, positive self-esteem during adolescence, and higher academic achievement (Carlson & McLanahan, 2010; Doherty, Kouneski, & Erickson, 1998; Roy, Buckmiller, & McDowell, 2008). Although scholarship in the area is still emerging, much of the research represented a limited view of the fatherhood experience.

Toth and Xu (1999) suggested that current empirical data provided limited information about the racial and cultural variations of fatherhood. Moreover, the depictions of ethnic minority fathers tended to be stereotypical, portrays White fathers as more competent fathers compared to non-White fathers, and yielded inconsistent findings regarding cultural and racial differences (Toth & Xu, 1999) and father involvement. Generally speaking, the literature on African American fathers within intact families was limited (Cazenave, 1979, Cochran, 1997). Furthermore, there was limited scholarship characterizing African American fathers' roles perceptions. Prior to the mid-1980's, some of literature exploring the contributions of African American or Black fathers to the family systems had been situated in a deficit model highlighting limited aspects of fathering and Black family experience as well as minimizing and misrepresenting the role of the Black father (Bryan & Ajo, 1992; Cazenave, 1979; McAdoo, 1988, 1993). Moreover, the literature relied on White middle class families as a reference point for the Black experience (Bryan & Ajo, 1992) which showed a cultural discrepancy in representing African American fathers in a more accurate picture.

Conceptualizing the role of fathers and father involvement was an ongoing process. Research suggested that the role of father was socially constructed (Doherty et al., 1998; LaRossa, 1988; Pleck & Pleck, 1997) and constantly redefined and re-envisioned (Olmstead,

Futris, & Pasley, 2009). It follows then that notions related to the role of fathers were impacted by various social and contextual factors. Although the literature outlines various characterizations of the father role, the role particularly for African American fathers is varied and multidimensional (McAdoo & McAdoo, 1994). While the literature offers a more diverse representation of the fatherhood experience (Ahmeduzzaman & Roopnarine 1992; Cochran, 1997; Fagan, 1998; McAdoo, 1988), current research often examined fathering experiences through the lens of unmarried, non-residential fathers or through accounts told by mothers (Allen & Hawkins, 1999; De Luccie, 1995; Fagan & Barnett, 2003). Marriage rates in the African American community are lower compared to other racial groups, there were examples of African American fathers who were married, physically present, and actively engaged in their families. Some literature indicated that African American fathers actively participate in child-rearing and other fathering duties within a nuclear family setting (Billingsley, 1992; Cochran, 1997; McAdoo, 1993). For example, studies indicated that married African American fathers engage in child-rearing activities such as changing diapers, actively participating in child care, and engaging in activities with their children (Ahmeduzzaman, & Roopnarine, 1992; Cazenave, 1979). Additionally studies suggested that African American men were more equalitarian in their views about the division of household labor and child care responsibilities (McAdoo & McAdoo, 1994).

Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by two theoretical frameworks, the responsible fatherhood model and symbolic interactionism. Doherty, Kouneski, and Erickson (1998) developed a conceptual framework termed responsible fathering. This framework was developed based on research literature, prior theoretical frameworks, and the notion that fatherhood should be examined through an ecological lens. Prior models examined fathering behaviors and attitudes inside or outside of marital relationships. This framework allowed an examination of behaviors and attitudes regardless of the living arrangements between the parents. Furthermore, the Doherty et al. (1998) framework examined the mother-father-child triadic relationship as well as broad external influences such as employment opportunities on these relationships.

Issues of ethnicity and cultural influences are viewed positively in this model unlike other models advanced in the literature. For example, Waites (2009) argued that a common strength of the African American family is family role flexibility. Doherty et al. (1998) also noted that role flexibility allows African American men to serve as surrogate fathers for children who do not have regular contact with their biological fathers. In this instance, the Doherty et al. framework also allows for consideration of issues of diversity in family form and the type of father figures.

Specifically, the Doherty et al. (1998) model underscored individual factors of the father, mother, and child; the co-parenting relationship; and contextual factors in the social environment. Father factors receive limited attention in the literature (Summers, Boller, Schiffman, & Raites, 2006). In the model, father factors include issues of role identification, appraisal of parenting skills, commitment to fathering, and an appraisal of men's relationships with their fathers. This study utilized the father factor, role identification, to gain a better understanding of the lived experiences of married African American fathers.

Symbolic interactionism with an emphasis on identity theory offered another lens for exploring the construction of fathering roles and role definition. Symbolic interactionism suggested that the self was comprised of multiple identities influenced by relationships like the father-child relationship. These identities were organized by the level of importance or salience the individual assigns to it with the innermost identity being the most salient (Burke

& Reitzes, 1981; LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). Furthermore, symbolic interactionism contends that individuals attach meanings to social roles as a result of social interactions (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). The meanings attached or assigned to the roles serve as catalyst for certain behaviors. Additionally, shared norms across the culture influence attitudes, behaviors, and values. Identities are self-meanings in roles and each role is organized by a level of salience (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). Salience means the likelihood of an identity being used under certain conditions (Stryker, 1968). Salience and identities were mechanisms used to develop self-concept and direct actions (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). Role salience suggests that the more prominent the identity, the more likely the individual will try to adapt positive behaviors related to the role. Bruce and Fox (1999) contended that men's commitment to fathering was an outgrowth of their sense of self as it relates to the salience of the father role. The level of commitment to a certain identity depends on the level of salience of that role within the role salience hierarchy (Burke, 1980). The more or less prominent the role, the more or less likely individuals were to identify with the role.

Goals and Research Questions

The goal of this phenomenological study was to explore how married African American men defined the role of father in their families. The following research questions were addressed:

- 1) What does it mean to be a good or responsible father?
- 2) What is the role of fathers in families?

Background and Review of Literature

The literature that explores experiences of married African American fathers and role perceptions was limited and dated. The most pervasive theme regarding father roles highlighted the influence of economics on role perception. Fathers as the primary breadwinner can be traced back as far as the 19th century (Lamb, 2000). While this was a critical notion across the majority of the reviewed studies, data also revealed meaningful connections between fathers' perceptions of their roles and how these roles were actualized through activities with their children and spouses.

Non-Empirical Literature

Two sources were used to provide a context regarding father roles in general and the roles of African American fathers specifically. Moreover, these non-empirical works provided father typologies and were used to further inform data analysis as well as theme identification for the current study. Finally, one aim of this study was to understand males' perceptions of good or responsible fathering. Exploring culturally expected or advanced notions about fathers' roles may provide a context to unpack these perceptions.

Lamb (2000) outlined four dominant father roles in the literature: (1) moral teacher or guide, (2) breadwinner, (3) sex-role model, and (4) the new nurturant father. The earliest typology of the father role was based on Puritan values of the father as the moral guide or teacher (Lamb). Using the Bible and Biblical teachings as guideposts, fathers were responsible for the moral development of their children (Lamb). Moreover, fathers served as role models of good Christian values. As industry changed and became more centralized in the mid 19th century, the roles of fathers shifted accordingly. Fathers defined their roles as breadwinner with the primary function of providing for their families' basic needs. Even

through economic strife like the Great Depression which ushered in for some and reinforced for other dual wage earning families, the breadwinner role remained primary for most men. The 1930's and 1940's marked emergence of fathers as the sex-role models for their sons in particular. Literature emphasized the need for strong male role-models. Finally, the mid-1970's marked the introduction of the new nurturant father. This father type was described as a "good father" as he was actively involved with daily child care. Lamb suggested that while different roles emerged at various times, the advent of one role did not necessarily indicate the decline of previous conceptions. It was unclear from Lamb's characterizations if these various role expectations or definitions were the same cross-culturally, in particular for African American men.

McAdoo (1993) advanced the argument that African American men have been viewed differently for men of other ethnic groups. Previous literature utilized reports of wives to understand the roles of the Black fathers whereas white men's response to this issue was well documented (McAdoo, 1986). Using an ecological approach for this review of the literature, McAdoo (1993) suggested that African American father roles were best understood within four categories: provider, shared-decision maker, child socializer, and supporter of his spouse. Similar to the breadwinner role discussed by Lamb (2000), McAdoo suggested that African American fathers shared in this expectation of economic provider for the family. A difference within Black families, however, was that this role was shared with the spouse and extended family members as well. This sharing of the provider role was a result of structural challenges like unemployment and deindustrialization in urban communities. The decision-making role was closely connected to the provider role in that decision-making was a shared responsibility. Fathers shared in decisions related to childrearing, health care, and employment decisions. Similar to the breadwinner/provider role, African American fathers were comparable to other groups regarding decision-making. Furthermore, African American fathers also provided nurturance and discipline for their children in the role of child-socializer. McAdoo noted that women remained the main source for socialization but men participated in this responsibility as well. Lastly, the marital role emphasized the influence marital satisfaction had on men's overall well-being, wives well-being, and fathers' ability to contribute to positive outcomes for their children.

In both frameworks it is unclear how the father's residence status played in the studies reviewed. Moreover, it was unclear if the relationship status influenced how fathers defined their roles. A more targeted review of the literature for married African American fathers from intact families revealed that these typologies were indeed at play.

Empirical Studies

Quantitative Studies. Quantitative methodology was the primary methods used to explore this issue in the literature with key findings indicating high levels of father involvement for married African American males and similar role characterizations within the family (Ahmeduzzan & Roopnaire, 1992; Bowman, 1993; Bryan & Ajo, 1992). Ahmeduzzan and Roopnaire (1992) used three measures (Child Care Index, the Family Functioning Style Scale, and the Profile of Family Support Scale) to explore the link between sociodemographic variables and level of activity performed by 45 married African American men with preschoolers. The researchers concluded that fathers' level of education, income, and length of time married impacted the level of involvement with their children. Bowman (1993) specifically considered issues related to father roles. Using cross-sectional surveys, Bowman examined the intersection of provider role perceptions, subjective cultural strengths, and family life satisfaction from a sample of 372 African American fathers from intact families. Key findings revealed that fathers were concerned about their families' economic

status; yet, the majority (77%) of fathers rated themselves favorably in the role of economic provider. Bryan and Ajo (1992) used self-administered questionnaires with 50 fathers to explore four hypotheses related to role salience. In particular, the researchers explored if father role perceptions (economic provider, teacher/guide, authority, companion, protector, and direct caregiver) aligned with fathers' actual activities with their children. Similar to Ahmeduzzaman and Roopnarine (1992), Bryan and Ajo found that sociodemographic factors, specifically income, had a significant impact on father role. Bryan and Ajo (1992) found positive correlations between income, employment and father role perceptions. Specifically, the greater the fathers' income the higher the level of significance placed on measures of father role perceptions.

Qualitative Studies. One qualitative study of married African American fathers was found. Cazenave (1979) was one of the first scholars to suggest that Black fathers were present and functioning in the home. The researcher conducted qualitative interviews with 54 middle-income letter carrier fathers from New Orleans. Guided by identity theory, this study explored father perceptions about their roles, their feelings about fatherhood, what the father role consisted of, and their reported behaviors in the role. Additionally, Cazenave explored the impact of the father as a provider on father-family interactions. Key findings revealed that the role of provider was salient for the men in this study. Fathers viewed earning a wage as a means to an end to meet their obligations in the role of father and husband. Fathers were not highly identified in the role of worker specifically but understood their ability to work led to resource accumulation for their families. Cazenave further suggested that the provider role then was more utilitarian for Black fathers. Although the provider role was deemed important, fathers reported that their roles were changing towards less role segregation. Many reported active involvement in child rearing responsibilities such as changing diapers, and helping with homework.

The reviewed literature included non-empirical, cultural conceptualization information as well as empirical studies. The literature presented demonstrates that there is a void in the research regarding African American fathers' role perceptions within the family. Although there were some similarities found in research particularly around the father roles being defined in economic terms, the literature was still extremely limited. Moreover, there was a dearth in qualitative methodology particularly from a phenomenological perspective. The researchers aimed to fill gaps in existing research on the experiences of married African American fathers. This current research will provide more recent descriptions of married African American fathers' roles within their families. Additionally, this study will illuminate fathers' perceptions of these roles and their beliefs about characteristics of good or responsible fathers.

Researchers' Role

One way to ensure rigor for qualitative research was for the researcher to discuss prior experiences and assumptions about the topic of exploration (Kline, 2008). The first author is a doctoral candidate at Texas Woman's University in Family Studies. Her research areas of interest include but are not limited to barriers to father involvement, fathering behaviors and attitudes of African American males, and effective engagement of fathers. She holds a Masters of Social Welfare degree from the University of California, Berkeley. Her dissertation research will explore the lived experiences of fathers who completed a court-mandated fathering course. She has published work on responsible fatherhood. As a social work practitioner, her work was primarily with children and families involved in the public child welfare system. Her interests in exploring issues related to fathering were influenced by those professional experiences where resources to engage and work with fathers were limited.

Additionally, she explored this topic because she believes the representation of African American fathers in the social environment (i.e., media portrayals) and the research tends offer limited portrayals of the African American fathering experience. As an African American woman rearing children with an African American male, she has first-hand knowledge observing and relating to parenting experiences in the nuclear family. Yet through research and experience, the first author acknowledges that her experiences may not fully capture or compare to her partners. By conducting this research, she sought to explore married fathers' perceptions about their roles within their families. It is hoped that this study will provide additional information about the varied experiences of fatherhood.

The second author is a faculty member at the Department of Family Sciences at Texas Woman's University. His research areas include fathering behaviors, parenting education, financial stress, interparental conflict, and Asian American families. As a scholar who examines fathering roles and behaviors, it is beneficial to explore and understand factors that have potential to facilitate or hinder men as fathers to be an involved in their children's lives. He is equally intrigued by how men from different ethnic groups would display their behaviors and roles in the familial context. Research has shown that it is not as common for African American men as men in other ethnic groups to function in father roles within the marital context. As a result, Dr. Hwang believes this research study carries a unique level of significance by shedding light to the understanding of married African American fathers in the lives of their own children.

Methods

The purpose of phenomenological research was to describe the individual experiences of world through the lens of these experiencing a certain phenomena (Patton, 2002). Moreover, the phenomenological approach assumed a shared experience or essences of shared experience meaning that created meaning in the larger social context (Patton, 2002). These meanings were explored as the fathers reflected on their perceptions and experiences as a parent.

Qualitative Inquiry

Transcendental phenomenology was the type of inquiry used for this study as developed by Edmund Husserl (1931) and translated by Moustakas (1994). This approach was suitable for a few reasons. First, this study sought to understand the meaning married, African American men's experiences as fathers. Meaning was a central component to transcendental phenomenology and drives how data are collected to explain the human experience (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). Moreover, Starks and Trinidad (2007) suggested that phenomenology approach allowed for closer analysis of the meaning of individuals' perceptions of their lived experiences. Secondly, phenomenology focuses individuals' interpretations of their personal experiences (Nicholls, 2009). Lastly, the researchers wanted to allow married, African American fathers to define and interpret their own experiences. Using participants' experiences and interpretations provides a greater understanding of their perceptions of father roles, fatherhood, and the responsible fathering. Phenomenological methods allowed the researchers to create categories or themes from participant experiences. These themes describe the essences of these experiences and created a framework for exploring commonalities and relationships (Starks & Trinidad, 2007) related to father roles, fatherhood, and responsible fathering.

According to Moustakas (1994), collecting and analyzing data was a four step process: epoché, transcendental-phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and

synthesis. First researchers must refrain from judgment, called epoché, while distinguishing and accurately describing respondents' experiences. The researcher should not push their own agenda in their research, make assumptions about respondents' experiences, or ask leading questions that may detract from the essence of the respondents' experiences. In the second step, Transcendental-Phenomenological Reduction, text descriptions were used to elicit meaning and the essence of the fathers' experiences. The researchers detailed using verbatim reports of what was seen, heard, and perceived about fathers' experiences. Although each father's experience was unique, there were some commonalities which may characterize a more collective lived experience. Next, imaginative Variation, described the significant structures of the phenomenon. During this step, the researcher engaged in four tasks. First, the researcher developed potential structural meanings to the textual meaning captured during the reduction stage. Next, the researcher distinguished themes or frameworks that explained the appearance of the phenomenon. The researchers examined various structures that influenced participants feelings about their experiences such as their relationship to self and significant others (i.e., their fathers, spouses, and children). Lastly, synthesis occurred via vivid text and structural description to further illuminate the issue. Identification of common themes and differences of experiences were critical in that regard. This researcher used this approach to summarize fathers' experiences and perceptions, thus, making connections to further explain the meaning of these experiences.

Ethical Considerations

The researchers were granted approval to conduct this research through the Institutional Review Board at Texas Woman's University. Each participant completed a written consent to participate in this study prior to engaging in the interview process. The participants were also informed verbally and in writing that their participation was strictly voluntary and consent could be withdrawn at any point during the research process. Participants chose pseudonyms which were used during the interview process and for reporting results of the study. All semi-structured interviews were audio-recorded and conducted in private rooms at local libraries. The first author transcribed all interviews.

Sampling

Purposeful, criterion, and snowball sampling as well as criterion sampling were used (Creswell, 2009; Onwuebuozie & Collins, 2007; Patton, 2007). Small, purposeful samples allowed the researchers to understand the phenomenon in depth (Patton, 2002). As the purpose of the study was to understand the experiences of a distinct group, criterion sampling was appropriate. The criteria for the study was that each participant must be African American, married, a biological father, 18 years or older, and living with his children and their mother who was also his wife. Lastly, the researchers used snowball sampling (Creswell, 2009) by asking community members and study participants to inform their networks about this study. Each study participant was provided a \$20 stipend to a superstore for their participation.

Recruitment

Fliers were posted at local churches and shared electronically through a listserv at Texas Woman's University. The first author also contacted gatekeepers for men's civic groups and fraternal organizations with predominately African American memberships as well as facilitators of men's groups at local churches. These gatekeepers were not involved in

the recruitment or data collection process. The role of the gatekeeper in this instance was to facilitate contact with the civic, fraternal, or church group. The first author attended designated membership meetings, made a brief presentation, and distributed flyers to those in attendance. The first author made additional fliers available to those who requested them to recruit other participants. Finally, the first author asked members of churches and male groups to post fliers where potential participants may see them. All written correspondence will include the researcher's name, contact information, the title of the study, general purpose of the study, eligibility criteria, statement of risks, and a statement explaining that participation is voluntary and can be withdrawn at any time.

Data Collection

The researchers used three methods for data collection: (1) email and telephone communications, (2) semi-structured individual interview, and (3) field notes. Email was the first point of contact with all participants. The first author was provided with names of potential participants by key informants or participants contacted the first author directly. Each participant sent correspondence stating their intent to participate and provided a telephone number. The first author then emailed initial recruitment documents to the population which included details about the study purpose and the researchers contact information. Interested parties contacted the first author by electronic mail and/or telephone. The first author provided an electronic copy of the informed consent document. Additionally, some participants asked questions about the study electronically and these communications were retained. Email was also used to communicate with participants during the member checking process who requested electronic copies of their transcribed interviews instead of a hard copy. The first author retained all electronic communication until the conclusion of the study. The researchers spoke with each participant via telephone prior to the face-to-face interview. During this conversation, the researchers reviewed the interview questions and research themes, discussed any issues related to the questions, as well as the ethical obligation of the researchers. Additionally, the researchers used this contact to establish eligibility for the study. Lastly, the initial conversation offered an opportunity for the researchers to build rapport with the participants and describe the interview process in detail including the use of an audio-recording device and note-taking.

Field notes were another data sources. Field notes will be recorded during and directly following the interviews. According to Patton (2002), field notes are descriptive and include basic information and observations. Additionally, field notes contain direct quotations or thematic perspective and significant reactions of the researcher to shared information (Patton, 2002). Lastly, field notes contain this researcher's interpretations, initial analysis, and hypotheses (Patton, 2002). Handwritten field notes will be maintained in a spiral notepad and stored in a locked file cabinet in the first author's office. Digital notes were maintained via password protected software.

Semi-structured, face-to-face interviews were the final data sources (please see Appendix A for interview questions). The interviews were audio recorded to ensure participants' responses were captured accurately. The interview questions were developed based on themes that emerged from the literature regarding father roles (Lamb, 2000; McAdoo, 1993), role perceptions (see Bryan & Ajo, 1992; Shannon et al., 2012) and fathering behaviors. Prior to the start of recording, each participant was given the opportunity to review the interview questions and ask any other clarifying questions about the process. The interviews lasted between 30 and 90 minutes. Each interview began with fathers completing a demographic questionnaire followed by broad questions about the roles and expectations of fathers in families. At the start of each recording, the researcher reiterated the purpose of the

study and that participants could withdraw their consent to participate at anytime or decline to answer any question(s). Next, the researcher asked participants specific, probing questions about their perceptions about their roles in the family, examples of their fathering behaviors (i.e., child care responsibilities), and the assessments of their role within the family. The researcher used clarifying statements (i.e., please explain your answer) to gain a deeper understanding if initial answers were unclear. The researcher took notes during and after the interviews indicating initial impressions.

There were standardized and open-ended components as well as informal, conversational aspects of each interview. According to Patton (2002), standardized open-ended interviews follow strict sequence. This approach is advantageous as it reduces interviewer bias and allows the researcher to compare responses (Patton). Conversely, this method limits flexibility and the ability for spontaneous conversation between the participant and researchers. To compensate for this limitation, informal questions were asked based on issues which emerged during the interview. Patton (2002) suggested that these types of questions were natural and relevant to the research experience. Furthermore, these questions were in concert with the participants' experiences, thus creating an individualized aspect in each interview.

Data Analysis

Data analysis began with the identification of themes gleaned from reviews of the verbatim transcripts. Data analysis was conducted manually and via NVIVO 10. Bernard and Ryan (2010) identified 12 techniques that can be used to identify themes in the data both manually and via computer software. Moreover, Bernard and Ryan developed a decision tree to guide theme identification which was used to choose from the twelve techniques outlined in their text. Thematic coding via manual or observational techniques and the computer software, NVIVO 10, was used to identify categories in the data. These techniques were separated into observational (repetitive text) and manipulative (cutting and sorting and word lists/key-words-in-context) techniques. These techniques were used with all data: interview transcripts, field notes, and reflexive journal.

Observational techniques involved reading through the transcripts, marking them up, and the use of different colored pens and highlighters (Bernard & Ryan, 2010) to denote differences. Manually searching the data for repetitive text was the first step towards reduction. The first step was to search transcripts manually for repetitive text. All data was read three times for repetitive text. The first author reviewed each transcript three times searching for repetitive words and/or statements. The more often a word or idea appears in the text, the more likely this idea was a theme (Bernard & Ryan, 2010). Repetitive statements were highlighted (i.e., breadwinner, protector) and then grouped by similarities. A list of initial themes and subthemes was then generated.

Manual searching and NVIVO 10 software were used for manipulative techniques. According to Bernard and Ryan (2010), cutting and sorting involved identifying direct quotations that seemed significant and arranging this text into piles of items that belong together (i.e., importance of physical/emotional presence). After identifying significant quotes, the researcher used NVIVO 10 to index and create a reference for the original text. The researcher then cut and pasted similar quotes onto a sheet of paper; thus creating piles or themes. NVIVO 10 software generated word list and key-word-in context information. The researcher used theme words gleaned from observational techniques to generate a list of words within the text (Bernard & Ryan, 2010). The NVIVO 10 software counted the number of times the word appeared in the text. The more frequently the word occurred the more likely its significance. The researcher used this technique broadly as well without indicating words or terms of interest. This approach was used to ensure that words or ideas were not

inadvertently disregarded. No new themes emerged from this broader search of the transcripts. Similar to the observational techniques, a list of themes and subthemes were generated from this analysis.

Trustworthiness and Rigor

Trustworthiness and authenticity described validation strategies in qualitative research (Patton, 2002). According to Carlson (2010), qualitative researchers used methods like reflexivity, thick and rich descriptions, and triangulation to establish trustworthiness. Incorporating these methods “ensures that data were appropriately and ethically collected, analyzed and reported” (Carlson, 2010, p. 1103).

Reflexivity and Bracketing. The process of reflexivity exposed ways researcher bias impacts the research process (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). Patton (2002) argued that the process of reflexivity stressed that the researcher become aware of their cultural/political consciousness and take ownership of their perspective. Similarly, bracketing allowed researchers to set aside pre-existing assumption to focus on the participants’ experiences. To address issues of researcher bias and promote reflexivity, the first author maintained a reflexive journal throughout the process as suggested by Carlson (2010). Thus, the first author created a reflexive journal which contained the researcher’s opinions, experiences, and impressions about the research process. Moreover, the journal helped identify cultural, gender, and romanticized notions that first author had about this research area.

Audiorecordings and Thick/Rich Descriptions. To accurately capture participants’ responses, the researchers used an audio-recording application through the Microsoft windows cellular phone platform. Use of audio recording allowed for verbatim data transcription which enabled the researchers to use detailed, direct verbatim quotations to characterize the participants’ experiences. Thick and rich descriptions promote a deeper understanding of common experiences across population (Carlson, 2010). Moreover, these descriptions captured the essence of the fathers’ experiences.

Triangulation

This process involved collecting information from different sources using different methods to analyze the data (Carlson, 2010; Patton, 2002). Data were collected from multiple sources (interviews, telephone, and email correspondence) to meet triangulation standard. Additionally, field notes were recorded during and directly following the interviews. Field notes were descriptive and included observations such as participants’ body language (Patton, 2002). Field notes contained direct quotations or the emic perspective and any significant reactions of the researcher to shared information (Patton, 2002). Moreover, field notes added structural descriptions which helped in data analysis (Sealey & Hathorn, 2014).

Data analysis was triangulated through member checking, coding, and use of theory. Member checking was a process that involved gathering validation of the researchers’ data interpretation by eliciting feedback from participants (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). The member checking process occurred at the end of the data transcription process. The researcher provided the participants with their verbatim transcript for commentary and to review for accuracy of ideas. Additionally, it provided a list of identified themes. No additional feedback was provided via member checking process. Data was coded based on methods outlined by Bernard and Ryan (2010) which involved manual and computer assisted coded (see “Data Analysis” for details).

Findings

Participants

Eight married African American men for the study. The criteria for the study was that each participant must be African American, married, a biological father, 18 years or older, and living with his children and their mother who was also his wife. The participants lived in the Dallas Fort-Worth Metroplex. The average age of the participants was 36 years old. Each participant had at least a bachelor’s degree and four had master’s degrees. All participants reported family annual earning of over \$60k. The majority of the participants had at least two children. Two had biological children from a previous marriage and relationship. Two fathers were also rearing step-children in the home. The average number of years married for the participants was 6 years. All participants were married to African American women. Regarding religious preference, the participants identified as Christian (n=6), Catholic (n =1), and spiritual (n=1). All participants worked full time averaging over 50 hours a week.

Results

Results for each research question are presented along with themes and descriptions gleaned from the analysis of eight verbatim transcripts... Two themes emerged regarding fathers’ notions about behaviors of a responsible or good father: 1) provide for their children, and 2) responsible or good fathers are physically and emotionally present. In relation to the roles of fathers, seven themes or descriptions emerged from the data collection: 1) provider; 2) role model/sex-role model; 3) disciplinarian; 4) leader; 5) supporter; 6) teacher/spiritual teacher; and 7) guide. Each research question will be presented along with the corresponding themes. This section identifies participants’ common experiences using verbatim text to further illuminate these experiences. A summary of the themes with the corresponding research question is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of Key Themes

Research Question	Themes
What does it mean to be a good or responsible father?	Provide for their children Physically and emotionally present
What is the role of fathers in the family?	Provider Role Model/Sex-Role Model Disciplinarian Supporter Spiritual Teacher Guide/Teacher

Research Question 1: What Does It Mean to be a Good or Responsible Father?

The participants were asked to respond to the following questions,

- 1) “Describe the characteristics of a good or responsible father?”
- 2) “What do you think is the most important thing a father can do for his child(ren)?”

Two prominent themes emerged from the data. Good or responsible fathers:

- 1) Provide for their children;
- 2) Are physically and emotionally present.

All eight of the participants mentioned providing financially for their families as a measure of responsible fathering. Participant 1 noted that fathers have a “fiduciary responsibility” within the family. Participant 2 ranked the role of provider as the most critical role in responsible fathering. He noted that “the friends I grew up with, there was always a struggle financially. Week to week, check to check mentality, and I just don’t want my family to deal with that.” Similarly, Participant 3 remarked that responsible fathers invest both financially and emotionally in their children’s futures. The term “good provider” was offered by four of the fathers.

Physical and emotional presence was also a common theme across all interviews. Fathers expressed the importance of remaining physically present in the home but also emotionally connected to their children. This emotional connection was characterized via descriptors like nurturer, supportive, and attuned to their children and spouses as well.

Participant 4 remarked that responsible fathers “know his kids more than anything, you have to know their wants, their likes, their characteristics...you have to know them through and through.”

Participant 5 described expectations similar to Participant 4 stating “be there for them every time they go through the good and bad times...I can be a shoulder to lean on or an arm to embrace them.”

Participant 6 offered, “present in their child’s life” as the first indicator of a responsible father. When probed about his definition of “present” he added that fathers should “on a daily basis have conversations with them (children)...”

Participant 1 described fathers’ presence as a “premium” in the African American community. He further stated, “so just the fact that somebody is there is the first step” for responsible fathering.

It was noteworthy the influence of their dynamics with their own fathers from childhood and this notion of physical and emotional presence. Six of the participants were reared in homes without their fathers. The two participants reared in intact families suggested that their fathers were physically present but emotionally absent. Participant 4 described his father, “he was *there* but he wasn’t *there*.” The participants seemed to make a conscious choice to course correct this dynamic with their own children.

Research Question 2: What is the Role of Fathers in Families?

To explore this question, participants were asked the following questions: “Describe your parenting style”; “What do you think is the role of the father in families”; and “Are you a good father? Why or why not?”

The following themes emerged from the data:

- 1) Provider
- 2) Role Model/Sex-Role Model
- 3) Disciplinarian
- 4) Leader
- 5) Supporter
- 6) Teacher/Spiritual Teacher
- 7) Guide

Provider and Role Model/Sex-Role Model

As the father reflected on the role question, a number of types emerged which mirrored those found in the literature particularly by Lamb (2000) and McAdoo (1993). All of the participants agreed that the role of father was breadwinner or provider. All fathers also agreed that fathers should serve as role models. Participant 2 stated that, "I have to continue to make them believe with they believe now. They think that I am a superhero." Three fathers added the dimension of serving as a sex-role model as described by Lamb (2000). Participant 1 related that fathers should "set the example for their sons...so they will know how to lead and how to be lead." Participant 1 further added when referencing his daughter that he must teach and show through his actions how women deserve to be treated. Participant 1 added:

And for your daughters, making sure that they have an understanding of teaching them how to be treated because they that you interact with them will tell them whether or not its ok of the to be treated that way...If you don't give them that value system or sense of worth by your actions or words, anyone can come along and tell them what their actions or worth is. I want her to know her worth, intrinsic worth...

Participant 4 expressed that he believed one of his roles was to teach his son how to be a man. Speaking about teaching his son how to treat a lady by opening doors for them, "I mean he will hold the door, he will jump in front of his mom and open the door for her. I am trying to teach him, you, know, what a man is supposed to do."

Disciplinarian

Four of the participants spoke about fathers being the main disciplinarian in the family. Participant 2 remarked that his daughters "just can't do whatever they want to do even though they believe they should be able to." Participant 4 stressed that boys in particular required discipline and fathers "need to be the main disciplinarian." Participant 1 expressed "correction is a very important part of being a father." It is noteworthy that two of the three fathers with daughters did not mention serving as disciplinarian or other related terms when talking about the role of fathers. This role of disciplinarian encapsulated McAdoo's typology of African American fathers as child socializers. Discipline was a critical element regarding the rearing of children.

Leaders

The perception of fathers as leaders was mentioned by three participants. Leadership as described by these men implied that fathers serve as the head of the household or main decision makers. Participant 3 stated,

The role of father is to be kind of like the captain of the ship. They set the course, navigate the course, make sure everything on the ship is moving accordingly...If there's a call to make tough decisions for the family, financially, gotta make the call...You can say what you think you know, it's a partnership. But ultimately you are the person accountable...

All three men felt that they were equal partnerships with their spouse; yet, believed it was their role to make the tough decisions.

Supporter

All of the fathers mentioned terms and described experiences in which they fostered their children's emotional development. Terms like supporter, providing a secure base, being attentive, and providing unconditional love were used by the participants. Participant 5 stated "I have all daughters...so I gotta be a nurturing father and understanding as well."

Participant 7 added when talking about his parenting style,

the most important thing is unconditional love. I mean not matter what as long as your kids know that you love them and will do whatever you can or have to do for them I think everything else falls into place. Personalities are going to clash. Eventually things are going to change but that is something that is something that will never change or should never change.

Teacher/Spiritual Teacher

For three of the fathers, faith and teaching their children about spirituality and God was paramount. Lamb suggested that earliest typology of the father role was one of moral teacher or guide in which fathers impart Christian values or serve as the moral compass for their children. Although Participant 8's son was less than a year old, he spoke about his duty to lead him down a path of faith and strong moral character. Participant 8 stated that fathers should "lead them (children) down the right path...make sure they are growing up with the right set of moral."

Participant 3 said that fathers give children a sense of self. In his opinion the sense of self of self was spiritual. He stated, "being in that right relationship with God because I am not going to always be there and your mom isn't going to always be there." Moreover Participant 3 stated "using the Bible as a backdrop, here are some Biblical principles we will stick to as a family, this is what works for us as a family and this is what we are going to do." Participant 1 was the most vocal about the role of God and faith in his life and how faith shaped his parenting. When asked if he was a good father, Participant 1 responded with "I mean I don't value being called a good father and then my children not have a relationship with Christ. I would rather be called a terrible father and they understand that in 10 years they have to have a relationship with Christ."

Guide

Five of the participants of the participants spoke about fathers as teachers and guides their children. Participant 5 provided a number of passages where he spoke about being a teacher, teaching his children, and offering guidance. Participant 5 stated, "I want my kids to learn, I don't know if there is necessarily a word for that but I want them to learn in everything that they do." He further suggested that while he wants them to learn, he is careful to make sure they have enough challenges to learn lessons on their own. Participant 3 echoed a similar style of teaching and guidance with his children. He stated, "my parenting style is more like observe and build...I say you can try that but this is going to happen...now I am not going to yell at you and tell you no. I'll let you fall, I'll help you up...but I'll say remember I told you, you were going to fall just so they can kind of learn, she can learn for herself."

Discussion

Using the responsible fatherhood framework and symbolic interactionism, the present phenomenological study examined how married African American men defined or perceived their role as fathers as well as their assessment of good and responsible fathering. This work utilized a phenomenological approach which allowed fathers to describe their individual experiences and attach their own meanings to these experiences. The emergent themes from this study affirm findings and frameworks offered within existing literature. McAdoo and McAdoo (1994) suggested that the role of African American fathers was multidimensional. Identified themes included six characterizations of the role of fathers: provider, role model/sex-role model, disciplinarian, supporter, spiritual teacher, and guide/teacher. All fathers noted that fathers had various roles in the family. Given the family dynamics and father-child relationships, these roles or identities changed to fit different situations. It is noteworthy that new notions of the role of fathers did not emerge from this study. Instead the data supported existing notions in the literature about the role of father. For example, all of the fathers stated that a primary role of fathers is that of breadwinner or provider. This breadwinner/provider role has been noted in a number of studies regardless of race, class, or residential status (Bryan & Ajo, 1992; Cazenave, 1979; McAdoo, 1988, 1993; McAdoo & McAdoo, 1994). This finding suggests that perhaps the roles of fathers have some level of universality across cultures. This study did not explore father's perceived efficacy in these roles, but only asked fathers to offer their thoughts about father roles. A future study could examine if cognition influences fathering behaviors and actions. If fathers believe their role is that of a teacher or breadwinner, how do these roles translate in temporal interactions with their children and in their family? Additionally, a study of this nature could make more connections regarding role salience as both cognition and behavior via interactions with children would be measured.

Perceptions regarding responsible or good fathering were also explored in this study. When asked, "to describe the characteristics of a good or responsible father," the portrayal of fathers as breadwinners and providers emerged for all participants. This finding suggests that these fathers viewed providing for their families as paramount or something that they must do. Participants 1 and 3 both married to women in high powered, higher earn occupations explicitly stated that family finances fell to fathers as the head of the household. Interestingly, these men were two of the most vocal about the role of God, religion, and spirituality in their lives. The contextual influence of religion in role perception was not explored in this study. Given the strong connection to the church in many African American communities, future studies should unpack the role of religion in father role identity and behaviors.

Although this study did not specifically explore issues of physical and emotional presence of fathers, this issue informed how all of the men chose to parent their children. The majority of the fathers (n=6) grew up in the home without their fathers. Of this group, four of the men described their relationships with their fathers growing up as very strained with intermittent contact. Moreover, during these infrequent interactions, fathers in this study reported that their fathers were not always emotionally available. Participant 7 stated "when it was good, I soaked it up because I wasn't sure when I was going to get it again." Also, Participant 3 did not meet his father until he was in his early twenties. It is remarkable only one of the fathers, Participant 5, described his father as fully engaged and active in his upbringing in spite of his nonresident status in the family. The participants who grew up with fathers physically present in the home described fathers who were emotionally unavailable. Participant 4 described his father constantly working, "it was a different time then. That's what men did." Participant 8 reported a similar experience with his father who had long commutes to and from work which impacted the amount of time for interactions. The seven

who reported less positive relationships with their fathers when growing up have made conscious decision to father differently. This theme of course correction aligns with the idea of role making in symbolic interactionism. Role making suggests that individuals change aspects of a role that no longer suit their needs or have little value to them (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). Moreover, the model of responsible fatherhood suggests that men's relationship with their fathers may influence the level of father involvement (Doherty et al., 1998).

All of the participants described an aspect of their role as one of emotional supporter. Some used different terms but the general consensus was that fathers should be emotionally available for their children. Having fathers themselves who were physically and/or emotional detached or distant appeared to have an effect on the fathers; yet, from their own self reports they were able to understand that children need physically and emotionally presence of fathers. Future studies should explore specifically the impact of physical and/or emotional disconnect from fathers during childhood on current functioning and behaviors of fathers in intact families.

Limitations

Prior to discussing the implications and further direction for this research, we should note some of the study limitations. First, participants were limited to married, African American fathers living with their children. African American fathers from other types of family systems were not included and should be consider when exploring father roles and self-efficacy in that role. Additionally, including fathers who are cohabiting, or co-parenting from a different resident may provide a different perspective. Secondly, the reader needs to be aware of the small sample although the findings are consistent with previous literature on the topic. Next, every father in this study has a bachelor degree which is not common among African American men. As a result, the result may not be generalizable to other African American men. Lastly, this study gathered participants from a small geographic area; thus, results may be indicative of certain regional dynamics.

Implications

The results of the study have several implications for practitioners and policy advocates who work with African American fathers and African American families. Although father absence is a significant issue in the literature and a reality for some of the fathers in this study, the fathers understood the significant role they play in child socialization and overall well-being. Moreover, the fathers in the study were able to connect the effects of their own father's physical and/or emotional absence for their lives on their well-being and approaches to parenting. Some of the fathers mended relationships with their fathers while others had limited or strained relationships. Social services and family professionals can help fathers explore any unresolved issues from their family of origin and support fathers if they choose to rework the fathering examples from their family of origin. The importance of male role models is also a critical area to understand and for further exploration. The participants spoke of their fathers, uncles, or other influential males' impact on how they behave as fathers and ways in which they understand their own manhood. Many referred to these men as mentors and role models. Parent educators can create curricula that emphasize the importance of social support for positive father involvement. Also, policy makers can offer funding and grant opportunities for community organizations in support of father to father or adult male to adult male mentoring.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions

1. Describe the characteristics of a "good" or "responsible" father.
2. Tell me about the typical activities your father did with you as a child.
3. What is your most positive memory with your father? What is your most negative experience?
4. Describe the quality of your relationship with your father growing up.
5. How do you think your father learned how to parent?
6. Is/was your father a good father? Why or why not?
7. Tell me how you learned to parent.
8. Describe your parenting style.
9. Tell me about the typical activities you do with your children.
10. Describe the quality of your relationship with your child(ren). Is there anything you would change? Why or why not?
11. Are you a good father? Why or why not?
12. Do you feel you are the same type of parent as your father or different from your father? Why or why not?
13. Describe the current quality of the relationship with your father. How do you feel about this relationship? Share a story that best captures this feeling.
14. What do you think is the most important thing a father can do for his child(ren)?
15. Is there anything else you wish I would have asked you about that you want to share with me?

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