Teaching My Son to Be a Father: The Plight of Unmarried Adolescent African American Fathers

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TEACHING MY SON TO BE A FATHER: THE PLIGHT OF UNMARRIED ADOLESCENT AFRICAN AMERICAN FATHERS

by

Michael George Till

A Dissertation
Submitted to the
Faculty of The Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the
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A quantitative research design was utilized to examine and understand the perceptions of fatherhood and manhood held by unmarried African American adolescent fathers. In face-to-face 60–90 minute interviews using a semistructured interview guide developed by the researcher, participants were asked open-ended questions to provide these young men with a voice and an opportunity to express their needs, support, neglect, understanding, and perception of how society views them and its impact on the functioning of the family unit. Using purposeful sampling, 10 unmarried African American adolescent fathers, located in the southwestern area of Michigan, were interviewed for data collection.

Interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. Transcripts were analyzed using the constant comparison (grounded theory) technique. Themes and patterns were identified, which could contribute to knowledge of unmarried African American adolescent fathers regarding the study.

Findings indicated the following: (a) unwed African American adolescent fathers are more involved than they are often given credit for; (b) given the same opportunities, resources, and support systems, paternal involvement may compete
with that of maternal involvement; (c) the lack of knowledge and awareness of opportunities may influence the self-esteem and involvement of African American fathers; (d) how African American men evaluate themselves is often a result of how they have been evaluated; (e) environmental experiences with relationships and family may influence how young African American males regard parenting and marriage; (f) more influence for self-regard may be obtained from outside sources and experiences; (g) obstacles and barriers persist for men in general, and for African American males specifically, in terms of services and programs to assess and address their needs; (h) a healthy self-regard is influenced by the presence and involvement of a father or father figure in the lives of young black children in general, and young Black men specifically; (i) society continues to lag behind in terms of adequately identifying and addressing the needs of African American males.

The study concluded with discussions and recommendations on how to improve the quality and quantity of service delivery for men in general, young fathers primarily, and African American male fathers specifically.
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First and foremost, before any acknowledgements can be made, I must give all thanks and glory to God, for without Him nothing that I have done and will do in the future would be possible. Now let's start from the top. I wish to extend my appreciation to all the people who believed in me when I did not always have the confidence in myself, who supported and pushed me when I they knew that I was not giving my all, who made me a part of their family when family was so much needed, and who taught me many things while allowing me to grow. Although I may not remember to thank everyone, rest assured that many have contributed to this young man's growth and development.

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Acknowledgments—Continued

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I wish to give special thanks to George Bridges and Richard Gaines specifically (both members of my beloved fraternity, Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc., the greatest fraternity in the world) for their friendships and the “fathering” moments of slowing me down and “schooling” me when needed. They have exemplified manhood, aspiration and perseverance for me to follow.

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And now for I must sing the praises of my family, the most important foundation in my life and that which has kept me motivated and aspiring for more. I want to thank my little brothers and sisters, commonly known as the “Rug Rats,” Donta, JaVonte, Aisha, and LaToreya, who may not grasp what I have accomplished now, but hopefully I have established a foundation from which they may also aspire to do great things. All and everything is within your reach, if you truly believe. Jenita Marie Moore, thank you for putting up with me and being my rock during the most trying times. Great things I know are also within your reach and rest assured that I will continue to stay on you to grab what is yours. To those I have shown that I care and have valued your kind words and support, and have simply allowed you to “check me,” thank you and I forgive you.

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Acknowledgments—Continued

Woman. I pray everyday that I am able to give back at least half of what you have given to so many and to care as much. You have sacrificed so much and have not always seen your value. I pray that when you see your first-born walk proudly across that stage, you will realize and recognize that a significant part of you walks within me. Though our job is far from complete, the future is too bright for us to ignore.

I ask that everyone rejoice in the successes that I have had and will continue to strive towards, knowing that all of my accomplishments, I say again, have resulted from so many who have chosen to believe in me. And it is only the mistakes that have truly been mine. Keep Coping and Hoping and Striving to Stay on Top.

Michael George Till
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Problem and Its Background

Adolescent pregnancy has been recognized as a national social problem of growing proportions (Barret & Robinson, 1982). The United States has the highest rates of teen pregnancy and births in the Western industrialized world (National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy [NCPTP], 2000). Teen pregnancy rates are much higher in the United States than in many other developed countries—twice as high as in England and Wales or Canada, and nine times as high as in the Netherlands or Japan (Alan Guttmacher Institute [AGI], 1994). Teen pregnancy costs the United States at least $7 billion annually (NCPTP, 1997). Four in 10 young women become pregnant at least once before they reach the age of 20—nearly 1 million a year (Forest, 1986; Henshaw, 1998). Eight in 10 of these pregnancies are unintended (Henshaw, 1998) and 79% are to unmarried teens (Ventura, Mathews, & Curtin, 1999). Each year, almost 1 million teenage women—10% of all women ages 15–19 and 19% of those who have had sexual intercourse—become pregnant (AGI, 1999). The sharpest increases in out-of-wedlock childbearing have occurred among Whites (Kiselica, 1995). However, between 1980 and 1988, the teenage pregnancy rate among African Americans increased nearly 9% (Henshaw, 1992). Since that time the teen birth rate has declined slowly but

The teenage pregnancy rate among Blacks has been approximately four times the rate for Whites, and the birth rate among Black adolescent females has been approximately two times that of White teenagers (Scott-Jones et al., 1990). The largest decline since 1991 by race was for Black women (NCPTP, 2000). The birth rate for Black teens ages 15–19 declined 13% between 1994 and 1998 (NCPTP, 2000). Finally, Whites accounted for approximately two thirds of the total births to women under the age of 20 in the United States (Moore et al., 1986). In addition, despite the recent declines in teen birth rates in general, the overall teen birth rate for 1998 is still higher than it was in the mid 1980s when the rate was at its lowest point (NCPTP, 2000). Also, most teenagers giving birth before 1980 were married, whereas most teens giving birth today are unmarried (Ventura et al., 1999). Concomitantly, it has been charged that adolescent males are failing to be responsible parents, displaying a sense of immaturity and missing out on the joys of fatherhood.

These data raise significant questions for young Black males in general, but more or less for society in particular. For example, what does the notion that “Any boy can father a child, but it takes a man to raise it” really mean? Does it mean that unless males are of a specified age (by societal norms) they are not capable of raising a child? Because society is biased toward the “normal family cycle,” which assumes
marriage before parenthood (Russell, 1980) and secondary school completion before
marriage, adolescent parents deviate from prevailing ideas about the order in which
one ought to transition through life's major social roles (W. J. Jordan, 1999). Or
does it mean that with the status of being a man come certain responsibilities—
responsibilities that need to be considered, not only for the child, but also being
involved in the child's life for years to come? According to Kiselica and Sturmer
(1993), these findings suggest that society is giving teenage fathers a mixed
message: We expect you to become a responsible parent, but we won't provide you
with the guidance in how to become one.

The likelihood of teenagers having intercourse increases steadily with age;
however, about 1 in 5 young people do not have intercourse while teenagers (Singh
& Darroch, 1999; Sonenstein et al., 1997). Most young people begin having sex in
their mid-to-late teens, about 8 years before they marry; more than half of 17-year-
olds have had intercourse (Singh & Darroch, 1999; Sonenstein et al., 1997). A
major contribution that adds fuel to the fire when the plight of young families is
considered is the assumption that young males and, for the purposes of this study,
young adolescent African American¹ males, are responsible for these unequipped
and ill-prepared families. Official data have shown that most teenage pregnancies
involve 18- or 19-year-old females and males in their early 20s (Kiselica, 1995)
rather than younger adolescents. For example, data reported by the National Center

¹ The terms African American, Afro American, and Black are used interchangeably.

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for Health Statistics (cited in Beymer, 1995) indicated that only 29% of 309,819 babies born to teenage mothers in 1988 had teenage fathers. As society continues to attribute the number of single-parent homes, inactive and unavailable fathers (young and old, Black and White), and perhaps the generational pregnancies to adolescent fathers, expectations of male parental involvement unconsciously may be lowering. In addition, young Black males may be ostracized from assuming and participating in positive and reinforcing roles of provider, father, and family. By igniting what many men, not simply adolescent fathers, perceive as a “rite of passage into manhood,” in one breath society punishes irresponsibility (i.e., child support, humiliation, degradation, termination of parental rights, or arrests for failure to pay), while in another make demands for fathers to be involved and responsible, yet ignoring the obvious: that services are not readily available nor prepared to deal with fathers, young or old, Black or White. The failure of men of all ages to assume responsibility and accountability for their roles is problematic; yet, their behaviors may be a microcosm of how society truly views the institution of marriage, family, and community. (For example, examine the number of divorces that take place yearly for a better understanding of the problem.)

Nearly two thirds (64%) of sexually active 15–17-year-old women have partners who are within 2 years of their age; 29% have sexual partners who are 3–5 years older, and 7% have partners who are 6 or more years older (Darroch, Landry, & Oslak, 1999). Most sexually active young men have female partners close to their age: 76% of the partners of 19-year-old men are either 17 (33%) or 18 (43%); 13%
are 16, and 11% are 13–15 (Sonenstein et al., 1997). But there remains a contingent
of young men who believe that relationships and sex are cornerstones of a family’s
foundation. The proportion of adolescent men ages 17–19 who approve of
premarital sex when a couple does not plan to marry decreased from 80% in 1988 to
71% in 1995 (Ku, 1998).

Identifying the difficulties encountered by, and developing recommendations
for, unmarried adolescent African American fathers (UAAAF) is the goal of this
study. For the purpose of this paper, an adolescent father refers to a father, or an
acknowledged father-to-be, above the age of 17 and under the age of 20 years. The
obstacles they face stem from limited knowledge of their circumstance due to (a) the
paucity of research available on Black adolescent fathers, (b) the superficial roles
that agencies/institutions play, (c) limited availability of programs designed
specifically for young fathers, and (d) the implications of unfulfilled needs that create
a hostile environment for these individuals. The lack of support networks that young
fathers experience affects their self-esteem and parenting roles. As a result of teen
pregnancy, adolescent fathers face intense pressures from their partners, their
families, and themselves (Elster & Panzarine, 1983; Fry & Trifiletti, 1983). They
must address difficult decisions about paternity, financial responsibilities, educational
continuation, and residency (Barth, Claycomb, & Loomis, 1988). With few
programs and opportunities designed specifically to increase parenting skills, self-
estee, education, and employment, the role of adolescent Black fathers who
choose to be involved in parenting continues to be problematic.
Context of the Researcher

Having been born and raised in a single-parent home in the inner city of Detroit, Michigan, I remain humble and unable to fully comprehend the entire parameter of my own very existence: a product of an inner city education; a survivor of inner city life; and a successful Black male, not in terms wealth or material success, but in living beyond the age of 18. I am without a criminal record or history of incarceration, not a substance abuser or user, nor a recipient of a judicial system education, and I do not fall into the other existing stereotypes to which many of my peers, and even those before me, have succumbed. Traditional interventions with underachieving African American males have focused on gaining competence in the Eurocentric culture, rather than reinforcing competence in the African American culture (Bass & Coleman, 1997). I feel blessed to be among the fortunate few who have people believing in them enough to provide opportunities for personal growth and to foster a desire to “stay on a path” and pursue higher education. I am a success in the eyes of many for those very reasons alone, yet still I am a victim of circumstances. Carrying a badge of “Blackness” affords honor, condemnation, and, for many, resentment. Being a young Black male from a single-parent home offers advantages and disadvantages that I attempt to identify even today. A mother is praised for having raised a child who “amounts to something,” though the childrearing practices for a male child and female child are known to be different. Or she may experience embarrassment over a child who chose to assume the path of
“survival” and created a similar lifestyle in the process. These are familiar feelings experienced in single-parent (primarily female-headed) households.

What role did not having a father in my life personally play in my development, if any? Did he choose or was the choice made for him not to be a part of my life? And does he even know that I exist? These are some questions that I have hypothesized about and perhaps may have in common with many children who have been raised in single-parent homes, with other families, or even on the streets. These are issues with which many have struggled in their developmental years. Is it possible to miss something that was never there? Does being involved mean that fathers must live in the same household? Would it make a significant impact upon cognitive development if he were there? Or is having a father present—at your tee ball games, the first time you rode a bike, when you learned to go to the bathroom on your own, the time you fell and broke your arm and needed surgery, the first time you were kissed and wondered about sex, the time you were reminded that your color would be used as a barrier to opportunities throughout your life, or simply at the father-son activity held at your school—more powerful than anyone could really imagine? How do the psychological chains of slavery affect Black men and society at-large even today? These are but a few of the questions and concerns that have stimulated my interest in understanding young Black fathers and their needs.

In the case of men in general, Black fathers primarily, and adolescent Black fathers specifically, there is very little research, few policies, and even fewer programs that exist to address the needs of this population. As a person of color, I
was conditioned early in my development, and at times I was forced to defend myself, against the stereotypical images of young Black males that continue to permeate society. Confusing messages and images from both sides about what it means, or should mean, to be a man were common. As a product of a single-female-headed household and an observer of numerous families who experienced the loss, lack of understanding, or simple confusion of the “family secret” regarding a biological father’s absence, I have frequently speculated on the effect of this absence. How does it influence a young Black male’s thoughts about his role as a Black male and about fatherhood? I found it of special and personal interest to investigate and identify who these fathers are and to develop an understanding of what their issues might be.

The present study may also open up interest for further programs, policies, and research, such as investigating the historical implications of slavery on manhood and fatherhood, or the vital roles that men of color play as teachers and role models to both male and female children in pre-kindergarten and early elementary years. Results obtained in this study may also generate discussion on the plight of Black men in general and Black adolescent fathers specifically. The study may also benefit fathers, young and old, of all races and ethnicities, in understanding and identifying their needs, roles, and responsibilities. I believe that we have entered an era where the “macho man” and “tough guy” images, which have been conditioned in young men early in life, are being replaced with males, both young and old, creating alternative methods for self-expression. The idea of a young man pleading for
someone to talk with, or of an old man crying for love and understanding, is no longer farfetched. The study may also contribute to the limited knowledge base in the area of Black men and fatherhood from their own perspectives. Participants in the study may gain valuable insights about their own psychological and emotional needs.

The conclusions emerging from participants about their experiences, choices, and understanding should be useful for institutions, policy planners and administrators, mental health organizations, community organizations, and others who are concerned with the welfare of minority or Black adolescent males. Furthermore, studies of this type are likely to be of assistance not only to program developers, but also to the individuals in various positions who are chosen to facilitate and deliver services to this population. Such assistance would be achieved by staff and workers in areas where these individuals are likely to be found, having been trained to work with and beyond the stereotypical images of Black men and young fathers that we have been conditioned to see. Further assistance may be achieved in supportive systems that may not encourage fatherhood at a young age, but will not punish nor continue to condemn a person for their offspring. This insight would result in a system that welcomes and encourages involvement of young and old fathers in all aspects of birth and parenting beyond the formative years.
Overview of the Study

In the present study a qualitative design was used. Initially, unmarried adolescent African American fathers (UAAAF) were identified, described, and interviewed. The participants selected for study should not be generalized and are reflective of a specific segment of urban society, including middle class, the working poor, and the very poor. Secondly, the task of obtaining a retrospective examination of perceptual beliefs and attitudes held by UAAAF who conceived their first child during adolescence was obtained through semistructured interviews. Third, their past and present needs were identified.

Previous researchers have found that self-esteem is correlated with juvenile delinquency, academic performance, and psychological depression (Rosenberg, Schooler, & Schoenbach, 1989), as well as with adolescents' concerns about health, school, and family problems (Harper & Marshall, 1991). These factors were emphasized throughout the interviews with this sample of fathers. Finally, the researcher was interested in identifying and describing any existing traditional, cultural, and/or societal experiences that were influenced by discriminatory practices impacting family dynamics of African American life. Policy discussions, while they do not always identify African American males as a source of the problem, repeatedly suggest that African American males are inherently irresponsible, erratic in behavior, and unable to assume the responsibilities of employment or fatherhood (Gadsden & Smith, 1994). When these individuals come into contact with the Friend of the Court for example, they are often forced to prove their competency as parents.
and their value to the lives of their children. From the onset, these young men are "pushed against the wall" and are penalized for crimes committed (or not committed); for being unemployed; for their type of employment, if any; for having limited education or a history of delinquency; or simply for taking a defensive stance towards their attackers. Bureau of Justice statistics (1997) indicate that an alarming number of young Black men are under some form of "justice control," either in prison, on probation or parole, out on bond, or sought on a warrant by the police (Boyd-Franklin, Franklin, & Toussaint, 2000).

Rationale for the Study

Research on African American males is relatively recent and scant, focusing typically on discussions that both characterize and put these males "at risk," either as learners in school or as adolescent or absent fathers (Gadsden & Smith, 1994, p. 634). Considering the plight of unmarried adolescent African American fathers of African descent and describing who these young men are, in terms of their importance to the lives of their children, their families and communities, and the very fabric of our society in the years to come, is the problem under study. Long before African American male children enter the academic arena, they are faced with challenges that may ultimately influence their career and lifestyle across their life span. The social contexts of community and culture, coupled with the realities of economic need, not only frame how young African American males see schooling, but also determine the nature and level of their aspirations; their perceptions of male
efficacy; their willingness to engage in traditional job-seeking activities; their entry into some form of criminal behavior; and their capacity to conceptualize adulthood, fatherhood, and the responsibilities of caring and nurturing their children (Smith, Gadsden, & Kenty, 1994). What is known about African American fathers mirrors the work on African American male development generally; that is, there is little research and what exists is limited in scope (Gadsden & Smith, 1994).

Studies focusing specifically on declining labor market opportunities point to the dire economic and social plights experienced by disproportionately high numbers of African American males and the difficulties they face in gaining access to higher education and well-paying employment (Gadsden & Smith, 1994). The meanings and perceptions they associate with fatherhood and manhood are also considered. The limited literature on the backgrounds of adolescent fathers suggests that they are more likely to come from disrupted and disadvantaged backgrounds, although most of these studies rely on small and nonrepresentative samples (Pirog-Good, 1995). Additionally, as a researcher, and in an attempt to identify and describe unmarried adolescent African American fathers, it is advantageous to elicit existing perceptual views of society that these young men have developed during their short lives. Questions are numerous. For example, are unwarranted stereotypical images of these young men first as Black males and then as new fathers influencing the services and support networks being rendered throughout society, and especially within the Black community? Has society given up on young boys, which in turn has led them unconsciously to give up on themselves? Despite increasing public
discussions about problems facing African American males, research on African American boys and men pales in comparison to negative public perception of them as perpetrators of crime and violence (Gadsden & Smith, 1994). The programs and the males in them have not been a major focus of research efforts, nor have they contributed much in terms of research data to policy discussions about their experiences and needs (Gadsden & Smith, 1994). Conclusions often are prematurely made, discounting or minimizing the role of discrimination, poverty, unemployment, media portrayal, dependency attitude, and educational attainment and motivation that may be altered or influenced early in the stages of development (i.e., "fourth grade syndrome"). Jawanza Kunjufu (1985), in his book *Countering the Conspiracy to Destroy Black Boys*, describes the "fourth grade syndrome," at the time in which some teachers begin to apply stereotypes to Black boys and begin to feel threatened by them.

In summary, the historical persistence of barriers to manhood has significantly impacted the psychosocial development of African American males (Crawley & Freeman, 1993). And, the general inability to fulfill masculine roles has made rage, frustration, powerlessness, and hopelessness pervasive themes in their developmental dynamics (Lee & Bailey, 1997).

**Images of Black Adolescence Gone Astray**

Although research on fathers has increased across disciplines, relatively little of this work focuses on African American fatherhood or the developmental and
social issues that affect African American fathers (Gadsden & Smith, 1994).

Stereotypical replications of men, primarily Black men, by media are major influences of the problems currently faced involving crime, racial profiling, violence, pregnancy, relationships, and families. The Black male is constantly evaluating and reevaluating his role in society, often besieged on all sides with mixed messages and images of what it means, or should mean, to be a man. On one hand, feminists call upon men to be more sensitive and share their masculine privilege (Ehrenreich, 1984), while male writers advocate that men get in touch with and celebrate primal or mythic images of manhood (Bly, 1990; Keen, 1991). On the other hand, the marketing and advertisement industry endorses the demeaning, oppressive, and controlling behaviors toward women and self. The often conflicting nature of these images and messages has left many men confused about the nature of manhood and the essence of masculinity (Doyle, 1983; Emerson, 1985; Merton, 1986; Pleck, 1981). For African American men, these images and messages concerning manhood are often distorted by compelling data suggesting that, as a group, they are in a state of psychosocial crisis (Lee & Bailey, 1997).

Not surprisingly, much of the ideological legitimation for the contemporary misery of African Americans in general, and black men in particular, derives from the historical legacy of slavery, which continues to assert its brutal presence in the untold suffering of millions of everyday black folk. For instance, the pernicious commodification of the black body during slavery was underwritten by the desire of white slave owners to completely master black life. The desire for mastery also fueled the severe regulation of black sexual activity, furthering the telos of southern agrarian capital by reducing black men to studs and black women to machines of production. Black men and women became sexual and economic property. Because of the arrangement of social relations, slavery was also the breeding ground for much of the mythos of black male sexuality that survives to this day: that
black men are imagined as peripatetic phalluses with unrequited desire for their denied object—white women.

Also crucial during slavery was the legitimation of violence toward blacks, especially black men. Rebellion in any form was severely punished, and the social construction of black male image and identity took place under the disciplining eye of white male dominance. Thus healthy black self-regard and self-confidence were outlawed as punitive consequences were attached to their assertion in black life. Although alternate forms of resistance were generated, particularly those rooted in religious praxis, problems of self-hatred and self-abnegation persisted. The success of the American political, economic, and social infrastructure was predicated in large part upon a squelching of black life by white modes of cultural domination. The psychic, political, economic, and social costs of slavery, then, continue to be paid, but mostly by the descendants of the oppressed. The way in which young black men continue to pay is particularly unsettling. (Dyson, 1993, p. 183; italics added)

Previous cultural, demographic, and geographic research considerations have been largely directed towards impoverished neighborhoods engulfed in economical and political turmoil and neglect. Unfortunately, the majority of research on both the absence of fathers and adolescent development has used White middle-class samples (Barber & Eccles, 1992). Traditional developmental research on men and families, like much of the research on father absence (Gadsden & The Philadelphia Children’s Network, 1993), examines a subset of fathers and families, typically those who have been or are married to the mothers of their children and those who are middle class, employed, or White.

Currently, several theories attempt to explain the etiology of this problem. One theory is that African Americans are targeted for genocide by a genetically inferior yet oppression-dominant culture (Welsing, 1991). A second suggests that these statistics result from the failure of mainstream educational systems to effectively work with the needs of African American males (Ladson-Billings, 1994).
Central to the challenges confronting African American males are significantly low levels of educational attainment (Green & Wright, 1991; Johnson & Watson, 1990; Narine, 1992; Reed, 1988; Wright, 1992). Data on the educational attainment of African American male youth from a variety of sources present a profile of widespread failure (Johnson & Watson, 1990; Narine, 1992; National Black Child Development Institute, 1990; J. M. Patton, 1995; Reed, 1988; Select Committee on Children, Youth, and Families, 1989; Subcommittee on Investment, Jobs, and Prices, 1991; Subcommittee on Select Education, 1990). A third is that African Americans doubt their own ability to achieve in U.S. society (Fordham, 1988; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986).

Conspicuously, the discussions of research and the research agendas that explore the range of issues contributing to the problems facing African American males, in particular, and fathers, in general, remain absent. Traditionally, African American underachievers have been encouraged to learn how to negotiate the Eurocentric school culture in order to succeed (Ladson-Billings, 1994). The education provided in the school systems does not adequately resolve the cultural dilemma that has led to the existing underachievement across our nation. Several authors in discussions of second-culture acquisition have argued that an effective method for managing the personality dislocation that can be the result of acculturation stress is to learn how to become biculturally competent (Coleman, 1995; LaFromboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993; Ogbu & Matute-Bianchi, 1986; Padilla, 1980). Traditional interventions with underachieving African American
males have focused on gaining competence in the Eurocentric culture rather than reinforcing competence in the African American culture (Bass & Coleman, 1997). LaFromboise et al. hypothesize that becoming grounded in the values and social support systems of one's culture of origin is a necessary precursor to developing and demonstrating competence in a second culture.

Definition of Terms

The key terms used throughout this study are defined as follows:

Young Black father or unmarried adolescent African-American father (UAAAF): An unwed African American (of African descent) adolescent male who is an acknowledged father over the age of 17 and under the age of 20.

Involvement: Having contact (physically and emotionally) with a biological child at least four times a week or a minimum of 25 days a month.

Color consciousness: The unnatural assignment of mental or moral traits based upon physical skin color. These traits can be either positive or negative, as long as the basis is assumed to be in the skin color (Akbar, 1984).

Partner: Referring to the biological mother with whom the young father had some form of relationship at the time of conception and subsequent birth.

Research Questions

This study was directed towards exploring the following areas of inquiry:
1. What role do unfulfilled social, psychological, and economic needs play in creating a hostile environment for unmarried adolescent African American fathers?

2. What influence does a social support network have on self-esteem and parental involvement for unmarried adolescent African American fathers?

3. What obstacles and barriers do these young men face with family, society, economics, relationships, and parenting?

4. Are there significant differences among those fathers who are known by the mother/child and are sporadically involved in the child(ren)'s life, those who remain unknown and uninvolved, and those who are present/known and actively involved? (Involvement does not always constitute living in the same household.)

5. What effect do employment/educational practices or habits of unmarried adolescent African American fathers have on their participation in childrearing practices?

Limitations of the Study

One limitation of the study is that the results cannot be generalized to the overall population of unmarried adolescent African American fathers. This sample involves a nonrandom and nonrepresentative selection of the identified population for study. Existing literature suggests that the nonrandom sampling method, while not the preferred choice, is acceptable until a database can be developed that will completely assess the population (Brown, 1983). Previous studies on adolescent
fathers have revealed a wide range of sample sizes, from as few as 9 to as many as 100 (Hanson, Morrison, & Ginsburg, 1989; L. A. Smith, 1988).

The historical implications of suppression and repression are reflective of cultural, traditional, and societal experiences and descriptions held by the individual participants, and not that of the general population. Cheatham (1990b) argued that there is a need for a constant recognition of the many individual differences that exist within and between African American communities. Nevertheless, Cheatham (1990a, 1990b) added that it is equally important to understand the unique African American culture that has evolved in response to the historical experiences of Blacks in America. A distinction is often made between Africans and those of African descent brought involuntarily to North America as slaves in the 1600s, whose heritage and descendents extend across Africa, Australia, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Central and South America, the West Indies, Northern Europe, and the Caribbean islands. In considering the ages of 17–20, the researcher assumes that those who became fathers experienced normative developmental and transitional issues similar to those of younger fathers.

Organization of the Study

This dissertation is divided into five chapters. In Chapter I, an introduction to the study, context of the researcher, purpose of the study, rationale for the study, definition of terms, research questions, limitations of the study, and the organization of the study are developed.
In Chapter II, a review of literature is presented, encompassing the existing literature on Black fathers and the legacy of racism and slavery to society. The literature review also provides a psychosocial, cultural, demographic, and descriptive examination of a small segment of unmarried adolescent African American fathers in southwestern Michigan. Additionally, the availability of social programs and adolescent fathers' help-seeking behaviors are reviewed.

Chapter III consists of the methodology, including the description of methodological conceptualization and the research sample. The chapter includes discussion on selection of participants, research instruments, data collection, and data analysis.

Chapter IV deals with the findings of the study. A description of participants and organization of the findings are included in this chapter.

In Chapter V, a summary of the research, conclusions, discussion of the results, recommendations for practice, and suggestions for further research are presented.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Overview

The history of counseling people of color, or multicultural counseling, in the United States remains relatively new and brief. Although a few early pioneers (e.g., Du Bois, 1903; Frazier, 1939, 1966; Horney, 1937; Sanchez, 1932; Stonequist, 1937) recognized the importance of cultural factors in understanding human behavior, until the 1960s most psychological theorists, researchers, and practitioners rarely acknowledged culture as playing a major role in personality dynamics or influencing the psychotherapeutic process. Instead, during the first half of this century, psychology became a source of tools for educators and mental health professionals in the United States to force conformity on the “different” (Ramirez, 1991), to perpetuate inaccurate stereotypes regarding minority groups (Sue & Sue, 1990), and to attempt to demonstrate the intellectual, cultural, and racial superiority of the dominant White Anglo culture (Guthrie, 1976; Ramirez, 1991; Sue & Sue, 1990).

The present review of the literature makes reference to the substantial cultural influence that the legacy of racism and prejudicial attitudes continues to have on Black families in general, and Black fathers specifically. Historically, Black men and boys have been, through society’s overt acts and implicit attitudes,
regarded as and made to feel less than relevant to their families and society at large. For over 400 years it has been clear to African American mothers that "the deck is stacked" against their sons from birth. Unlike his White male counterpart, achieving masculine privilege in the United States has not been the birthright for the African American male (Genovese, 1974; Hernton, 1965; Lee, 1990; Staples, 1983). Society continues to resist the idea of the Black male as parent and family provider.

Several factors have contributed to the neglect experienced by fathers of children born to adolescent mothers. Until recently, fathers of children born to adolescent mothers have been ignored both in research and in service programs (Elster & Lamb, 1986). Only a small body of literature gives adequate attention to young fathers, and an even smaller one addresses young Black fathers. Instead, researchers have directed the majority of research involving adolescent parents towards mothers in relation to their child, the father, and other support systems. While continuing to provide overall care that remains poor or inadequate, it is assumed that the transitory lifestyle of many adolescent fathers makes it difficult for them to be studied. The transitory nature of adolescent relationships has often meant that fathers were unavailable to be studied, to receive services, or to be actively involved in their children's lives (Lorenzi, Klerman, & Jekel, 1977; Nettleson & Cline, 1975).

Indeed, it is argued that the social programs that exist today continue to follow historically cultivated traditions of neglectful attention and service for the needs of adolescent fathers. Agencies providing services to young unmarried
mothers refuse to stray beyond providing minute services or neglectful interest in the needs of unmarried fathers. Despite such deprivation, expectations of responsibility and accountability of unmarried fathers for their offspring run high.

**Slavery's Bad Taste**

As the plight of young Black men is considered in terms of their psychological and cognitive ability to accept and assume responsibility for parental care, an examination of the historical implications of slavery that may be generationally rooted in the families of these young men is crucial. Critical developmental processes regarding fatherhood and manhood may have been socially, emotionally, and psychologically stunted to some degree within the family sphere of these young men. Moynihan, referring to writings of Thomas Pettigrew and E. Franklin Frazier, and to Nathan Glazer’s summary of Stanley Elkins, argued that “the slave household often developed a fatherless matrifocal (mother-centered) pattern,” and that severe postemancipation rural and urban poverty meant that “the Negro family made but little progress toward the middle-class pattern of the present time” (Gutman, 1976, p. 271). “In its lasting effects on individuals and their children,” American slavery was “indescribably worse than any recorded servitude, ancient or modern” (Gutman, 1976, p. 271). For many southern Black families, the migration to the North, for example, with the prospect of more opportunities and a better way of life, did not always allow for a smooth transition. Migration to the North reinforced social and familial disorganization among southern Blacks—a
process similar to what had happened in "the wild Irish slums of the nineteenth century Northeast" where "drunkenness, crime, corruption, family disorganization, [and] juvenile delinquency" were "routine" (Gutman, 1976, p. 378).

Notwithstanding are the persistent family discord and dysfunctional relationships that may continue to inflict perhaps irreversible harm on a population, particularly their offspring, who at one time was punished for brandishing a rich tradition of community and family networks. These punishments often resulted in families being broken up to reduce threats of disobedience, rebellion, and revenge.

Indeed, arguments are often made to minimize, suppress, or deny these long-lasting and often life-altering experiences of oppression and repression. Some sociologists go as far as to argue that the Black family in contemporary America is heading toward increasing disintegration and that this process has its roots in slavery (Blackwell, 1991). Yet, the most common element in their theories is to regard slavery as the cause of all the pathologies that they say are "characteristic" of the Black family today (Frazier, 1939; Pinkney, 1969; Moynihan, 1965). Never is it the sole intent of scholars and activists to attribute to the ugly face slavery has created all of the existing pathologies that influence the lives of people of color. Nor is the behavior of minimizing or ignoring responsibility an acceptable or "fashionable" alternative. There exists a sentiment that most families of varying racial and ethnic backgrounds teach and encourage their children some existing moral and value-laden standard of ethical conduct. It may be safe to assume that admitting and accepting responsibility for behaviors, regardless of the consequences that result,
ranks high on the list. Where the conflict often arises is in the determination and administration of moral and ethical conduct. What dominant racial or class group has the right to impose its beliefs, values, and will onto the oppressed or subjugated masses, while eliminating and interpreting the cultural and historical moments to these masses?

With these psychological barriers and obstacles presented at every turn primarily to Black families, and specifically to young Black males from birth, the amount of frustration and anger carried by generations of people of color comes as no surprise. Under such conditions, these young fathers are often asked to carve a masterpiece out of stone that future generations will sit and admire, while being provided only dull or inadequate tools (e.g., training, programs, support systems, or guidance).

Freedom: By Whose Standards and by What Means?

The struggle for civil rights for many Blacks did not end in the 1960s. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was the most far-reaching and comprehensive law in support of racial equality ever enacted by Congress (Franklin & Moss, 2000). Although the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was designed to eliminate many of the inequalities of the past and has resulted in many positive developments since then, life for many of the underserved and neglected has deteriorated even further. In the South, it wasn't uncommon nor unexpected for some segregationists, intent on retaining the "old order," to experience a backlash. In the North, such a backlash
was manifested in the actions of Whites, who discovered their prejudices for the first
time or who resented direct-action protests to eliminate discrimination in their own
communities (Franklin & Moss, 2000). It wasn’t usual to see some of the once
public places transform themselves into private clubs or establishments—a response
similar to the one following the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1875. While the
Black Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s required a full-scale reexamination of the
place of African Americans in American life, it also demanded more involvement by
Blacks themselves and more action to relieve the conditions that the investigations
revealed (Franklin & Moss, 2000). Divisive and often debilitating tactics in dealing
with behaviors that daily rehash traumatic experiences of people of color (i.e., racial
profiling, sexual harassment, discrimination in the workplace through lack of
promotions or opportunities, stereotyping, hate crimes, and police brutality) simply
ignore, minimize, or deny the existence of discrimination in its entirety, be it subtle
or overt. Disagreement remains concerning the number of Black males who are
incarcerated, unemployed, uneducated, disenfranchised, neglected, medicated and
labeled, who have limited political or professional advancement opportunities,
predefined occupations (i.e., athletes and entertainers), or health issues and
concerns, or who are police shooting victims in the United States. If one single
indicator could portend the future of the African American male, it was that in 1995,
of the 22 million Black adults in the country, more than 2 million males were in
prison, on probation, or on parole (Franklin & Moss, 2000). By comparison, in 1994
only 503,800 Black males were enrolled in undergraduate colleges (Franklin &
Moss, 2000). Where agreement can be found is in recognizing that some of these experiences are occurring within and outside all racial and ethnic backgrounds and across all color lines. For example, the increase in widespread use and abuse of drugs in all segments of American society and the attendant violence produced by proliferating drug markets and dealers in urban communities were major factors in the passage by Congress of the Anti-Drug Act of 1988 (Franklin & Moss, 2000).

The erosion of the Black family primarily, and the elimination of the Black male specifically, remains a slow and insidious process, yet a quite tactful and effective one, nonetheless, over the years.

Slavery undermined the family as the fulcrum of the social order that Blacks had known in West Africa, from which most slaves came, even though it never completely destroyed marriage and family as important social institutions. Sir Charles Lyell said that “one of the most serious evils of slavery is its tendency to blight domestic happiness; and the anxiety of parents for their sons, and constant fear of licentious intercourse with slaves is painfully great” (Franklin & Moss, 2000, p. 140). This “evil” not only blighted the happiness of the White family but was one of the powerful forces operating to weaken the slave family altogether (Franklin & Moss, 2000). Like African American families in general, the experiences of Black teenage fathers are influenced by the tragic legacy of racism toward African Americans in the United States (Franklin, 1982, 1989; Gibbs, 1984; Johnson, 1985; Leavy, 1983; Parham & McDavis, 1987; Poussaint, 1990; Ruiz, 1990; L.A. Smith, 1988, 1989). In revisiting the time of slavery, we find that some slaves did marry, of
course. However, it is inescapable that, whether voluntary or involuntary, marriage affected Black peoples' chances of remaining together until death (Blackwell, 1991). The unions that existed varied substantially throughout the country. Slaves' opportunities for relatively stable sexual unions outside the institution of marriage not only varied from region to region but also depended upon the willingness of slaveowners to adhere to the law regarding these unions (Blackwell, 1991).

Whites in New England, for example, applied far more stringent regulatory norms to black people and to whites themselves than did whites in most of the southern regions. Consonant with the Puritan ethic, they expected all who engaged in heterosexual activities to do so only after they had taken marital vow. The publishing of marital bans prior to marriage, which was conducted by a magistrate, was a further effort to regulate sexual norms. There is considerable evidence to support Franklin's argument that this explicit respect for the institution of marriage and the implicit regard for the family prevailed throughout New England (Frazier, 1948; Blassingame, 1981). Not unexpectedly, black people were eager to conform to these societal and legalistic expectations, since they had come from areas having carefully delineated proscriptions for the institution of marriage and the family. It was in the South, however, more so than in any other region, where Frazier's comment about the inimicality of economics for black family life takes on more explicit meaning. During the early stages of the slave trade, more men were recruited than women, largely because of the need for strong men to till the soil and work the land. This created a highly distorted sex ratio, but in time more black women were forced into American slavery, which not only balanced the sex ratio better but proved to be economically more profitable for slaveowners.

In the South and Middle Atlantic states, particularly, experiments with different forms of slave unions, both in and out of wedlock, occurred but largely as a means of strengthening economic life among large slaveowners. Thus legal marriages, casual unions, and stud farms—whose main purpose was the production and subsequent marketing of children like cattle—were sanctioned by the prevailing social system. During this process, there developed a myth of black licentiousness and animalistic sexual behavior overlaid with a disdain for formalized marital unions. This myth was created by slaveowners who structured social situations that facilitated a self-fulfilling prophecy of sexual behavior between black men and women. It was convenient to rationalize, for instance, that blacks had no regard for marriage while whites were simultaneously forcing them into sexual unions.
on stud farms, often without benefit of marriage. Not infrequently, young girls of 13 became mothers. Once their fecundity had been established, they were used to bear more children with amazing regularity so that by the time they reached 25 at least a dozen children had been born (Franklin, 1948; Blassingame, 1981). Many of the children were traded or sold and separated from their families. Many fathers were never permitted an opportunity to play the role of husband-father. Casual, if not brittle, familial relationships were common. In many instance the extirpation of family life as we know it among slaves was a sine qua non for maintenance of the economic system of slaver. Therefore, innumerable family units were destroyed by the persistent practice of selling fathers or mothers separately and children as well, or by trading children for other property or cash.

When black men did leave their families, historical and sociological evidence shows that they usually did so under duress. The only alternative to forced separation was instant death. Indeed, numerous slave escapes were undertaken because of the unfailing determination of black men to reunite with their family members. Even their success at this endeavor fails to confirm the viewpoint that slaves welcomed separation because it permitted greater freedom to establish new sexual liaisons. Although white disregard for the black slave family seems to have been the norm, there were exceptions. In the South and Middle Atlantic states, for example, usually depending upon the size of the plantation, some slaveowners did make valiant attempts to protect and preserve the sanctity of the institution of family among slaves. Smaller plantation owners were often more diligent in this regard than larger owners, among whom a callous disregard for black family life was particularly characteristic (Franklin, 1948; Blassingame, 1981). (Blackwell, 1991, pp. 112-113)

History has a profound way of repeating itself as identified by a system that uses “enslavement” through life sentences in penitentiaries; limited or minimum involvement in child-rearing unless under strict supervision; life-long sentences of poverty; limited educational and employment development; de-emphasis on the institution of marriage as shown by the high prevalence of divorces; and the shattered or crippled ideal of “family unit” as demonstrated by the instances of violence, greed, selfishness, betrayal, neglect, and abandonment across ethnic and class groups. Social educators have long recognized that an opportunity gap
separates those with sufficient political and economic means to influence their own environmental conditions from those who neither possess nor can reasonably acquire such means (Anyon, 1979; Beard & Beard, 1930; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Counts, 1932; Dewey, 1916; Freire, 1970; Mann, 1957; see also Hertzberg, 1981, and Stanley, 1985). For young males growing up in a low socioeconomic status, alienation from the legitimate institutions of society, including prominently the schools, practically ensures that their actual opportunities by legal means are very low (Endleman, 1997). Although these problems are occurring across color lines throughout society and the world, society suffers collectively from unequal amounts of exposure given to aberrant people of color, resulting in the continued negative images and stereotypes that the media presents. From the original European conquest of the Western hemisphere (e.g., Zinn, 1980) to current forms of institutional discrimination, the political and economic discrepancies separating dominant and dominated sociocultural groups have been undergirded by a fundamental gap between American ideals and social actions—a gap between rhetoric and reality (Baldwin, 1963, 1988; Banks, 1987, 1989; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Faludi, 1991; Greene, 1993; Kozol, 1991; Newmann, 1975; Nieto, 1996; Ogbu, 1987; Philips, 1972; Sleeter & Grant, 1994). This cycle of deception, alienation, and oppression results in significant problems within the family dynamics for these young fathers. Andrew Hacker, in his assertion of the unfair treatment that Blacks receive, stated:

When you’re black, you’re never sure how you will be received on the highways, in stores and at lodging places. As you drive across the country,
you can never be sure that you will not be stopped by the police or spend a night in jail. If a motel clerk can't find your reservation, is it because she has seen you in person? Are all the toilets at this service station really "out of order"? The day-to-day aggravations and humiliations add up bit by bitter bit. Clerks keep a watchful eye on you when you look around in a shop and you can sense when you are seated in a restaurant that they would rather you had chosen some other eating place. There is a constant strain of living in a white world. (*Los Angeles Times*, 1992, p. B11)

How About Just Twenty Acres and You Can Keep the Mule?

The prevalence of discriminatory practices regarding housing and employment that these young Black males face teaches frightening lessons early during their childhood years. For example, a large nationally representative study of housing documents indicates that Blacks are discriminated against about half the time they try to rent an apartment or buy a house (Brill, 1999). The employment picture is less clear, but results do suggest that Blacks applying for entry-level jobs may be discriminated against about one third of the time (*Focus*, 1993/1994).

Hacker further stated:

When you are told that blacks who have come from the Caribbean earn higher incomes than American blacks and that other minorities start at the bottom and manage to find jobs and to succeed, the message seems to be that color by itself is not an unsurmountable barrier. But you must wonder how blacks endured insults and humiliations in the past—not being able to set foot on beaches and in parks or in public libraries used by whites; being called by your first name, feeling helpless in the presence of white police and judges with almost total power over your life. To be black in America meant reining in your opinions and emotions and forcing smiles to assure whites that you harbored no grievance against them. It seems that white America had no desire for your presence or any need for your people. (*Los Angeles Times*, 1992, p. B6)
While the Black middle class gradually quadrupled and the top 20% of all Black households averaged $61,000 in income, many of this middle class fled the inner cities, leaving behind a poor underclass (Brill, 1999). This flight, for those less fortunate, increases the obstacles that young Black fathers face, first in surviving, and then in providing for their families regardless of their preparation. Income, healthcare, and life expectancy in the central cities have decreased, and a majority of Blacks continue to feel that they are locked out of the promise of the American Dream (Brill, 1999). The added frustrations for many young Black males of being locked out of society and being assassinated and left as the walking dead have fueled hostility and violence that are often glorified on television any given evening after a Black male is killed by the police. It has become a challenge for Black leaders to stroke the masses and call for peace, because they too have found it difficult to overcome the injustices that occur. This has resulted in more young Black youth who have no reference to or interest in the philosophy of nonviolence, who have begun to believe that they are going to have to fight White racism if they are to survive. Many young Blacks, with no respect for themselves or for anybody else, are dropping out of school, joining gangs, selling drugs, going to prisons, and killing each other with a frequency that boggles the human imagination (Korsch, 1993).

The disparities that have resulted from discriminatory practices and have survived even the most searching scientific findings have given strength and persistence to the existing separate African American world and have hindered the advancement of Black families. The forces that operated on the African American
population for three centuries or more were of such nature as to create a distinctly separate Black world within the American community (Franklin & Moss, 2000). The system of slavery created a basis for an inherent assumption of inferiority of and for Blacks that ultimately gave rise to deliberate separation of the races and the resources that existed. Not even the social upheaval brought about by the migration of large numbers of Blacks from rural areas to urban industrial centers did much to disturb the existence that African Americans led apart from the rest of the community (Franklin & Moss, 2000). The promises and subsequent demands for reparations have become a resurfacing fight for “just due” (or “justice due”) that only time and thinking will determine.

Can We as Fathers Have Assistance?

According to Lamb (1983), our society historically has defined men as the instrumental and economic leaders of the family but has viewed women as expressive figures responsible for child-rearing and the socialization of children. Based on the unfounded theoretical notion that mothers are more biologically prepared than fathers to raise children, the mother-infant relationship also has been more emphasized in psychological theory and research (Parke & Neville, 1987). The influence that these unfounded theoretical notions have on fathers in general, and on young fathers specifically, may be seen in the administration of resources allocated at local, state, and federal levels. Almost 20 years ago, Jaffe (1983) argued that these assumptions have influenced social service policy so as to create a pattern of
de facto discrimination concerning fathers as social service clients. With such an
abundance of family life and community problems, it is striking that, historically,
social service programs for teenage parents have failed to address the needs of
teenage fathers (Kiselica, 1995). Current welfare reform efforts and criminal justice
actions have wide-ranging implications for these men relative to the economic
support they can provide to their families, their involvement in informal and often
illegal economies to make such contributions, their high potential for incarceration,
and the emotional impact of their absence on the lives of their children (Gadsden &
Smith, 1994). Still, the literature emphasizes that agencies serving unmarried
mothers have not given enough attention to unmarried fathers, especially the
unmarried adolescent father (Berstein, 1971; Chilma, 1979; Connolly, 1978;
Mendes, 1976; Pannor, 1971; Vincent, 1960). Many initial programs targeted
teenage mothers only (see Children's Defense Fund, 1986a; Goldstein & Wallace,
1978; Smollar & Ooms, 1987; U.S. Congress, 1986). When these agencies have
involved the father, it has been only superficially or punitively (Furstenberg, 1976;
Johnson & Staples, 1979; Kreech, 1974; Pannor, 1971; Young, 1954). Service
programs purported to target teenage parents tend to consist of medical,
educational, and psychological assistance for teenage mothers but not teenage
fathers (Children's Defense Fund, 1986a; Kiselica, 1992; Kiselica & Sturmer,
1993b, 1995; Smollar & Ooms, 1987; U.S. Congress, 1986). In sum, for many years
the majority of research on adolescent parents has focused primarily on mothers in
relation to the child, the father, and other support systems (Hendricks, Howard, & Caesar, 1981).

Much of the work on father absence is located in research on the consequences of African American adolescent pregnancy and female-headed households in poverty (Gadsden & Smith, 1994). Again, minimum attention has been given to the experiences of fathers and their needs. With scientific study of adolescent fathers and program development lagging far behind that of mothers, neglect and service delivery to these young men is the result.

Although a few programs have provided service to adolescent fathers, barriers to adequate job training, education, support groups, and parental guidance/training still remain. Because of the relatively small research base on the life-span development of African American males, programs that focus on fathers and families fail to address both setting (socially and institutionally) and intellectual context (politically and economically) for understanding the problems confronting increasing numbers of African American males. These males become fathers in the normal, but not always typical, course of adolescence, and sometimes in the absence of strong educational and social supports (Gadsden & Smith, 1994). Today's teenage father knows little more than his partner or non-father peers about sexuality and reproduction (Barret & Robinson, 1982; Brown, 1983; Finkel & Finkel, 1975). Yet, psychologically and intellectually, teenage fathers are more like than unlike their non-father peers and older fathers (McCoy & Taylor, 1985; Nakashima &
There also continues to be little information on the roles that absent fathers play in the development of the child. Once again, much of the work on father absence is located in research on the consequences of African American adolescent pregnancy and female-headed households in poverty (Gadsden & Smith, 1994). While information on the role played by these absent fathers in teen mother families is very sparse, what is available indicates that fathers are much more likely to live apart from adolescent mothers than from mothers in general (Danziger & Nichols-Casebolt, 1988). Data from the 1981 National Survey of Children indicated that almost half of the children in these families had not seen their fathers at all in the previous year, and only one sixth of them saw him as often as once a week (Furstenberg, 1976). And although teenage fathers can have a positive influence on their children's development, at least some young fathers may not know how to parent or respond consistently to their infants' cues in an appropriate manner (Kiselica, 1995). Fathers' absence increases the probability that young mothers will have to raise their children alone. The findings of most research on parenting skills of teenage parents have been based on teenage mothers and indicate that adolescent mothers may provide less appropriate forms of stimulation and care for their young children than adult mothers do (see Lamb & Elster, 1986). Therefore, the problem
appears to be two-fold: those fathers who are present and uninvolved, and those who are unknown.

For those fathers who are involved but assume a lifestyle that breeds inappropriate or questionable behavior and parenting, such behavior is often detrimental to the longevity of the family as a unit and perpetuates the stereotypical images that fathers, young and old, including men of color, are often resistant to or prone to attribute to continued racial and discriminatory practices. The external portrayals of people of color being relegated to illegal activities or behaviors as a way of “life” and/or “survival,” coupled with the internal struggle or awareness that potentially they could be caught or harmed, often result in an imbalance between responsible attitudes and dysfunctional selfishness. Burdens are often placed on parents, families, and children when inappropriate behaviors result in detrimental outcomes that may have disproportionately affected Black males over the years. These alarming outcomes have led to increased rates of incarceration, domestic violence, rapes, homicides, suicides, illiteracy, robberies, substance abuse, “system dependence,” unemployment, and lower wage-paying positions that have plagued Black communities and endorsed a vicious and often debilitating cycle of generational behavior. Little involvement in paternal child-rearing and the perpetuation of detrimental values and behaviors are proving to have harmful effects, particularly in the Black community, on male/female relationships, teen pregnancy, domestic violence, divorce, and several other areas pertinent to the Black community’s mere existence. In many instances these factors fuel the
discrepancies that often exist and persist in laws, programs, policies, and their implementation and enforcement, which, more often than not, result in debilitating outcomes. Those fathers who are involved, but are inappropriate or problematic in their parenting, seldom understand the ramifications of their behavior on others in their lives and their future.

Intense pressure on adolescent fathers from their partners, their families, and themselves often occurs after conception. Difficult decisions about paternity, financial responsibilities, education, and residency must be addressed. Additionally, it is suggested in the present study that the “work behavior” of absent fathers may have a significant influence on their participation in child-rearing. There may also be indications that minority families may experience more paternal involvement than what is frequently reported. Two studies on teen fathers suggest this. Sullivan (1989) found that young men who reside in Black and Hispanic neighborhoods may participate in the excitement of the event surrounding the child’s birth but may reduce their involvement over time. Anderson’s (1989) work on young Black men in the inner city described the status significance that they derive from parentage, even though they eventually sever the relationship with the mother and child.

However, research conducted on adolescent pregnancy by Elster and Lamb (1986) indicated that adolescents who become parents are at greater risk for becoming dependent on the social welfare system and are generally more apt to be abusive or neglectful toward their children. This same research indicates that the maltreatment of children is thought to be the result of the adolescent parent’s
inability to cope with the stresses of parenthood, limited resources, and general lack of experience in being a parent (Elster & Lamb, 1986).

Barret and Robinson (1982) conducted a study of White married teenage couples in high school from rural working-class families in central Pennsylvania. They found that boys and girls were ill-prepared for parenthood because of unrealistic expectations of child development and a lack of knowledge base and experience concerning children. The results of a more recent study of the parent-child interactions between 15 pairs of adolescent parents and their infants indicated that the fathers were less sensitive than the mothers to their infants' communications and tended to demonstrate less reciprocity (McGovern, 1990). The lack of their own psychological development likely caused these young men to be more impatient and intolerant of children, and more prone toward physical abuse in their child-rearing practices. Although teenage fathers often share many of the same psychological, contextual, and offspring characteristics as those who are typical of maltreating adults (e.g., role confusion, employment difficulties, financial stress), no data suggest that young fathers are more likely than adult fathers to maltreat their children (Kiselica, 1995).

There is evidence that the children of teenage mothers have cognitive deficits. For example, their scores are lower on standardized intelligence tests and achievement tests, and they are retained in grades more often. Such deficits are small but consistent, appearing in the preschool years and continuing through elementary school (Hofferth, 1987).
The long-term follow-up study of adolescent mothers and their children by Furstenberg, Brooks-Gunn, and Morgan (1987) documented the persistence of both behavioral and achievement problems through adolescence. Some research suggests that these effects may be attenuated if the teen mother lives with other adults who help take care of her children (Kellam, Ensminger, & Turner, 1977; Maracek, 1979). Having the presence of the teen mother’s parent in the home provides the child with role models and support systems that will possibly aid in both the child’s, as well as the mother’s, development.

On the other hand, the presence of the teen’s parents in the home makes the father’s participation in child-rearing highly remote, which may ultimately hamper the child’s development. The benefit of parental participation in child-rearing by fathers of all ages has been well established in the developmental literature. For example, studies have found positive effects of paternal involvement on the young child’s cognitive and social development (Easterbrooks & Goldberg, 1984; Parke & Neville, 1987; Radin, 1981). In addition, the Furstenberg (1976) study indicated that the preschool-aged children of teen mothers obtained higher scores on achievement tests when they saw their fathers regularly. Although many fathers do not live with their children, the amount of contact between adolescent fathers and their children is much greater than has been commonly believed, particularly for Black fathers (Furstenberg, 1976; Furstenberg et al., 1987; Marsiglio, 1987; Parke, Power, & Fisher, 1980). Nonresident fathers are less likely to be involved in routine caretaking and more likely to be playmates for their children (Fernandez, Ruch-Ross, &
Montague, 1993). Many also provide some financial support for the child and the child’s mother, at least initially (Furstenberg et al., 1987; Lorenzi et al., 1977; Parke et al., 1980).

It is this researcher’s intention to show that, despite the absence of supporting research on the roles that “perceived” absent fathers play in the development of the child, the assumption of their absence warrants further examination. By contrast, little attention has been given to the many Black fathers who are an integral part of their family’s life and functioning (Bright & Williams, 1996). The erroneous conclusion to be drawn is that the African American father has abandoned his position in the family (see, e.g., “A World,” 1993). The stereotype of the Black father as an “invisible man,” who is usually absent from the family, has little power in the family, and is not involved or interested in the socialization of his children, is being challenged (Bright & Williams, 1996).

Following the lead of other researchers to challenge existing myths and stereotypes of Black fathers’ interest or involvement in child-rearing, this researcher initially sought to identify who these young fathers are.

Who Are These Fathers?

In the process of reviewing the literature, it quickly became apparent that limitations existed in the type of information drawn from and about this population of young fathers in general, and about Black teenage fathers in particular. Although I was able to identify the ages of the fathers at the time of birth, little information or
only rough estimates currently exist as to the ages of these teenage fathers. Nationally, 7% of young men aged 20–27 reported that they had fathered a child while they were adolescents; 79% of conceptions were nonmarital (Marsiglio, 1987). Ethnic differences are noted, with Black men fathering children at younger ages and more often outside marriage than males of other ethnic backgrounds (Clark, Zabin, & Hardy, 1984; Marsiglio, 1987; Rivera et al., 1985). The programs and the males in them also have not been a major focus of research efforts, nor have they contributed much in terms of research data to policy discussions about the experiences and needs of African American males (Gadsden & Smith, 1994). Most of the research on young fathers concerns the consequences of adolescent fatherhood for the young men themselves (Fernandez et al., 1993). Attempts to capture the “raw experiences” of unmarried Black adolescent fathers are simply rare or nonexistent. In the present study, the question arose, what better method currently exists to capture the trials and tribulations of fatherhood and manhood faced by young Black males beyond allowing them to “tell their stories”?

According to Sonenstein (1986), although there is fairly accurate information regarding the numbers and characteristics of teenage mothers in this country, precise demographic data on teenage fathers are unavailable because the age of the father is often not listed on birth registration forms. Therefore, Sonenstein hypothesized that government statistics regarding the number of teenage fathers are probably underestimates and warned researchers to interpret those statistics with caution (Kiselica, 1995). The transitory nature of adolescent relationships has often meant
that fathers were unavailable to be studied, to receive services, or to be actively involved in their children’s lives (Lorenzi et al., 1977; Nettleson & Cline, 1975). Birth records of children born to adolescent mothers, a major source of what is known about their fathers, have incomplete information on fathers (Hardy & Duggan, 1988; Sonenstein, 1986). One in every six U.S. birth certificates has no information on the age of the baby’s father; for more than 4 in 10 babies born to adolescent women, no data are available on the father’s age (Landry & Forrest, 1995). Information from mothers aged 15–49 who had babies in 1988 and were surveyed in the National Maternal and Infant Health Survey indicated that fathers for whom age is not reported on the birth certificate are considerably younger than other fathers (Landry & Forrest, 1995).

The lack of sufficient or consistent information on the ages, identity, and other demographical areas of interest or concern for young Black fathers may lend support for the author’s study and encourage subsequent studies that attempt to identify and distinguish unmarried adolescent African American fathers from their counterparts.

Does Age Really Make a Difference?

It may be hypothesized that, on one hand, not all of the fathers of teen pregnancies are teenage fathers. Typically, the fathers in the literature reviewed for this study were older than the mothers of their offspring, especially when the mothers were teenagers. Although the literature on adolescent fathers is growing,
the usefulness of these data in understanding adolescent pregnancy and childbearing is limited by the fact that many fathers of children born to adolescents are not adolescents (Fernandez et al., 1993). The older the father is, the greater the probability exists that he may be responsible and responsive to the needs of both the mother and the child throughout the pregnancy and perhaps at least a year or two beyond. Although this initial involvement does not guarantee that the father will be actively involved or that the couple will parent together, it does increase the probability that the older father is more likely to have planned and responded positively to the pending birth. It also increases the likelihood that the older father is in a better position financially (by earning more per hour of work than the younger father) to deal with the future barriers and parental obstacles. Older men were found to be more mature than younger men in the Nakashima and Camp (1984) study of adolescent mothers and their partners. Having an older man may increase the probability that he may be involved in the childrearing practice. Fathers who are unmarried, Black, or partners of lower income women are younger than other fathers (Landry & Forrest, 1995).

While these older males may offer their younger girlfriends a father figure or some much needed self-esteem, they may also add to existing behaviors that have become detrimental to the young mother's relationships with her own family or her lifestyle. Lamb & Elster (1986) found that young women who were involved with significantly older men (more than 3 years age difference) were more "troubled." They were more likely to have a history of smoking, alcohol use, illicit drug use,
school-related problems including dropping out of school, and early sexual initiation than their counterparts who were closer in age to their partners (Fernandez et al., 1993). These pre-existing behaviors, coupled with violations of socially acceptable dating norms, often compounded the young mother’s development. Troubled young females are often easy prey and are easily identified by older males, who are keenly aware of the material needs and attention for which these young, vulnerable females may be yearning. Having drifted away from their parent(s), having assumed a parental role at a younger age, or being denied a relationship with their own father, these young women may be reaching for a way out of their current condition. The troubled lifestyles of these young women may be compounded if their partners also experience social problems (Fernandez et al., 1993). Eighty-five percent of prisoners, 78% of high school dropouts, 82% of teenage girls who become pregnant, and the majority of drug and alcohol abusers—all come from single-mother-headed households (Miller & Zubaty, 1995). Although the older father’s involvement in parenting and presence in the household may represent a supportive arrangement for the child, the most critical variable for the adolescent mother appears to be whether she lives with her parents or relatives (Fernandez et al., 1993).

Though these young fathers are quite capable of fathering a child, caring for the child raises increased concerns and hurdles. The problems increase 10-fold when the young mother gives birth to a child with a young father her age or younger. A tremendous burden may be placed on both extended families to care for the young
parents and their offspring. If the young mother or father comes from an environment in which survival techniques, out-of-wedlock births, and teen pregnancies are prevalent and the norm, placing a strain on the existing limited resources may lead to tension and eventual relocation. Studies reviewed earlier suggested the possibility of adolescent mothers setting up independent households when they partner with older men (Fernandez et al., 1993). Yet, if the father is younger or not actively involved, the dependency on governmental assistance increases for the mother and offspring. After a young mother assumes what she considers to be an independent lifestyle through government assistance, the probability for additional births by younger or older fathers may be increased.

Furstenberg (1976) found that the experience of adolescent parenthood often led young women to establish their own households, regardless of marital status. If the young mother has family support and stays with parents or relatives, positive outcomes are more likely to occur. The Furstenberg and Crawford (1978) 5-year study of adolescent mothers found major differences in the socioeconomic circumstances of never-married mothers who lived with their parents or relatives and those who lived apart from their parents. Those who lived with relatives were more likely to return to school, graduate, develop marketable skills that could lead to employment opportunities, and become less dependent on welfare assistance. Most of these positive outcomes at 5 years were predictive of continued success 17 years later (Furstenberg et al., 1987).
It is the author’s intent to study the assumption that father involvement should be both encouraged and supported by programs and resources, and that male models, preferably biological fathers, are an important tool in helping young Black boys maneuver and transition into manhood and fatherhood and, subsequently, the role of provider.

A Father Without a Name

Young mothers share the blame in depriving children of their father(s) by frequently failing to identify the name and age of the biological father. They do this for a host of reasons: to protect him from family or existing laws (i.e., statutory rape); because she is unsure or unaware of the possible father as a result of her current lifestyle; because she been a victim of a situation, such as a rape, in which she may blame herself; because she is fearful of the individual; or because she is simply ashamed of what others may think about the impeding birth. Obstacles and hostility often exist. For example, when papers are served to a father regarding paternity 3 or 4 years after a birth of which he had no knowledge, expectations and responsibilities are required of him if the paternity proves to be valid. However, his feelings and emotions are ignored regarding both the child and its mother. An unforgiving legal system exists in which these fathers, especially the young ones, are limited in their rights and roles from conception to birth. Young men fathering children often are blamed for the pregnancies and excluded from services and research (Barret & Robinson, 1982; Hendricks et al., 1981; Kahn & Bolton, 1986).
Although many fathers are often limited in their involvement from conception to birth, there does not appear to be a trend towards favoring abortion, as was once found among White male teenagers. More recently, it appears that the gap between White teenage males' views on abortion and those of Black or Hispanic fathers may have closed. Data from the 1988 and 1995 National Survey of Adolescent Males concluded that between 1988 and 1995, young males' approval of abortion decreased significantly. In 1995, 25% of U.S. males aged 15–19 agreed that it was all right for a woman to have an abortion "for any reason," down from 37% in 1988 (Bogges & Bradner, 2000). The large decrease in approval of abortion among White teenage males has closed the racial and ethnic gap in attitudes towards abortion that was evident in 1988, when White youths held significantly more liberal attitudes toward abortion than did either Hispanics or Blacks (Bogges & Bradner, 2000).

It can be hypothesized that the same social and psychological factors influencing academic motivation and academic attainment within the school setting can be identified in the cultural forces in the African American community, which often conflict with those of the majority culture represented within the school setting. For those young Black males who are able to attain academic success and opportunities beyond their athletic prowess, mastery of "living in various worlds," coupled with support systems, may be the difference between economic prosperity and subjugation. Possessing the ability to "play the game" or "assimilate to the status quo," which people of color in general are required to master (a crafty
technique for survival) if economic gain, scholastic achievement, or professional advancement is to be obtained, has proven to be a necessity. This is often what sets these achievers apart from those who often are depicted as underachievers, liabilities, or tyrants. Many ethnic minorities handle the ambivalence associated with trying to fit into several different worlds by developing what Hale (1982) calls "personality dislocation." Hale argues that much of mainstream culture is in conflict with African American culture and cannot be easily integrated without some personality dislocation. As the personality is dislocated, the African American male student may believe that this system is not designed to help him and thus he develops learned helplessness (LaFromboise et al., 1993). These struggles may result in low self-esteem and self-regard for himself and low motivation for academic success. Struggles of this magnitude, without a strong support network available, may situate young Black males beyond the acculturative stress and cause these "rich minds" to exhibit characteristics found in those who are underachievers. Examples of these characteristics are external locus of control and a low sense of self-efficiency (Schunk, 1991); low self-concept (Jordan, 1981); and low sense of adequacy, feeling isolated, and having self-contempt (Ford, 1991; Ford & Harris, 1991; Ford, Schuerger, & Harris, 1991). As Ford et al. (1991) have suggested, it is important to remember that minority students who are achieving may also have identity development needs that focus on their racial identity as well as their achievement identity (Bass & Coleman, 1997).
Research suggests that African American males are at a higher risk for dropping out of school, engaging in criminal activity, being a perpetrator or victim of a violent crime, and being incarcerated than their European American peers (Bass & Coleman, 1997). Gill (1991) reported that the Center for the Study of Social Policy predicted that 70% of working-age African American men will be jailed, dead, alcoholic, or hooked on drugs by the year 2000. The Department of Justice reported that 1 out of 4 African American men was in jail or under court supervision, and that there were more African American men in their 20s under court control than there were African American men enrolled in college (Bass & Coleman, 1997). Gill cites The Institute for the Advanced Study of Black Life report to remind us that 1 in every 3 African American men, ages 20–24, is a potential homicide victim (Bass & Coleman, 1997).

Contrary to popular thinking, teenage pregnancy is not a new phenomenon in the United States (Kiselica, 1995). In support of this conclusion, Males (1993) noted that national records indicate hundreds of thousands of births among teenage girls every year during this century (Kiselica, 1995). And as stated earlier, these teen births are not necessarily to adolescent fathers.

Studies that examine psychosocial and cognitive development focus primarily on schools and classrooms as a critical context for understanding how the experiences of young African American boys translate into problems during adolescence and adulthood (e.g., Bowman & Sanders, 1988; Jackson, in press). Vast opportunities to learn and comprehend life-altering conditions emerge when
young men are provided safe and supportive environments to articulate and express their understanding of the world in which they live. Identifying their struggles and limited knowledge during their formative years may have substantial implications during the pregnancy and subsequent birth of their children. In addition, these recounts speak volumes to the discriminatory and racist practices that are an influential part of their cognitive behavior as it pertains to fatherhood and manhood. Thus, it is the author’s aim to provide this population with an opportunity to be heard and, perhaps, provide some therapeutic outlets to better understand and take into account the particular circumstances of these young men.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Participants

Participants were obtained through the use of various sources: formal presentations made to directors or designated personnel, informal presentations made to associates via word-of-mouth, area churches, recreation facilities, and alternative education programs.

Particular focus was given to the social and behavioral sciences that have investigated this population and have developed and implemented models of intervention. Participation was voluntary. If the first two attempts at obtaining enough participants were unsuccessful, potential subjects were then informed that they would be paid for an interview.

Initially, the proposal was submitted for review by the doctoral committee, then was submitted to the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) at Western Michigan University on September 27, 2000. Approval for the proposal was granted on October 30, 2000.

Selection of Participants

The participants in this qualitative study consisted of 10 unmarried adolescent African American Fathers (UAAAF) selected from the following
community organizations located in southwestern Michigan: Kalamazoo Probation Enhancement Program (KPEP), the Douglas Community Center, and Western Michigan University. All of these organizations are located in Kalamazoo, Michigan. The agencies/organizations listed in Figure 1 were also contacted for assistance in identifying potential participants. Members of these organizations came from various backgrounds.

The Family Health Center  
The Family Institute  
The Boy Scouts of America  
The Boys and Girls Club of Greater Kalamazoo  
Center for Continuing Education for Young Families (CEYF)  
Kalamazoo County Juvenile Court  
Teen Pregnancy Clinic, Bronson Hospital  
Family Independence Agency  
Prenatal Clinic at the Family Health Center  
The Young Men's Christian Association  
Michigan State University/Kalamazoo Center for Medical Studies Clinic

Figure 1. Additional Agencies/Organizations Providing Assistance in Participant Selection.

A letter and questionnaire were developed containing the criteria for the selection of eligible participants. The director or specified staff member was contacted to identify potential participants, serve as liaison, and assist in scheduling personal interviews. The director or staff member so identified was then given detailed information regarding the study.

It was determined that, in the event that fewer than 10 UAAAFs expressed an interest in the study, a second letter (in addition to a phone call) was to be mailed
to the identified organizations to request additional participants in the study. If more UAAAFs responded, they would be included in the interview protocol, but the results would not be reported in the analysis.

The UAAAFs were selected from members affiliated with the identified organizations who met the following criteria: (a) an adolescent father defined as being between the ages of 17 and 20; (b) the identified biological father of at least one child (i.e., newborn, infant, adolescent); (c) a current resident in the southwestern area of the state (to increase the participant’s availability for the administration of the protocol and/or follow-up); and (d) one who is unmarried at the time of the administration of the protocol. This sample was chosen to identify, compare, and contrast the perceptions held by UAAAFs about fatherhood and manhood, as influenced by cultural, historical, and social aspects of family dynamics in African American families. In addition, it provided a reflective exploration into their experiences from conception through the birth of their first child.

Procedure

Participants were recruited by purposeful sampling (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; M. Q. Patton, 1990) as opposed to random sampling in order “to select information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study” (M. Q. Patton, 1990, p. 169). Among various purposeful sampling methods delineated by M. Q. Patton, intensity sampling seemed most appropriate for the present study in that an intensity sample can provide excellent or rich examples of the phenomenon of
interest, but not unusual, extreme, or deviant cases (Kim, 1996). M. Q. Patton (1990) defines information-rich cases as “those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research, thus the term purposeful sampling” (p. 169). Participants were informed that participation was voluntary. Potential directors and/or staff members were informed that participants would be paid for an interview if the first two attempts at obtaining data proved to be unsuccessful. It is important to note that the use of payment to recruit additional subjects became unnecessary. All participants involved in the study fulfilled their commitment to the study without compensation. Equally important to mention is that the fathers were given the opportunity to review the typed transcripts made during their individual session. Five participants’ responses needed clarification or further explanation and were subsequently documented (see Appendix I). Therefore, additional follow-up sessions were not necessary. The researcher was confident in concluding that the comfort level established and sustained with the young fathers aided in the honest responses and disclosures provided. It was not unusual for the fathers to become emotional in acknowledging their appreciation of having someone who was interested listen to them. Having a young African American researcher may also have been influential in the comfort level described by these young fathers.

Participants were located through various means: through flyers distributed in various sites frequented by unmarried young Black males of African descent; by posters and/or flyers displayed in public places frequented by Black male teenagers; through referrals from community agencies, churches, schools, and recreation

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facilities; and by word-of-mouth. Again, the primary source of identifying potential participants was through the assistance of the identified area organizations and agencies.

A Parental Consent Form (Appendix D) from parental guardians was required for those under the age of 18 and was included in the packet.

Research Instruments

The Criteria Information Form (Appendix E) served as the basis for screening individuals to assess whether they met the specified criteria. The acceptable size of the sample was between 10 and 12 UAAAFs. It was determined that, in the event that more than 12 UAAAFs volunteered to participate in the study, a random drawing of 12 UAAAFs would be conducted.

The identified contact person initially arranged a meeting to minimize anxiety and serve as an initial “safety net” for the potential participant. At the time of the initial contact, the researcher, who was also present, presented in some detail the purpose of the study, interview procedures, and issues of confidentiality. Verbal consent and mutually scheduled times and sites for interviews were subsequently agreed upon. The phone number of the researcher was made available to potential participants in case they had any concerns or questions pertaining to the nature and procedure of the study. A follow-up phone call or postcard to schedule the interview was provided to those who agreed to participate in the study (Appendix F).
At the initial setting for the interview, the selected participants were given a Participant Consent Form (Appendix C), and the Criteria Information Form (Appendix E). In addition, a prepaid addressed return envelope was provided. The consent document justified the need to schedule the participants for face-to-face audiotaped interviews. Once the researcher received the completed information from the participants, they were contacted by telephone to schedule face-to-face audiotaped interviews. The Semistructured Interview Protocol was presented at the time of the interview (see Appendix G).

The Criteria Information Form (Appendix E) for data gathering provided support in collecting, reporting, and analyzing the data. The Participant Consent Form (Appendix C) provided participants with information explaining issues of confidentiality to protect their identity by utilizing code numbers and fictitious names. Identifying information such as names, cities, places of employment, and specific examples included in transactions were altered by substituting pronouns, general categories, and indistinguishable information. Background information for participants and interview transcripts will be stored in a locked file cabinet located in the Counselor Education and Counseling Psychology Department. All information will be kept secure for 5 years and then destroyed.

Data Collection

For this qualitative study, the major source of data was obtained through face-to-face, semistructured interviews and a sociodemographic information
questionnaire. The use of in-depth, face-to-face interviews for data collection illuminated some of the subjective and contextual aspects of unmarried adolescent African-American fatherhood experiences and perceptions that might otherwise go unnoticed in research using a more structured approach. The administration of the interview was arranged by the researcher and participants at a mutually convenient time and site. Each interview was audiotaped and transcribed with the participant’s and/or guardian’s consent and awareness. Any important observations, such as personal reactions, were noted by the researcher.

Data Analysis

In an effort to fully understand obstacles faced by the UAAAF, an analysis of the qualitative data was utilized. M. Q. Patton (1980) observed that analysis of qualitative data is “the process of bringing order to the data, organizing what is there into patterns, categories, and basic descriptive units” (p. 144). Also, Tesch (1990) defined data analysis as a process that entails an effort to formally identify themes and construct hypotheses (ideas) as they are suggested by data and an attempt to demonstrate support for these themes and hypotheses. The data analysis strategy in this study is called “constant comparative method” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) or “coding” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), this strategy, constant comparative, combines “inductive category coding with simultaneous comparison” (p. 182). Throughout the analysis of the data, the themes, constructs, and hypotheses (ideas) that emerged from the data were
identified from the interviews and were tested and compared against themselves as the analysis proceeded.

For this research study, face-to-face interviews 60–90 minutes in duration were conducted in a specified site. Follow-up interviews lasting half of the initial interview time (30–40 minutes) occurred only for the purposes of providing clarification and ensuring accuracy of information provided by the young fathers. The UAAAFs were asked to respond to several open-ended questions categorized to elicit the various themes experienced by the young fathers. The interview questions allowed the participants to consider their perceptions of fatherhood, manhood, their relationship with the mother of the child and her family, their relationship with their own family, and the attitude of society towards them. In addition to maximizing opportunities for uncovering similarities and variations in participants’ experiences and views, the questions were arranged in five parts.

Part One examined the experiences of the young man’s relationship with the mother of his child prior to, during, and after pregnancy and subsequent birth. This information aided in painting a portrait of the relational patterns and communication skills that were existent throughout the relationship, which may have resulted in the “fear of the unknown” created by the pregnancy and birth.

Part Two sought to further the educational constructs that were extended to these young men regarding manhood and fatherhood by examining their own relationships with their fathers or various male models identified as being influential in their survival and development. This information further drew attention to the
need for resources and programs that encourage and emphasize the importance of communication and male models in the lives of this population.

Part Three attempted to shed some light as to how the participants developed their knowledge of sexual behavior. Further understanding may aid programs that improve communication skills and reduce sexual exploitation, divorce, family abandonment, domestic violence, neglect, and disrespect of women in general, and Black women specifically. Despite increasing public discussion about problems facing African American males, research on African American boys and men pales in comparison to negative public perception of them as perpetrators of crime and violence (Gadsden & Smith, 1994).

Part Four attempted to further examine the "raw experiences" and assumptions drawn from their own accounts within pertinent realms of society. Policy discussions, while they do not always identify African American males as a source of the problem, repeatedly suggest that African American males are inherently irresponsible, erratic in behavior, and unable to assume the responsibilities of employment or fatherhood (Gadsden & Smith, 1994).

Part Five asked these young men to engage in a retrospective exploration of their experiences and lack of understanding that may have influenced some of their current situations or predicaments. A retrospective look could provide these young men some therapeutic opportunities to become more expressive and understanding of their experiences, which may lead to more insightful decisions and subsequent lifestyles and behaviors.
The Criteria Information Form consisted of a set of structured questions designed to gather basic criteria information regarding family constellation (i.e., father’s current age, mother’s age at birth, father’s age at birth). Further demographic information was obtained during the interview regarding understanding of fatherhood and manhood. Questions were asked concerning the UAAAF’s relationship with his own family dynamics prior to conception, during the pregnancy, and after the birth.

All fathers were interviewed individually at a predetermined site for the participant’s convenience. It was expected that interaction between the researcher and the young fathers would yield certain responses that provide descriptive accounts of their experiences and their perceptions about roles, support, and societal perceptions. A telephone call was made to the young fathers thanking them for their participation in the study. In addition, the directors and/or staff members that assisted with identifying participants for the purpose of the study were also called and thanked.

Process of Discovery

Each audiotaped interview was transcribed with existing themes being coded using the NUD*IST 4 Classic software for qualitative data analysis. NUD*IST 4 (N4) stands for Non-numerical Unstructured Data * Indexing Search and Theorizing and is a qualitative data analysis used to add credibility to the results. NUD*IST is a computer package designed to aid users in handling nonnumerical and unstructured
data in qualitative analysis, by supporting processes of coding data in an index system, searching text or patterns of coding and theorizing about the data (Richards, 1998).

Each participant was asked to review his transcript for clarification and consistency. The changes suggested by participants were identified and made. Dividing the interview into sections made coding of information more feasible. Each interview transcription was initially examined separately for the purpose of identifying key terms, phrases, and categories used by the participant to represent his views and experiences in relationships, with society, as a young man, and as a father. Key terms, statements, and phrases were identified under the following major headings as listed in the interview guide: relationships, education regarding manhood/fatherhood, sexual behavior, perceptions of society, reflections of lost youth, and life as a young Black male. Terms, statements, and phrases obtained during individual interviews were indexed according to the page and the specific section of the page in the original transcript in which they were located. The resulting terms, statements, and phrases were compiled in a separate listing. These listings were accumulated by identifying the corresponding parts and copying and pasting them from the original transcript coded into the computer using NUD*IST, resulting in a hard copy of the listing. The indexed listing was a valuable resource for quickly locating what individual participants stated regarding specific topics or issues, in addition to its value in identifying recurrent themes, patterns, and variants existing within the statements provided by each participant.
The resulting information led to cross-examination of the listings to further identify recurrent topics or themes discussed by the participants for data analysis. Labeling and grouping of key terms, statements, and phrases pertaining to similar phenomena or concepts under major categories were conducted. Initial considerations were given to the numerous on-going modifications and refinements of categories during the process of comparative analysis. Through comparative analysis, a second set of listings of the identified categories was determined under the following headings: relationships, education regarding manhood/fatherhood, sexual behavior, perceptions of society, reflections of lost youth, and life as a young Black male. These listings were composites containing each participant’s responses to particular categories. Any further refinement of coding resulting from subsequent examination and clarification of identified themes, concepts, and categories occurred during the process of writing the final analysis.

A tabulation of the themes was developed to aid in identifying norms among experiences, assessment of needs, identification of discriminatory practices, and the development of recommendations to address the plight of unmarried adolescent African American fathers. Participating organizations/agencies were given the opportunity to receive a summary presentation of findings and recommendations to encourage further response to the needs of this underserved population.
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The Participants

As already noted in Chapter III, unmarried adolescent African American fathers (UAAAF) were invited to participate in this study based on their knowledge about and experience with fatherhood.

The participants for this study consisted of 10 diverse UAAAF. Twenty-three potential participants were initially identified. Of these 23, 11 met the criteria and agreed to participate. Of the 12 potential participants who were not selected, 11 were eliminated because they were over the age of 20. The 12th young man, although he met the requirements, failed to attend the scheduled and rescheduled times for the interview. Seven of the selected participants were obtained with the assistance of the Kalamazoo Probation Enhancement Program (KPEP), one participant was obtained with the assistance of a social worker from the Douglas Community Center, and the final two participants were obtained with assistance from personal relationships with employees at Western Michigan University. All 10 participants participated in a 60–90 minute face-to-face interview. Seven of these interviews were conducted in one of the Kalamazoo Program Enhancement Program offices in Kalamazoo. One interview was conducted at the home of the

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participant in Three Rivers. The final two interviews were conducted in an office on the campus of Western Michigan University.

The research participants consisted of 10 adolescent males. The participants ranged in age from 17 to 20. Seven of the participants were 20, two were 19, and one was 18. Seven of the participants were sentenced to the KPEP program, due to their involvement with the judicial system. Six participants reported living with their mother. Three reported living with a girlfriend (not necessarily the mother of their child) and her family. One reported his girlfriend and mother lived with him.

Seven participants reported having some form of employment. Two reported they were not employed. One participant reported that he was supported by his deceased father’s Social Security checks. Of the 10 participants, 4 reported having a high school diploma and having college experience, while the remaining 6 reported not having completed high school. One reported completing requirements for a Graduate Equivalency Diploma (GED), and 2 participants reported having taken college classes within the past year.

Three of the adolescent fathers indicated they had significant relationships with their biological fathers, although their parents were not married or living together. Two adolescent fathers reported coming from a two-parent household (mother and father) and that their parents were married (one marriage did not include the biological father). Of these two, one adolescent father reported having a significant relationship with his stepfather, while the other adolescent father reported
no significant relationship with his father (an alcoholic and abusive towards the family, which led to their departure).

Seven fathers denied having a significant relationship with their fathers. Three of the seven reported having known their father and maintained some form of relationship with him. One reported having recently found out that the person he called his “uncle” had actual been his biological father. Another adolescent father indicated that his parents had been divorced when he was young and that he did not have a significant relationship with his father prior to that time nor at the current time. One father reported having no relationship whatsoever with his father. The final adolescent father reported not having a significant relationship with his father, who passed away less than 3 years ago. Eight of the adolescent fathers revealed some form of anger towards their fathers for not playing a significant role in their childhood, as was demonstrated in their interview accounts. Five reported having had uncles or older brothers assume “father figure” or “male figure” roles in their lives.

All 10 of the adolescent fathers indicated that the mother of their child came from a single-parent (female-headed) household. Six of the fathers reported living in or having lived the majority of their lives in single-parent (female-headed) households. Two fathers indicated their parents were married and still together. One adolescent father reported having lived with an alcoholic mother and had been on his own since age 14. Nine of the 10 fathers reported thinking highly of their mothers and maintained significant relationships with her. One adolescent father indicated
that his mother was an alcoholic and abusive, yet he maintains some form of a relationship with her.

Organization of the Findings

After further examination and clarification of identified themes, concepts, categories, and subcategories, the final refinement of categories and subcategories was determined. Data were organized into the categories and subcategories that emerged from the interview protocols, as presented in Figure 2.

1. Relationships
   a. Relationship with mother of child
   b. Relationship with his family
   c. Relationship with her family
   d. Relationship with his own father
   e. Relationship with his own mother
   f. Relationship with male figures in his life

2. Education Regarding Manhood/Fatherhood
   a. Meaning of manhood
   b. Meaning of fatherhood

3. Sexual behavior

4. Perceptions of Society
   a. Community and society
   b. Service programs

5. Voices of Young Dads
   a. Words to pass on
   b. Who could have made a difference
   c. Needs

6. Reflections of Lost Youth

7. Life as a Young Black Man

Figure 2. Categories and Subcategories Emerging From the Data.
In subsequent sections of this chapter, each category is explained and then supported by a series of quotations from the interviews as narrated by the participants. To ensure confidentiality, the names and other identifying information in the quoted interview text have been altered.

Relationships

Knowledge of relationships in general throughout the lives of these fathers varied widely. Several fathers indicated that their knowledge of relationships involved primarily violence, controlling or aggressive behavior, and attempts at sexual conquest. Very few individuals reported experiencing meaningful, positive, and nurturing relationships with people of the opposite sex. Their conceptualization of nurturing and affectionate relationships entailed or required some form of sexual behavior.

P3: I've seen relationships where they fight all day long. Relationships where there 50/50 in the relationship. I've seen relationships where you couldn't believe like uh, the man doing everything that the female ain't doing. Or the man just working while she just sitting at home doing nothing. I've seen relationships were the woman is hitting on the guy and the guy ain't really trying to fight her back. That's love right there. Certainly is love.

P1: I probably would have to say like as far as males. I grew up kind of hesitate. We were competing a lot for females. We fought a lot over females. Each other and people on the streets. Oh, I say as far as conflict with most of friends and family who were in relationships, there were arguments. Every relationship I can think of they solved conflicts by arguing and then later by talking, but I'd say umm. There were plenty of emotions. My brothers and their girls and stuff like that. I have seen some of the controlling relationships. Some care free relationships. I pretty much have seen the whole spectrum.
P9: I mean. Relationships I grew up seeing it was all friends and at school. It seemed like whoever was hot was hot for that minute. You know. If you were hot, you were just hot and everybody wanted you. And it seemed like the relationships we had, the more thug you were the more attention you got. And the tighter (stylish) clothes you wore for women, the more attention you got. And the more you drank. The bad things happened. Which is common on all plains, no matter what. It might be more common in blacks. It seems like the “badder” you are, the more people want to be with you. Or “be out” with you. I don’t know if it is exemplified through music, but that is where I see it a lot.

Relationship With the Mother of His Child

The conceptualization of marriage and two-parent homes as demonstrated by these young fathers varied and was readily not of interest to many of these young men, as demonstrated by their behavior and intentions. Most of the fathers sought to provide emotional and financial assistance to their offspring. Only two of the fathers expressed interest in marriage, and while all of the others desired to have an active role in parenting, they did not present any indications of intentions to marry the mother of their offspring. One of the fathers indicated that he currently maintains sole parental custody with the assistance of his mother of his young child. Nine of the 10 fathers reported having more than one child by different women. Several indicated having difficulty with the lines of communication throughout their relationship prior to conception, during the pregnancy, immediately prior to the birth, and subsequently after the birth of their first child. Only two of the fathers acknowledged currently being in a relationship with the mother of their first biological child. Several of them acknowledged some form of physical or sexual attraction having initially drawn them towards the mother of their first child.
Three of the responses to the protocol answered by the participants further probed into the difficulties that existed in the relationship with the mother of their first child and their influence on involvement from the father’s perspective.

P3: I only got one (laughing). It’s distant. We talk every once in a while when she decides that she wants to come get him for a couple of days. When we first started kicking it. It was cool. Then after awhile she just started tripping. She just started getting interested in other guys. So we ended up breaking up. We broke up and it was like an on and off thing since we were in the eighth grade. But this time it was just like it was over with. She was cute. She was sweet then. And then she turned into a crazy female (laughing). Just a female. Just outrageous. Man. it was all types of stuff. Arguing all the time. Trying to fight all the time. Arguing about her and other guys. I went through it a couple of times and then I just said forget it. It was hard to end an argument with her (laughing). She liked to fight a lot. So she tried all types of stuff. Cutting up my clothes, hitting, sticking me with stuff. It couldn’t really be resolved. After awhile after she cooled off we would talk. You know what I’m sayin? Calm her down, but then it would happen again. It was like .......... A female is going to be a female. You know what I’m sayin? And a male still has to have his friends. I had friends and family. None of my friends were giving me money or nothing, but you know there were always opportunities (for babysitting) when I needed to get away. I could go and kick it with them.

P6: Basically with all the arguments and stuff, I really didn’t come around much. I came a little bit before she got pregnant. Cause it was this guy. There was another guy in the picture. But then when she got pregnant it was still basically arguing and stuff and fighting (laughing). I can’t do that one again. Just the fact that I cared about her. We could talk all we wanted, but it would just never end. Like when we would talk about it and try to solve the problem. And if you don’t want to fix it, how are you going to solve it? She didn’t want to fix it, so we couldn’t solve it. I had to let it go. She was staying with me because her had put her out. We had been living together for about a month or two. Probably more when she got pregnant. It was cool then. When we first got back together it was cool. It was all the disrespect. She brought amongst us that made things bad. It was all the disrespect that she brought to me that made my family not like her.

P7: Yeah, I felt prepared to be a father. I just wasn’t really prepared to be around. It came to a point I was like man. Cause she had like, during the pregnancy and stuff. She had like threatened me with how she would just take my baby. “Me and my baby would just leave”. “I could just take me and
"my baby and leave". Me not knowing, you know what I'm sayin. I'm like, I'll still do for my son. You know what I'm sayin. I know you can't just. (laughing). I know somewhere there had to be a legal issue. You can't just up and take him. You know what I'm sayin? And not let me have any say so in his life or come and see him or nothing. But then we got the other situation resolved and it was like we had broke up. It was like after we had broke up and we had issues. I would keep him for a week. And she would keep him for a week. And we would just take turns. We did that for awhile and then it just started. You know what I'm sayin? Going down to me having him all the time. I would have him for like a month or so and then she would come and take him for a week and I was like. I'd see her for like (laughing) every three months or so. She had come up for two or three days and then bring him back. After the birth we stayed together for a little while. After I had already went through arguing with her over like. Like two or three guys that she spoke of. She had been kicking it with. And then turn around and it was another one. And then after him, me and her just ended really breaking and just saying I can't do you no more (laughing). And then it kind of turned into you know how before you breakup all the arguments and stuff. You what I'm sayin? It came to all the threats and stuff. I'll take me and my son and we can leave. But not knowing all along she did not want to be bothered with us. Cause it's like I have him all the time. It's like, ain't no help from her. She'd come through every blue moon. I'd get a call and have my son ready and she would never come. And then it came to when she called and said. I wouldn't even have to pack. I wouldn't think twice about packing (laughing) his bags. It was like the boy who cried wolf. You know? Sometimes she would end up popping up on me for real. And I would say that I didn't think you were coming (laughing). But it ain't know beef with her or nothing. I'm not with her anymore. I have no reason to be mad at her. I am happy with who I got. Me and my son.

P3: I moved back to Kalamazoo to be closer to her and be involved. Cause I could have stayed in school. I moved back and uh, we got a place together. And uh, after my daughter was born I couldn't see myself leaving them. Cause I was at the hospital and seen her born. And uh, me and her we got uh. We started getting close again. And I was handling my responsibilities as a father. You know I enjoyed being with my daughter and stuff like that. And uh, I don't know somewhere I just started messing up.

Three of the responses to the protocol answered by the participants examined further any unique features of the relationship that initially existed from the father's perspective.
P8: It was really good at first. I really didn’t know her that well, but I mean. It was really good in the beginning. Towards the end it started going down hill. She was really nice. She lived in my neighborhood. I knew her nephew, I used to play b-ball in the backyard with him. That’s how I met her. She was older. Usually a lot of arguments and fighting. A lot of threats. She always acted like she didn’t need me. She was still in a relationship too. So there were a lot of arguments. Basically the same thing kept occurring, a lot of arguments. There was really no plan. It was really something that just happened. She wanted me to be a lot older and act like a man. When I really was still a boy. It was really messed up.

P1: Well, I used to think that we were in love at first. I thought (laughing). You know but then you know things changed as we went along. We just talked on the phone all night and would be with each other all day. Every night and all day. I just always wanted to be with her. You know. That’s how it happened. It was cool. I mean we wrestled and things. Regular things that people do. The relationship began to change because there were things going on. I wasn’t the only dude she was messing around with so I had doubts a little bit. You know. It didn’t really change too much. I was kind of wild, you know. Her family was getting kind of mad at me because I never really said it wasn’t mine and I never said it was either. I just didn’t know. We got back together. Everything was cool. The truth came out and I was wrong and she was right. I accepted that. I was like. Okay, I still loved her. You know. I still loved her. We stayed together for about five years.

P10: She was my girlfriend for a year and a half. Initially, it was a physical attraction, due to her athleticism. Cause we both played b-ball at the time. So basically we had a physical attraction between the two of us. Our communication style was very open, we could basically discuss any issues that we had with each other in particular to our relationship or school or anything that we had at that time. I never knew her father. I had never seen him before because he didn’t stay in their house. And I am not quite sure that she knew him that well. Me and her mother had a very good relationship. Her mother was quite young. Her mother had her at sixteen years old. So she was relatively still in some growing stages in her life. getting back to being able to be free as an adult to do somethings. So she was very honest and open when we in particular to the questions we needed to ask her about.

Three of the responses to the protocol answered by the participants

examined the responses and preparation of the young fathers to the imminent or subsequent birth of their first child.
P7: With my first child I stayed in Las Vegas. I went to school, high school down there. I met a girl and got her pregnant. We kicked it for about four months. I had known her for about eight months. From the time I went to school there. But we were cool. She was Cuban. Our communication was just getting better and better. I actually was happy cause I always wanted a son and to be a dad. I felt prepared. It was like I got to go get me a job. And start taking care of this. Dress him and give him my name. So I was ready.

P1: So I felt that there was no reason why I shouldn't. I didn't feel prepared at all. I wanted to have an abortion at that time. Her mother didn't want one. Once again she felt that she had a child at a young age. In fact twins. Her thoughts were her mom's thoughts. She was afraid of the unknown. Basically, getting thoughts that I would find someone else or abandon her from her mom. She had abandonment issues with her father obviously. Am I going to be there for my daughter that we are going to have. Am I going to be able to be around and provide money for her. And things like that. So that was the basis for her anger. Whether I would be around for her. I think her mom had a great deal to do with it also because being emotionally involved with somebody or myself at that time. It was hard to let go and see that person leave. Being so close. And then somebody splitting. At that time she was a year under me. She was still in high school at that time. So to see me leaving, I think would still have been a problem even if she wasn't pregnant. You know. So it definitely was ties with her emotionally. In the relationship not just with the unborn child.

P5: Yeah the dynamics had changed. Cause after the birth of the child. Umm. You know. Nine months had past and I have changed. Going to school and being a part of a different atmosphere. Learning different ideals and having new goals about life in itself. Learning new things about myself changed who I was and who I wanted to be with. And who I considered that I wanted to be in a relationship with. That changed. In fact she remains the same cause she remains a part of the old environment. Considering where I came from in Muskegon. I just felt like. I didn't know if it was a feeling or I just didn't want to be a part of that environment anymore. And she was a part of that environment. Not to consider love, because I did care about her. A great deal. We were different. It was like A and Z, not A and B. the communication style did change because in essence I changed particularly to the dynamics. Not as an aggressive person, because as you do know in college you have to. It is a different environment from the urban environment created in any given city. It was. It just changed. It is hard to explain. Well it isn't hard to explain. We just didn't click the same. I thought about doing different things. Wanted to experience different things. Thought about movies differently. Thought about violence differently. Thought about reactions differently than what she did. In essence we were like two different
people meeting once again for the first time. It is quite strange because her grandmother and mom were more or less in my corner. Even though I didn't want come home. They still cared for me. They still saw positiveness in what I was doing. So in time you know, most the family even the young kids in their family, even some of the cousins because they are a close knit family. Everybody considered me to be a college boy. Somewhat different than everybody else. Which I was confused. They talked strangely about the unborn child as if they were going to be going to college or destined to be smarter than everyone else. So it was uplifting in a sense. Also distorting because I was thinking, why wouldn't they think that much of themselves, instead of negatively. Knowing that they were just as smart as I and they could do anything that I was trying to do. But just didn't have the motivation. At this time my mother.

**Relationship With His Family**

Eight of the fathers indicated that they were raised in a single-female-headed household. Nine reported maintaining a positive and supportive relationship with various members of their family (i.e., uncles, mother, brothers, and sisters). All of the fathers indicated they came from environments where teen pregnancy was prevalent and single-female-headed households were high. Three of the fathers indicated they had a parent who was displeased with the pregnancy. Five of the fathers reported currently residing with their mother or a member of their immediate family. The other half reported living with a girlfriend (not necessarily the biological mother of his first child). Only one of the fathers indicated that the mother of his child was older than he.

Three of the responses to the protocol answered by the participants identified some of the support systems that existed for the young fathers.

P8: After she had the baby. With my family it got better. They accepted it. It was family. They accepted it. My family never got along with her family.
though. Things today have changed a bit. They like me a little bit more. They knew that I wasn’t all that bad as they thought. You know? From being black and the people I hung around, because she was white. I was drawing social security at the time. I had put it in her mom’s name. I needed someone who could manage my money, cause I was young. With her family umm, it was pretty good with her mother. It wasn’t good with her father. But you know fathers are always protective of their daughters.

P10: If I need money I could go to my mother and father. If I needed to talk, my brothers.

Three of the responses to the protocol answered by the participants initially probed into the responses of the family, from the young father’s perspective.

P2: My family was very disappointed with me. They were doing everything they could to stop me from seeing her. I was starting to get prepared to be a father, but I still wasn’t ready.

P4: My family has always been there. And are still around and help when I need them. If I want to go out and kick it they would baby sit for me. It’s cool. My girl that I’m now with helps to. So it’s all good. With my family it was good. I just got the type of open family that accepts everybody. A little to open but, yeah, they liked her. They liked everybody else. I had support from both ways. From her family and mines as well.

P5: At that time I think that uh. Well my family was more supportive to what I was doing. They knew what I was doing. You can’t make two people be together you know just cause a child is coming. They knew I was going to school trying to become an engineer, so therefore it’s going to put me in a better situation to try to take care of the child whether I am with her or not. My parents have always been in my corner. My family was very supportive. Very supportive.

Three of the responses to the protocol answered by participants examined the communication style that existed in the family for the young father.

P4: My momma and my daddy were there for me. I don’t talk to my mother about everything. My brother and friends also were there. Being troubled. You know what I’m saying. Needing money or girl problems. Sometimes I didn’t listen to them. You know about right from wrong anyway. I already knew the answer. You just want somebody else to agree with you.
P10: I didn’t even tell my family when she got pregnant. They didn’t ask me (laughing). I mean. I was kind of scared. I didn’t want to tell them. One of my brothers knew, but my father didn’t and he didn’t tell. One of my brothers have a baby by her auntie and that’s how I got over there, you see. I would have told him. When it came out he (father) had already knew, but he didn’t tell me he knew. You know. But when it came out, they were coming over. I was just young. I didn’t know what he was going to say. I know he wasn’t going to just kick me out or nothing like that. But he just. You know.

P7: My family was tight. Other families you know. We all go through stuff. You know what I’m saying. And you just deal with it. It ain’t better in white families (laughing). You know what I’m saying.

Relationship With Her Family

All of the fathers indicated that the mother of their child came from single-female-headed households. A few of the fathers reported having had some form of contact with the father of their baby’s mother only after she became pregnant. All of the fathers indicated that the mothers of their children had come from an environment where teen pregnancy was prevalent and the number of single-female-headed households was high. Most of the fathers reported having had a positive relationship with the grandmother of their child throughout the relationship. One of the fathers indicated that the grandmother of his child resided in the household where he was paying rent.

Three of the responses to the protocol answered by the participants examined the relationships that existed with the mother of their first child’s family from the father’s perspective.

P3: It kept getting worse and worse as it went on. Very terrible. They would always say she made a mistake. You know. That I would never qualify for
what they wanted me to be. It was just really bad. She was in my corner at first and she stood by me. I do have to give her credit for that.

P4: At this time they really didn’t uh. I don’t think they really cared for me period, because I mean I felt that I was going to school trying to better myself and to put myself in a better situation to take care of my child. You know. And they really didn’t appreciate the fact. Well both her parents felt that I should have her living with me. So the relationship wasn’t too good. They felt that I had abandoned her and that I was just thinking of myself. That I was just going to go on and leave her behind.

P10: She was Cuban. Her family was cool. Her mom really liked me. I didn’t get to know her brothers or her daddy or nothing. I just met her mom. We dated for like a month. She noticed me. She told me that she started from the shoes up and noticed that I wasn’t from around here. So she came over to me and I was just cool with her from there on. She had a nice personality. We talked everyday. Wrote letters. I was over her house everyday. Sometimes she came to mine and stayed the night. When she got pregnant it was something we got to deal with and I stuck by her and we finished going to class and all that. Then I had to come back here. I kept writing her and sending her letters. And pictures when I had them. Her mom had figured something was up. We used to stay the night all the time. She wasn’t surprised or nothing. She sat down and had a talk with us and told us that we had responsibilities. Her father, he told me that he was going to kill me. So uh, he was out of town somewhere. They didn’t live together. It was just her and her mother. Her father was somewhere in California. Once he knew she was pregnant I had to deal with him.

P1: But, outside entities began to enter into the dynamics. Which made it harder for us to collaborate for a goal as a couple. A common goal as a couple. Well, the relationship didn’t change with her family at all because I jus think that it was an issue that the family dealt with on many occasions. Most of her cousins had babies at a young age. And then her mother also had a baby at a young age. So it wasn’t really an issue that wasn’t dealt with on a daily basis. Or on a monthly or yearly basis. I think the others (fathers) had babies and decided whether they wanted to be involved. I think I was probably the only one who went to college relative to their family. In relation to her family and mine. And that was sort of unique. Or probably not unique. I don’t know. The relationship did change.
**Relationship With His Father**

Three of the fathers indicated that they had lived in the same household with a biological father or stepfather for most of their lives. Five of the fathers reported thinking highly of their fathers and considered them to have played a significant role in their lives. Several of the fathers indicated that they knew who their fathers were. The remaining fathers indicated that their fathers were either unknown or that they had not had any form of contact with them. Several fathers indicated that they wished their biological fathers had been more involved in their lives.

Four of the responses to the protocol answered by the participants allowed them to reflect on the relationship with their biological father or the father figure that they grew up knowing.

P1: My dad was there for me and I love him for that. You know. He was good for me and I learned a lot. You know what I’m saying? Getting up early on weekends with my coat at the door. Man, you just don’t know. I think that I have learned a lot from him about being a man and a good dad. You know. Cause he was there for us. Like when he used to take me fishing early in the morning. I used to always love to go. Nothing really made me sad about him. He was cool.

P9: Basically the same strong bond as between me and my son. When I cry, I know that I can go to him. when my son cries he knows that he can reach his arms out and run to me like crazy (laughing). He took care of me. He told me the facts of life. He still does now. If I called my daddy now, if I needed something he would help me out. His role in my family was as a basic father. I love him. Strong bond. Strong man.

P7: Although me and my dad did not live together or have a great relationship, I feel that maybe my father knew that I would be alright. He always knew that I would get by one way or another. I’ve been hanging out with my brother who is slow since my dad past. I promised that I would take care of my brother who is older than me.
P2: Well, I guess uh, my biological could have been more involved. I think that my dad did a very good job. Even though he was a little bit older and couldn’t contribute as much as he wanted to because of his age. He did a good job. Maybe because my biological was younger, we could have done more things. We could have talked about more things. I think my dad was so. My dad was so old. When I got her pregnant he was like, so are you going to marry her (laughing). I could talk openly to him and he we had a good relationship. But sometimes his ideals were far fetched. They were not relative to my generation. He didn’t graduate. His last grade was the eight. He went into the army and then worked for the foundry. I think his concept was have a baby, marry the mother, and start a family. And staying with your family. Which is good. It seemed that we had a generation gap. In me understanding him and him understanding me. I think my biological could have played a major role in that issue.

Three of the responses to the protocol answered by the participants identified some of the effects that having a father had on the lives of the young fathers.

P8: I learned a lot from my dad, cause he was there. Man, it would be a whole lot different if he was not there for me. Don’t get me wrong, my mom is my girl, but she ain’t my dad. You know what I’m saying? I’m still learning as I go along. I’m doing alright. I had a lot of practice with my nieces and nephews.

Relationship With His Mother

All of the fathers reported having come from single-female-headed households. Five of the fathers indicated that they still live with or maintain a significant dependency on their mothers. Three of the fathers reported that they left home at a very young age. Four of the fathers lived at one time or another with the mother and/or grandmother of their first child. Several of the fathers were housed in a probationary program during this study and reported having a residence to return
to. One father identified his mother as having been a substance abuser and an abusive parent.

Three of the responses to the protocol by the participants reflected the influence of their mothers on the lives of these young fathers.

P6: My mom always gave me too much free time. She gave me too much free time to go out and have kids. If she would have asked me not to go out, I wouldn’t have gone. She had problems. I know that when a kid is trying to explain to you that he is going to his friends, make sure that he is going to his friends. If he’s saying I need ten dollars to go buy a shirt, make sure. Take him down there to buy the shirt. Don’t just give him the money. Make sure you know what your son is doing. The temper, the feuds, the problems. Basically what I went through with my mother. She always had her hands on me. Every minute you know. And that’s how I don’t want to be with my kids. Basically that’s what I don’t want to do. Do like how I got raised. How she did me.

P2: My mom had put me out of the house based on the whole ordeal. Cause she didn’t agree with it. Cause she had said that if I kept on seeing her, I would have to get out. Blah. Blah. Blah. She called the police. the detectives. The whole ordeal. She did a lot. It basically put me in the predicament that I’m in now. to tell you the truth. I knew I had to be prepared to be a father, but I wasn’t ready. I was still wanting to go and hang out and be with my friends. You know. Do the basics. I wasn’t ready.

P10: My mom. She’s alright. But sometimes she can be like right there and don’t say a word. But the first time she found out she was going to be a grandmother. She wasn’t living up here then. She was living in Detroit. And I wasn’t thinking about no kids then.

Three of the responses to the protocol answered by the participants reflected their mother’s relationship with the mother of the young father’s first child from his perspective.

P4: My mom didn’t too much like her at the time. In fact (laughing) I don’t think mom likes her at all. And obviously, she probably still doesn’t. The support systems that I had I would say were my friends. I would say just my friends because I really didn’t talk to my mother about the issues of any sexual related issues at all. Or any intimate issues at all. Or educational
relations. Even though my mother and I had a pretty good relationship. She would perhaps mention school, but it was basically a decision upon myself. As an adolescent she wanted me to focus on my school and to be as good as I possibly could. I did not feel prepared. And I thought that if I was to ever get anyone pregnant that I would have an abortion. Actually I wanted to have an abortion at the time. Her mother didn’t want her to have one. The relationship changed somewhat because I was leaving to go to college. At that time the relationship changed to why are you going to college? Why wouldn’t you want to stay here and be with me? Don’t you love me? This and that. The dynamics of the relationship changed with a third party. We were still open and we talked about a lot of our issues, even though we were arguing about most of them.

P1: My mom was of course upset. Her main statements were that she felt like just when somebody got a chance to get out, they are pulled back down. So her main goal was sort of confusing. Not confusing. Sort of inspirational that she would have such a push to get me out of the cycle. I had support systems at the time. Or the cycle. The family cycle.

P7: I told my father at the time. He wasn’t upset. My mom was the person who was mostly upset. And she didn’t really change. Her main focus was keeping me in school and she didn’t care how it was done. Even though we didn’t talk as much that was her main focus. I guess my mom became more of a support because I had her back. She backed me up with school and I could use her as somewhat of a cop out. Of which I did at times. Like my mom would kill me if I dropped out of school. Knowing that I didn’t want to leave school anyway. But it was a help just to have my mother as an excuse to give to say why I didn’t want to leave school. I did not feel prepared to be a father at all. It was no comforting in that my mom. My mom gave me no comforting in me still being a father. In fact, I think my mom pushed for an abortion to the last minute.

Relationship With Male Figures in His Life

Several of the fathers identified some male figures in their lives of whom they thought highly. They identified these male figures as having been a relative (i.e., uncle, brother) and having been instrumental in their development. No indications were made as to other male figures that may have provided significant relationships.
Five of the responses to the protocol answered by the participant reflected the influence of male figures on the lives of these young fathers.

P10: My father. My father. My dad was really a good dad. He uh, I wanted to be like him. You know. Give my kids the same opportunities that I had with my dad. I know that I could never do what he did, cause I did it young. And he was a little older when he had me so, but I still try. Well, my dad past away a couple of years ago.

P8: It means the same thing. It means you got to spend time you know. My brothers they got kids. My father, he has always been there for me. I got to do the same. You know. Every time I needed something he's always there. You know. I hate to ask him, but he knows. He always knows what I need anyway. He comes through. Like in here. I'm grown already, but he still comes in here and gives me money. I don't never ask him or nothing. That's a father right there.

P3: I would say that I learned this from my father. I come from a descent size family. It's five kids. From a two parent home where my father has always been there for every last one of us. So that's where I get my values from.

P7: My father if he was there. He could have put me up on the game. Instead of the police chasing me. All that type of stuff. Being there. Not on the streets. The streets didn't get me know where.

P6: I always go to my older brother with my problems and he always tells me to be detailed and how I should go about doing this. Whether I should just lay this down on the line. When your baby is in the hospital or when your baby moma is on her to dying or something like that. I am on the verge of having that experience. Yep. She has breast cancer and she goes to the doctor everyday. She is twenty-one. Her oldest sister been telling me that she's been giving me custody papers and that I am supposed to be going to these hearings. She would never come tell me, but her older sister would let me know. I don't like it and I feel that it ain't right either. You know. Maybe we could have sat down and decided all this out.
Education Regarding Manhood/Fatherhood

A sense of awareness regarding the responsibilities required of a father towards his child permeated throughout the interviews. At times an eyebrow was raised during the interview when a participant's perception of manhood and fatherhood appeared to contradict or simply did not match the behaviors presented. It quickly became apparent that a progressive change had occurred concerning what it took to be a "real man." The concept of being a provider had been replaced by something else. In the past 200 years, fatherhood has lost its four traditional roles: irreplaceable caregiver, moral educator, head of family, and family breadwinner (Endleman, 1997). The father role has become smaller, devalued, and diminished as paternity has become decultured and minimalist (Endleman, 1997). An obscure meaning of masculinity has resulted. The progressive change has led to the erosion of the preconditions effecting fatherhood (although it does not guarantee good fatherhood, the absence of either one makes it impossible to assume a "good enough" parental role): (a) co-residency with his offspring, and (b) some form of a parental alliance with the mother. Their concept of manhood and fatherhood was demonstrated in the types of responses that they provided during their individual interviews.

Meaning of Manhood

All of the fathers indicated initially that manhood entailed assuming numerous responsibilities. What varied were the meanings that they gave to

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"responsibilities." Although not outwardly discussed, the "rites of passage" they received throughout their development often ascribed to them the norms previously earmarked for their mere existence within their own environments (i.e., degradation, women, "Blackness," race, and self).

Four of the responses to the protocol answered by the participants probed into what manhood meant or involved for them as a young father from their perspective.

P3: Reading books. Observing others. Yeah. Reading books and observing others. I’d rather see a sermon than to hear one any day. I’d rather one would walk with me, than just to show the way. That is often in itself. I would definitely rather see someone do something, than hear about it. To read about it.

P8: What manhood means to me. Responsibility. That’s basically what it is. You come from having the time of your life. And everything is responsibility now. It really ain’t fun (laugh). It ain’t fun at all. It gets fun to a certain extent if you can do what you want to do, but all the responsibilities ain’t fun. I really learned this from my nieces and nephews. So when I got my own it got even strong and I really had to take on the responsibilities. So it was like I could just like. You know. Just give my nephew back to his mother and like I am done. I’m fine to go kick it or something. You know what I am sayin? Because they aren’t going to take care of my responsibilities. And my are not going to take care of my responsibilities for me. So basically, you just gotta do it on your on.

P4: Man, I had to become a man real quick. Whew. Real quick. I think I’m doing alright though. Yeah, I am doing okay, cause I’m here taking care of my son and not selling or doing drugs. I’m being a man. You know what I’m sayin? My son is my responsibility.

P9: My understanding of manhood is a lot of responsibilities. Having to do a lot of things that you don’t want to have to do, but you still got to do them. It really just a part of life as it goes on and just something that everyone has to face. Yeah, you know it takes over inside. You got know right from wrong and when to say no. And when to step up. Taking care of business.
You know what I’m saying. Getting your own house. Taking care of your wife, your kids, and you too. They feel all that. I learned this from my father.

Four of the responses to the protocol answered by the participants spoke to their understanding as to what responsibility required.

P10: Manhood means taking care of your own responsibilities. The mistakes you made in life. That is what your suppose to face. What you are suppose to face that makes you more of a man each time. I realize what I done back in my childhood years, I was just. Going to clubs, hanging out in the streets. That was then. I don’t even see that anymore. It’s played out to me. I got kids to take care of. I can’t just go to no club. I can’t just go buy this or buy that. I got to buy for the kids to. I just can’t go to the mall and buy me a new outfit. You know what I am saying? I got to buy my son something and my baby something and my girl. I sure didn’t learn that from my father. My father left when I was ten years old. It was my uncles. I have eight uncles.

P7: Manhood to me is um, taking care of your responsibilities as a man. Um, if you have a child being there for that child and raising that child. And um, if you can’t be there. Be there financially, cause some people you know may be way across the country and there ain’t nothing you can do about that. But at least you are taking care of your responsibilities. You know. Of the financial aspect of it. That’s pretty much how I would sum up manhood.

P5: My understanding of manhood is being responsible for self. Responsible and somewhat being the head of a household. I more or less see manhood as taking care of your family and being able to be looked upon by other men as a man. and by other women as a man. My concepts come from. Some come from my fraternity and from being involved in the lives of different men. Which also helps. The fraternity helps in being a part of the intimacy of a man and his family. Which you don’t see too much in the area that I was in. In my hometown most of the men, besides my father who exemplified manhood in itself were not involved in their kids lives. And it was actually recognized as a youngster, but more or less recognized when I got to college. Of what he offered me. But as a youngster, even though he didn’t stay with us or with my family. It was my mom. Most of my friends. It was only out of seventeen or eighteen friends. Two of them who had a father within the home.

P1: That you have to take care of your responsibility. Your gotta make sure that you have the right person that is true to you. You know what I’m saying? You girl has got to be in your corner and there for you. You got to
be a man and step up to the plate. You know what I’m saying? Man, that’s all I can say (laughing). You got to handle your business.

**Meaning of Fatherhood**

Fatherhood offered clarification for many of these young men—their official arrival into “manhood.” It appeared that conceptually they could envision how the fatherhood experience should be, based on their own father’s presence or absence, but being ill-prepared and unequipped made them vulnerable to replicate their father’s behavior or environmental behaviors.

Three of the responses to the protocol answered by the participants initially probed into what fatherhood meant or involved for them from their perspective.

**P2:** Actually fatherhood means to me one thing. Fatherhood is the actual birthing of a child. You can be a father to a child or you can be a daddy. I’d rather be a daddy. Someone that you can call dad. To me it’s a difference because a dad actually. A dad actually takes care of someone more or less. A father is just a person that actually births you. And just donated sperm to make you who you are. Umm. That is why I don’t use the term father. I would rather say that I am her dad. Or something like that. Even though. One thing that I can say. Even though my dad was a very good man, umm. I never got a chance to. He wanted me to call him father. I started calling him by his name. So at the time. I just started calling him dad like in the twelfth grade. So all my years of coming up through elementary and uh, and pre elementary years. Like one through five, I called him by his nickname. So that in itself swung me to believe certain things about fatherhood and the meaning of dad and daddy and different things like that.

**P7:** Basically, taking a lot of responsibilities. Spending time with them. Feeding them. Plus my son has sickle cell real bad and has to take medicine every day of his life. Most of his childhood at least. You know, it ain’t easy. Fatherhood to me is father and son. You know what I am sayin? It’s like a bond. Fatherhood is like a bond. I could like go some where like out of town for a week and leave my son with my mother or my sister (smiling). You know. And then come back and it seems like your son will look up at you and smile and go to reaching for you. It’s a strong bond.
P10: Fatherhood? It means. It really means a lot. a lot of responsibilities. Not wanting your kids to follow in your footsteps. Not wanting to do a lot of things in front of them that you would normally do. You know. You got to care a lot. It's basically just like knowing right from wrong really. In from of your kids. You know. Doing the right things.

Five of the responses to the protocol answered by the participants share some initial thoughts held regarding the pregnancy of the first child.

P6: I wasn't prepared. Uh. I probably would have wrote down some steps. I probably would have wrote down how to go about these steps. Yeah, I would have wrote down some steps on that one. Not jumping into having any children and taking time to set an example to bring a child into this world. That is about it.

P2: Even before. When I was like in middle school. I was like. I always said that if I was to get a girl pregnant. You know what I'm sayin. I was out doing my thang. A little teenager. You know what I'm sayin. I always said do to the fact that I always had a father in my life. I always said that if I ever got a girl pregnant. I wasn't going to abandon my child. You know. I ain't really too much for abortion. To me that's like a legal way to murder babies (laughing). Basically, I always really had my father and so I always knew what to do when fatherhood came around. Plus I had all my sisters who had babies. So you know I used to kidnap. I mean. Babysitting my nieces and nephews.

P5: I just want to be a father. There are no advantages. Not really. I mean. Like against who? Not really. Coming home or waking up and having that child come running to you saying Daddy. I love that. Yeah, I guess you got advantages. You got kids they gonna need help like me. It's good to have kids. It ain't much I can really say about it.

P7: Fatherhood. I always told myself that when I have a child, I would never do that to them. I would stick with them. You know. what's wrong and what's right. You know. I try not to repeat what my father done to me. I don't even know where he is at. My understanding is like, don't be a sucker and walk out. You laid there.

P1: I wasn't there for my first child. The second child I was in the delivery room. It gave me another chance to watch him grow up. I always telling my kids (three), you got a brother in Las Vegas. Showing them pictures. They all know his name. My sister has taken my kids out to Las Vegas to see their brother. So I got a very supportive backbone there.
Sexual Behavior

Education regarding sexual behavior of these young fathers had no consistent origin. The majority of the fathers indicated that some of their education was obtained through sex education courses at school. In most instances, it was obvious that their sexual behavior was a result of “trial and error” and peer pressure.

Four responses to the protocol answered by the participants address the education they received.

P9: At school really. Ain’t nobody tell me about that until I got to school. In class. In sex education class. Yeah. I wasn’t uh. I ain’t really start messing around until I was old enough ah, you know. To see how it really was. What disease you could probably really get. It was wait to I got closer to the age of sixteen. That’s how long I waited. I was taught in school what type of STD’s were out there. That was the first day, umm. How girl going about the menstrual cycle and stuff like that. And uh, there’s one more. How girls get that uncomfortable mood. Yeah, they really taught me more about that than any thing. I couldn’t really remember all that. For men, uh. That uh, puberty and stuff like that. At that age. Erections and the basic stuff. I learned more about females than about guys.

P8: TV, girls, and school. School will teach you about sex. In classes basically teaching you about strangers and stuff. About people trying to touch you in funny places. Basically a class to tell kids to watch out for this. Well they (girls) couldn’t really teach me nothing. It was basically me and the partners. When I lost my virginity, I didn’t really have a lot of guys around telling me things. I had my cousins and stuff, but we were always into playing b-ball. A man basically. A boy basically get interested in girl on his own. It could have been TV, classes, dang. A man. Even boys get homy. I’m saying you can’t be a virgin forever. You got to find out someway. It wasn’t trial and error. I had to see some things first. TV of course. TV’s going to tell you about it, just like classes gonna tell you about it. I mean sex is everywhere. Commercials on TV gonna tell you about it. Looking through channels being up past your bedtime gone tell you about (laughing).

P1: My second to oldest brother. I didn’t learn about sex until I was around my brother. I used to watch him, cause I used to could never leave the house. I used to catch him. I used to sneak down the basement and catch
him. My family ain’t never told me nothing about it. I couldn’t wait to do it. My brother didn’t really teach me. I just followed him. That’s all. Wherever he goes, he’s got to take me with or he can’t go. I used to be with him all the time. You know when you hear stuff over and over you know what’s going on.

P4: I would say my first time that I found out was through porno movies. My friend, his dad had them and we used to go to his house. And I was just amazed. Like wow. And that turned my whole point of view around about women and everything. Basically that might have been one of the worse ways to find out about relationships because it gave you such a vivid broad outlandish view of sex. That wasn’t the typical interaction between a man and a woman. Everything else after that was like whatever. This is what you are suppose to do right here. And we gained our concept about sexual relationship thru porno interactions. And then we always had our lying friend who always said that he had sexual relations when he really didn’t with the lady next door.

Perceptions of Society

Crucial to the development of the Black male’s emerging identity is his perception of society and his distinctive style. This style is highly individualized and is expressed through variation in walk, talk, choice of clothes (“threads” or “gear”), and natural or processed hair (“do”) (Majors & Mancini-Billson, 1992). Conformity to certain subcultural expectations for behavior that these young fathers face is often a long-term determinant of their survival within their community and environment.

Community and Society

All of the fathers reported they came from an environment that taught them to develop survival skills against entities which frequently showed inconsistent behavior toward people of color primarily, and Black males specifically (i.e., police,
judicial system, employers, print and visual media). These young fathers consistently reported that there is a negative connotation of Black males as having no potential and as being a risk to the betterment of society or "their people." Most of the fathers expressed a desire to seek out and to provide improved living conditions (within their environment) for their offspring. Although some of the fathers reported that they often sought employment through drug trafficking and dealing or other illegal activities, all of the fathers indicated the importance of obtaining a "good" job to enable them to provide for their families. The importance of employment was acknowledged and supported by the remaining fathers interviewed, who reported frustrations and discrimination experienced throughout their own employment-seeking and work history. None of the fathers indicated that they came from an environment in which people were living productive lives. Descriptions of their environments, as provided by these young fathers, were such that one would measure success by his ability to move out of the neighborhood. At no point in time did any of the young fathers give indications of pleasure or pride regarding their experiences within these environments.

Four of the responses to the protocol by the participants probed into the young fathers' perceptions of their community.

P2: Community? Umm, I think our community umm. That it could stand some changes as well. It's a lot of drug-infested areas. It's not a lot of murders and stuff, but coming up I have lost two close friends from shooting deaths. And uh, they seem like they're (community) trying to do something about it, but at the same time it just seems like it's being targeted in one place. I mean to say that. I'm saying that if they feel that they need to clean up the drugs on the north side, well they need to clean up the drugs in Portage to. Cause their drugs in both places you know.
P7: My son got to see that this is a crazy world and you got to be ready. You got to get a good job and remember that there are some people out here that’s going to hate on you. You know what I’m saying? This is a crazy world (laughing). Man, I just want to see him grow up to be a superstar. I don’t care if its football or basketball or as a rapper (laughing). He just needs to do what he needs to do. I want him to learn like me. You know what I’m saying? I want him to learn how my dad was there for me and like I’m there for him. You know what I’m saying? He needs to be there for his kids. I just want him to wait until he finishes school and finds a good job.

P4: I grew up in Kalamazoo. My neighborhood was pretty rough. I fit in good. Like I said I could basically fit in there like here. I can go to Bronson Boulevard and fit in or go to Alamo and fit in. Basically it was like a lot of gang banging, a lot of swearing, a lot of hanging out until three or four in the morning. School wasn’t bad. It wasn’t all that bad. I got into the wrong crowd. You know. Like I said my mom kept me spiffed up. That draws people’s eyes. He’s got a little money. How much did them cost? They wanted to hang out with me. I cracked a few girls here and there. I got in the wrong crowd. They didn’t take school to serious. In the beginning I did. You know what I’m saying? I started school and never missed a day. (hesitation). Like I said, I got in with the wrong crowd and they showed me different things that I shouldn’t have been shown. You know. You got to keep your head clear if you want to make it. Being in that bad crowd showed me things that I was not getting at home. Like I said, it’s not easy. Kids think it’s easy, that it’s just a game or that it is something that just happens. Gotta wake up. They better wake up and realize what they been telling you.

Three of the responses to the protocol answered by the participants reflected their thoughts about their families influence within the community setting.

P5: I can say this. Being in a black family, it’s more of a welcome house. A welcome home. More of an I don’t care attitude. I’m not saying an, “I don’t care” as in you know. It’s more of a comfortable feeling. Your accepted for who you are. If your black or white. If your white and you walk into a black person’s house, your going to feel more comfortable being around them even though you may think your not cause your white. It’s more of you can lay back and sit in the chair like this (demonstration). But if you go over to a white person’s house, their going to look at you like he’s making himself at home. Why is he doing that? While they (black families) are going to over look it. So what if he got issues. You know what I’m saying. It’s a more welcome feeling. Go and make yourself a plate. That’s what you get in a black person’s home. But in a white person’s home your going to have to ask. That’s not polite.
P8: I say that black families are going to have it hard regardless. That’s life. It goes back far. For black men and women. The same as families. The looks that they give you. The attitude. The being scared. Even though you got that fear, why you got to have that label? You know what I’m saying. “He’s black”. You always going to have prove yourself and defend yourself. Remember, I said harassment. Unfairness. You know like I explained before. A lot of things that don’t make a lot of sense. I feel that the black children are more free. They can do more. You know what I’m saying, within the house. They don’t have to ask to go out and play in the sandbox. Where the white children have to ask. I saw them before if you slam the door, that’s cool.

P6: This community is crazy, they, all they want to do is discipline. They don’t want to be nothing but a small town. They don’t want to do nothing for these people. They put a little restaurant in here every once in awhile. That’s basically all the business that’s here. Can we get a mall, club, something. Do something. This is all they think about. Seems like all this town thinks about is food and themselves. I don’t know. For me I kind of take life day by day and see what tomorrow brings. My future is kind of looking good. Like tomorrow I have an appointment for apartment.

Five of the responses to the protocol by the participants reflected their thoughts about their families’ influence within society.

P10: Society probably sees us (as young fathers) probably as better role models than the fathers of us when we was growing up having a better role model. To the best of our ability. That’s how I feel about society coming up, I didn’t think about me.

P4: Society sees us as young black athletes. I remember a time it was the track team in junior high and I just happened to go out for it and couldn’t make it. Just like running. You see all the other people running three or four laps around here and I couldn’t even do one. That right there told me that they were better than me. That I couldn’t even do this. That right there told me also that I wasn’t really nobody because I couldn’t do this or that. That’s how I thought at the time. I though that other times when I couldn’t do nothing right.

P2: They (society) probably see now like that man is doing something for himself. Trying to better himself. They probably think that I got a lot of positive things going for myself and none negative. I was on the verge of graduating and never made it. .......I really can’t say what I think of it. How it is today. I can say how it is. I don’t like it that much. I think it could have
been a little bit different than what it is. Especially this system (referring to the judicial). Let’s say you get in trouble and they put you on something with this person. Why they got to have someone else control your life and tell you what you can do and what you can’t do? That right there should be different. I am just going to send you to do community service for so long and so many days for that many hours or those days. I can agree with that. Cause you doing something for the community.

P1: I don’t really like it. I don’t like it one bit. I just hate my community right now. For making it hard for me. I hate that most about the community....I don’t know. Some people accept you as you are. Some people look at you as another person and then some people look at you as a bad person. Some people can see you and see good in you. Some people see you and see bad in you. Society is society. I mean society is basically people. You have some people out there who see you like I said. You have some people who don’t want to see nothing but the bad in you. Community? It could be just the areas where you hang out. Where you kick it. Or where you visit. That’s your community. A lot of people around here, they see you as. The first thing that comes to their head is that he’s a thug. He don’t do nothing but sell drugs. But its more to life than that. It’s just... if I was all that man, I would be rich by now (laughing).

P3: Society? I don’t really know how society looks at me. I never really bothered about what they were thinking. I know a lot of them when they think about young teens and they always think a young black man ain’t gonna never take care of his child. You know what I’m saying. But you got fathers out there that do. And it ain’t easy. A lot of people think life is easy cause you are a man, but for a male its harder than a female cause they can’t do a lot of stuff that males can’t do. They get a lot of stuff free that males don’t get free. Like, dang. Like anything. They get money free. They got guys that will give it to them. They got a lot of opportunities that males don’t have. Like... I don’t know really man, it’s just like a lot of stuff males can’t do that females can. I know that males can get money on welfare. Welfare is really not really gonna help nobody. (long pause)I don’t know. Ah, but it’s hard for females to. Single females to, it’s just. I believe it’s just hard period for people. You know what I’m saying. It ain’t just easy like the people who ain’t been through it think it is. It ain’t just a breeze. It ain’t as life without a child……Some people in society see you as trying to get a job and trying to raise a family. And it’s like a lot of other people who see you as just…you know what I’m saying? Some people will see you and just don’t like. I know the police ain’t gonna see you as nothing (laughing).
Three of the responses to the protocol answered by the participants considered their perceptions of how society or the community sees them in terms of responsibility.

P7: Lazy, a crook, a thief, don’t want nothing, just want to be on welfare. Don’t want to take care of my responsibilities. Don’t want to take care of my children. Man people are a trip. They say all these things about you and don’t even know you. You know what I’m saying. Even if you are taking care of your business. Man, they still have something to say.

P10: Man, they don’t even want to give you a chance unless you can jump high or run fast. Then your stupid when you get in trouble and have to have a lot of white people around to handle you money, cause you can’t count.... I don’t think they cared really. They think that we (black males) were dirt. To tell the truth. They think we don’t take care of our responsibility at home. They don’t think we can do nothing. They think we can’t find a job. You know, just a lot of downfalls in Kzoo, you see. Racism. You see a lot of other stuff going on around here and nobody don’t say nothing about it. They keep it locked down. We are out here.

Three of the responses to the protocol answered by the participants focused on their perceived roles in society or their community.

P7: Society is a dangerous grounds. I look at it like that. Cause you got people killing each other. We say we hate white people and it be our own kind doing us the worse. It’s bad. But I figure if we just start sticking together, it like would never happen.... My role? My role was like a drug dealer and unfit father. I say unfit cause I drop off money and all that, but look at where I got it. My role today is like changing. Change my community. Go back to school and to become a nursing assistant. I got one test left for my GED and then I would have worked going on seven months now. You’re hired in on the week. You know I feel if I do positive, positive will happen to me. Trying to get closer with the Lord. I want to be a role model with my children. Right now in my community they ain’t seeing me. I always told them that I was gonna change.

P4: We are all the same. We are all equal. It’s just hard to say man. We don’t need to prove ourselves. Just need to start doing things right. That’s why I say when I get out of her man, you ain’t got worry about me coming back up in here no more. One thing I got is my education. That’s one thing
that I am proud about. Nobody can take that from me. They know that they can’t take that from me.

P1: As a young black male out here, you better stay in school. Got to have a job. Society sees me like, someone selling drugs to his own people. Just having kids and ain’t got them. Just out here with no direction. I think society looks at me as, whose the next person your gonna get pregnant by leading them on. As a dropout and ain’t got no time for school. You know. He goes to school to cause problems. Gets kicked out of school. He ain’t gonna do nothing do nothing, he is just another black male in society. Violent, carrying guns, robbing and stealing. Just a lot of negative things. My community sees me as a drug seller. You know. I walk through the neighborhood with a whole bunch of dollars, getting beers. He will be around for awhile looking out for the police and stuff like that. Loving if I would change though. My mom worked at the neighborhood store, everybody know that’s my mom. Everybody knew me and my little brother.

Service Programs

All of the fathers consistently presented little to no knowledge of resources and services that were available to them. They acknowledged awareness of numerous services that were available to mothers with children, namely those services allocated through welfare agencies and public assistance programs.

In understanding patterns of father involvement, conceptual and methodological shortcomings have hindered progress in expanding popular understanding of supports and barriers to paternal involvement for low-income, minority, and unmarried fathers (Coley, 2001). Conceptually, what would cause young fathers or men in general to avoid or resist seeking and using public or community services for the betterment of their family or their situation? The lack of gainful employment today not only keeps the entire community in a pit of poverty but also deprives young men of the traditional American way of proving their
manhood—by supporting a family (Anderson, 1999). For many, they are forced to prove themselves in other ways. Anderson (1999) writes:

Casual sex with as many women as possible, impregnating one or more, and getting them to have his baby brings a boy the ultimate in esteem from his peers and makes him a man. Casual sex is therefore fraught with social significance for the boy who has little or no hope of achieving financial stability and hence cannot see himself taking care of a family.

The meshing of these forces can be clearly seen. Trapped in poverty, ignorant of the long-term consequences of their behavior but aware of the immediate benefits, adolescents engage in a mating game. The girl has her dream of a family and a home, of a good man who will provide for her and her children. The boy, knowing he cannot be that family man, because he has few job prospects, yet needing to have sex to achieve manhood in the eyes of his peer group, pretends to be the decent and good man and so persuades the girl to give him sex and perhaps a baby. He may then abandon her, and she realizes he was not the good man, after all, but rather a nothin' out to exploit her. The boy has gotten what he wanted, but the girl learns that she has gotten something, too. The baby may bring her a certain amount of praise, (in the past) a steady welfare check, and a measure of independence. Her family often helps out as best they can. As she becomes older and wiser, she can use he income to turn the tables, attracting her original man or other men.

In this inner-city culture people generally get married for love and to have something. But this mind-set presupposes a job, the work ethic, and, perhaps most of all, a persistent sense of hope for an economic future. When these social factors are present, the more wretched elements of the ethnographic portrait presented here begin to lose their force, slowly becoming neutralized. For many of those who are caught in the web of persistent urban poverty and become unwed mothers and fathers; however, there is little hope for a good job and even less for a future of conventional family life. (pp. 177-178)

The outcomes of past experiences, coupled with an intensive amount of "pride," "insecurity," "ignorance," or simple "male ego" about the mental health systems for African Americans in general, and for African American fathers specifically, can easily serve as examples that have led to occasional negative perceptions of injustices or life-long punishment for past mistakes. Many of these
young men have felt or perceived themselves to have been victimized by prejudice and discrimination and, therefore, are limited and alienated in their abilities to obtain gainful employment or resources beyond some illegal means such as drug selling or drug trafficking. Such victimization may lead to a greater understanding, if not tolerance, of those who resort to dealing drugs to “survive” (Anderson, 1999). This is in no way an attempt to ignore or underestimate the frequency of discriminatory policies and practices that have effectively hindered large segments of minority populations. Sue, McKinney, Allen, and Hall (1974) and Smith (1981) have documented the discriminatory and culturally insensitive historical treatment of African Americans by the mental health system in the United States, such as providing inferior forms of therapeutic treatment to African American clients. When constantly presented with such obstacles it must be suggested, understood, and accepted that justifiable mistrust, elusiveness, guardedness, and hostile behavior may develop and persist. African American teenage fathers fear that they will be judged by helping professionals for their position as unwed adolescent parents (Hendricks, 1988) or that helpers might report them to authority figures, such as child support enforcement officers (Kiselica, 1993).

Fathers with a stronger commitment to parenting and who see their role as a father as integral to their image are, not surprisingly, more involved fathers, regardless of their marital and residential status (Black et al., 1999; Bruce & Fox, 1999; Hossain & Roopnarine, 1994; Roopnarine & Ahmeduzzaman, 1993). However, relatively little is known about how such beliefs are formed (Doherty
et al., 1996; Furstenberg, 1995; Marsiglio, 1995) or about how much beliefs influence actions versus actions influencing beliefs. In what ways does obtaining goods and services from friends and family allow for or provide a perception of hindrance for self-dignity and self-determination? For example, fathers who start off being involved in the care of their infant may develop a strong commitment to parenting, and fathers whose paternal identity is an integral and important part of their self-concept are likely to put much greater effort into being involved and active fathers in a variety of domains (Coley, 2001).

Researchers have hypothesized that among unmarried-parent families, support from extended-family members might decrease the desire or need of mothers for paternal involvement (Danziger & Radin, 1990). For example, in low-income and single-mother African American families, mothers and grandmothers are often the primary caretakers of children (Chase-Lansdale, Gordon, Coley, Wakschlag, & Brooks-Gunn, 1999); thus, fathers may have difficulty forging a place for themselves in the family system. However, this claim has not received support in empirical work (Coley & Chase-Lansdale, 1999; Danziger & Radin, 1990; Spieker & Bensley, 1994). There are some indications from the sample that some extended-family members and peers have encouraged paternal involvement.

In what ways does paternal involvement provide for empowerment and a sense of being? An ideal of individualism and a sense of family provider for many men may consummate their own individualized identity of what a "bread winner" looks like. Creating their own paths based on opportunities for economic and social
successes has always set Blacks apart from the dominant society, resulting in constraints and social ills that come with segregation. The past 30 years have brought a greater inclusion of Blacks in American society and a sharing of its fruits, but these developments have often helped those Blacks who were ready to take advantage of them—the middle classes, the educated people (Anderson, 1999). For the poor, who often lack the skills, the education, and the outlook to take advantage of these new opportunities, further victimization as a result of change often stymies their growth and development and hinders their opportunities for empowerment and a sense of being.

Three of the responses to the protocol answered by the participants initially probed into their awareness of services if any, that were available to males.

P1: I don't know of any.

P9: Only thing about all of them. I was the type of person that went out and got all these things for myself. So I really didn't stop to see if there really were programs, you now, if I had to live off the system or something. If there is a way for me to get subsidized housing or something like that. I would either work or find another mean, hustle or something to get all these things. If I'm gonna have health insurance for me and my child and stuff like that. I wouldn't know.

P10: What you mean? They got services out here, but. Being a man you really don't want to be bothered with them. All they really want to offer you is like welfare. Don't put me on welfare you see. I don't have nobody that I can just like drop my son off to and be like. I about to go do this. You know what I'm saying. I have to come up out of my pocket and I ain't got money to be coming up out of my pocket all the time to pay somebody to baby sit. You know what I'm saying? It really ain't no difference if my ex had had my son. It's really young black people period. It's really no difference. I mean it really ain't no difference. You still gonna have problems. But it's just like. It seems like it's more. More deeper when you get into like for a man. Cause it's like, will I get a job. I'm gonna have to spend have my check paying for a babysitter. Them I'm going to have to spend the other half towards bills.
And then I’m going to have to borrow this so that I can get some food and pampers and stuff. Man, and these jobs really ain’t paying much. They ain’t bad though. But they really ain’t paying much. And then it’s really hard to get into the factories around here. Then there are these McDonald jobs. They offer you welfare. They offer you. The only thing I have been offered is welfare. That’s basically what it is. A good job. Not these McDonald jobs, they ain’t gonna do nothing. There was a daycare at the school I was going to, it was something. It wasn’t really what they offered at the school, it was just how they acted towards me. Every time something going on, they don’t want you to be a part of it. Like if something is going on, they rather suspend you.

P7: What services? Umm. I don’t really know of one.

Five of the responses to the protocol answered by the participants express their thoughts about those services and opportunities that exist for black males.

P9: I think they exist. I think that they are out there. There not as good as what they should be. You know what I am saying. people don’t put their effort into doing for us (black males). They always. You get labeled. Everybody is always going to label you so therefore, how they label you is how the services are going to be. If they label you bad, their services are going to be bad. You know. If they had an all black prison and an all white prison guard. Cause they know what majority of the color that live there. But if you go to somewhere all white people are, that place is going to be clean. The roads are not going to be messed up. their going to make sure that it’s maintained and taken care of very well.

P4: Everyone thinks that (black males) are suppose to have a job. Being a man. Being labeled as a man. Your always suppose to have a job. If your fifteen or fifty-six and got a kid, they are always going to think so why aren’t you out supporting that kid. You know it doesn’t matter how old you are. You know what I’m saying. what it really boils down to is that sometimes people label you. When you’re a young boy trying to get a man’s position, their going to label you like you are not ready for this. And then if your black you can’t hold this down. This is made for a white guy who is a man. You can’t do this.

P1: I don’t know of none. I need to find some.

P8: It probably is (some services), but none ain’t come hollering at me.
P2: It's a lot of services. You can do anything. I ain't saying that we ain't as bad as anybody else, but we doing everything just like everybody else is doing. All I know about is for computers.

Three responses to the protocol answered by the participants make a plea for services for males in general and black fathers specifically.

P3: As far as what? I know school. Big Brothers programs. FIA programs. But that ain't for us (referring to fathers). I've tried. Sometimes I see my services as just going to school and getting me a job. That's what I see my services as. Getting up every morning. It's like we should have a chance to. We should have some support to. Give us some programs. They had the baby, but we have to pay child support and all this. Be worried about going to jail. The judge screwing up your support papers. I got a perfect example. I'm getting garnished out of my check and it ain't even going to the child support. It's going somewhere else. Who knows. I showed the judge my check stub and he tells me that he doesn't know where it's going and he ain't got nothing to do with that. All along I'm garnished and it say child garnishment and he don't know where it's going. And they (Friend of the Court) are sending me papers.

P1: Umm. Wow. I ain't used any at all. At the time there were a lot of mentor programs and New Life programs that go on. But not a lot of actual males who have time or are actually there to be a mentor. Or something like that. Medical or educational? Well. I went through a co op program that helped me. That was very instrumental in me going to college. That was the first time anyone actually put the thought of college in my brain. It was tailored towards minority students. I know of know that was tailored strictly for black males. I know of none right now. None.

P7: The system wasn't set up to deal with men. There is nothing you can do about it, your going somewhere one way or another.

Voices of Young Dads

Words to Pass On

All of the fathers reflected on their various experiences, such as with parental responsibility, relationship with their own father, and thoughts about their future. All
of the fathers appeared comfortable and at times relieved to have someone focus on them and their issues. Throughout each of the interviews, a calmness and ease could be observed as attention was given to allowing these individuals to, in a sense, tell their stories.

Three of the responses to the protocol by the participants provided reflections on how well they felt prepared for the changes to come.

P2: I ain’t prepared to be a father now. It’s gonna to take settling down and time. I don’t know. Maturity. If a person’s out there or can do for you, then you do what you got to do. You know what I’m saying. Is there medicine out there? I don’t know what’s out there that can help. all I’m thinking is time. As time goes on.

P5: Man I was ready, but I wasn’t ready to take that step then. it just hit me, but I couldn’t do nothing about it. My uncles told me that you are very lucky to have this right here, cause she loves you and she wants to be there with you. I’m just thankful that I found the right one. It was just that destiny. I’m just thankful. I don’t know she was actually the one to say, “Oh, you are going to marry me. You ain’t got a chance to get out of this one”. So I told her that I would give her an answer after I get out of here. She keeps on bringing it up every time I call home (laughing).

P1: The fact that I was away from my daughter for like a period of like eight months. I seen her here and there, but that ain’t the same. Umm, it really opened up my eyes not to ever want to take that for granted. Make sure that I can let nothing like this situation happen again.

Four of the responses to the protocol answered by the participants allowed for insight into what the fathers have experienced and are experiencing with fatherhood.

P2: Man, it ain’t easy, but it’s a good feeling (smiling proudly). My son keeps me busy. But that’s my man. He definitely is going to be fast (laughing). I’m happy. Once I get a good job, everything will be cool. I wouldn’t change a thing for my son. You know what I’m saying? Well, yes I would. Having a good mother there for us (laughing). No doubt. No doubt.
P7: I was just numb when I first saw my son coming out. I was happy. I was holding my first son. It was just lovely. The feeling. It was gravy. I was a happy man. nothing could take that away from me. Nothing. I had everything that we were suppose to have. And then it was just hard to say that I was ready for this step. I can't just turn my back on her. I stuck with her. It was when we brought the baby home alright for a couple of days. Then we started getting grumpy with each other. Get up and get the baby. The baby is crying. Now it's your turn. No it's your turn. You know back and forth. Sometimes you know she would stay up with the baby and I would still be sleep and she wanted me to stay up with her and I didn't want to get up. it was just like a lot of stress. So we had sat down and talked about it. If we both are going to get up with the baby or I will help you with the baby. I'll make the baby bottle. Whatever. So we started working as a team. Not just one doing it. We both did it. it was like. When the baby came it was alright. When you bring that baby home, that's when reality hits.

P6: Naw. I don't feel that I'm prepared. I'm still young. I still feel like having fun. I would have to say that is what would help is time. As time goes on I am gonna have to learn for myself. I'm gonna have to, you know. I know that I've been there and done that when I was young. But I'm still not ready. You know. Still not ready. It's just something that comes with time. That's basically it, you know. What goes on. I don't know…. One of my uncles had his child and we sat down. And he asked me are you sure that you are ready for this. It's gonna hit you. It's not gonna hit you until you bring that baby home. It's gonna be alright in the hospital. That's when it's gonna hit you hard. I had to be ready. You know what’ I'm saying? It wasn't just for me. It was for her to. I had to have a lot of help.

P7: I think that uh, society today could stand for a few changes you know. It’s uh, I mean I know a lot of people when they think you are the stereotype “deadbeat dad”. I know a lot of them personally both family and friends. Whatever. But me I choose not to be one just because of me. But at the same time society will look at you as one just for instance, just at this time because I am not able to be in my daughter’s life, but I bend over backwards taking care of her. You know. So I would consider myself a good father.

Three of the responses to the protocol answered by the participants allowed fathers to access where they feel they are in respect to being a father.

P4: Man, I had to become a man real quick. Whew. Real quick. I think I’m doing alright though. Yeah, I’m doing okay cause I’m here taking care of my son and not selling or doing drugs. I’m being a man. You know what I’m saying? My son is my responsibility.
P9: I think I am getting more prepared and getting better. The biggest thing is that you just have to find the right woman. Somebody that you can kick it with and that is in your corner. You want to be able to marry her. I hope that I can get married someday an give my son a good mother and father. So we will see what happens. Right now its just me and my son. You know what I'm saying?

P2: Uh, I just want to be there. Being there for the child in whatever they chose to do if it's positive. Teaching them the rights and wrongs and what you should do and what you shouldn't do. Yes, that's pretty much it.

Three of the responses to the protocol answered by the participants explored the education that they would pass on to their offspring.

P3: Umm, I just want to let him know when it comes to having sex and stuff like that. It's more to it than just having sex. And if you do produce a child than it's going to be some demands put on you by uh, me and society as well. Cause you got to take care of that child.

P9: I'd let my daughter know that uh. Probably the same thing. That when you're ready to have sex and stuff like that. You should really uh, think about what you are doing. Cause you can easily get yourself trapped in a situation where it's just you out there. So you wouldn't want to be in a situation like that.

P7: I think my kids should-experience a lot of positive things and see a lot of positive things. Learn a lot about Black History and what important black people have done for our country.

Three of the responses to the protocol answered by the participants initially probed into the caring aspects of the fathers.

P7: Well. What helped me the most was seeing men interact with their families. Like I said, with my fraternity I had a chance to see them interact with their families. Not to say that they were the greatest men. Or greatest husbands in the world. I got a chance to actually see from outside looking into the relationships as to what happens or what can happen. A lot of things can happen, but a lot of positives can happen from that stand point. I say that and from future things I just hope that my relationships can help me be a better man. I think it is a day to day thing. I think that you can always increase you manhood or continue to increase your manhood. It's like
different issues that is spiritually and academically to know as much as you can.

P1: I take from the experience. Just be yourself. I always tell my brother and sister to just be yourself. Cause in the end all you got is yourself. You don’t have to say you will do this or won’t do that for the crowd. My oldest sibling was to close to me at the time, so we were both going through it at the same time. So I really didn’t have anyone to sit down and tell me to be myself. I don’t want her to have a child at a young age. Cause with her, she would actually have to be with the child. Whereas the father can go do his thing. Or do whatever he wants to do. That is the main goal I would want her to understand in life. Everything else will come.

P7: My role in society is being important. It is like right in the community. I mean I got this love for the community for little kids besides other adults. I am more into the little kids than anybody else. I like to look out for their safety. I think they (community) want me to play a role of helping people out and leading them in the right way. Just to be me. Just to settle down with that right person and live my life like I should live it. That I haven’t got these rules. If I don’t clean my act up my future will be real bad. Probably imprisonment or being on lock down or on house arrest or something where you just can’t go outside or breathe or something.

Two of the responses to the protocol by the participants explored their perception of their future.

P10: The future for those who look like me? If I could really judge that, I’d probably go with them being successful. You know. And umm, and if they did look like me I would hope that they would be able to find that first job and then get into that career they want to be in.

P6: My dreams for the future are to own a mansion or something (laughing). I’d rather get married to and have me some more babies. I love my kids. If it were up to society or my community, I would be poor without no place to go. Always at home. Always. Society? I could tell you what it would look like with society. Community? The hard times. You know. Basically anything like that.

Two of the responses to the protocol by the participants explored their perception of their life.

P2: Life has been hard, but it’s been good. You know what I’m saying. Look at you. You know. You in college and other black people are in college.
Some people get a chance. You know what I'm saying? I want my son to have a chance.

P9: What do I want out of life? I just want to be treated fair. I want people to respect me. You know what I'm saying? Just because you dress differently or talk words that you can't really understand. Just don't label it as that was dumb. I just want to be, just fit in. Be treated fair, really.

Three of the responses to the protocol answered by the participants provided insight as to what they would tell other fathers about fatherhood.

P4: Becoming a father? I think I would tell them just to be responsible and I'd let them think of what I meant about responsibility. I'd also tell them don't just jump off into trying to be a parent or becoming a parent. Wait until. I'd tell them to wait until they get a little more wiser.

P1: I'd tell them. I'd tell them to enter a parenting program. Talk to their father about it or there mother. I'd probably also tell them to just wait. Then you got some fathers out there that probably don't want no kids. About parenting? I'd tell them that they better have the right state of mind. They got to know that things are difficult. I'd think I'd also tell them to be patient. Them the three things I would tell them. 

P8: I couldn't tell them nothing. You got to sit back and think about becoming a father to quick. They got to sit back and think. And to be wise. They have to also sit back and think about a lot of stuff. Example, I can sit there and come up with many things. Your child is independent without a father. When they get older they will turn their back on you. You know.

Five of the responses to the protocol answered by the participants further explored the consequences perceived to result from early fatherhood.

P7: Young fathers need to know what they are getting into. It ain't easy and they have to be ready for responsibility. They have to be ready to buy pampers, get a job, and just be a man. You got to help with the baby or you may just have the baby and it's not gonna be easy. You got to be ready for responsibility to be a father.

P2: Man, it ain't easy, but it's a good feeling (laughing proudly). What would I want to tell them about becoming a father? Like I said, if you're young you need to wait. If you're already a father you need to buckle your belt up and get ready for a rough ride. It's not going to get better unless you
make it better. If your not a father yet, I suggest you use protection. It’s a big hill to climb up. You know. Go back down that hill to make it easier. You got to get to the top first and then after you get to the top you work for it. You got to. It’s really hard to explain. Do what you feel is right.

P4: Parenting? Just show your kids that you care. As long as you show that you care, they will always respect you. No matter what you do. You can be strung out on drugs as long as you show them that you care. You put them first and nobody else. You know. Take them for a walk. They will always call you dad. Always. I’ve got a friend whose dad is strung out of drugs. But his father still visits with him. He jokes about it.

P9: I’d tell them that they got to be ready. You shouldn’t be a young father. Cause you ain’t ready to be a father. To be a father you have to have your own house. To be stable. I mean you can be a young father, but it wouldn’t be right. You have to be ready and get your thang together. You know.

P3: I would just tell them. That you just have to spend time with them. That’s the best thing in the world for me. You could be broke. You just spend time with them. They’re gonna want it. Just be there for them. Just be there. Just don’t come around every month. Come around just to see them. Knowing that you are there for them.

P5: I’d let my daughter know when you’re ready to have sex and stuff like that. You should really uh, think about what you are doing. Cause you can easily get yourself trapped in a situation where it’s just you out there. So you wouldn’t want to be in a situation like that.

Three responses to the protocol answered by the participants explored the trials and tribulations of fatherhood.

P8: Man that what I’m saying. Dawg when you first have that child, there ain’t nothing can take you away. That’s your choice if you want to leave. That’s your choice. When you hold the baby in your arms and look at that baby, man. Your going to be on cloud nine. Be in there (referring in delivery room). Definitely be in there. Cause when you hold that baby in your arms. I’m telling you ain’t nothing gonna take that away from you, dawg.

P5: I’d say that I’m proud to be a father. It makes me feel good to know that I could uh, provide for a little one. Show that I could just take care of her and just be there for her.
P10: I think it is to know that it ain’t no joke. I tell my brother everyday. That the last thing you want is a child. Because the money you hold in your pocket at any time could be gone. And the time you hold dear to yourself, that you feel you could be doing something else can be gone. And a lot of your inputs are going to be put into that child. And if you don’t have the mind frame, you can just ruin another black female or male on this earth. Which a mind is a terrible thing to waste. Especially a young black child. And you have the instruments to induce positive or negative thoughts in their mind. As far as being a father, that they should wait until they get into a relationship with a woman that they feel can handle a child or wait to marriage. I would say wait to marriage. And then a relationship in a marriage also. Cause I think marriage break up is ugly. Because of that same thing. You know. Some people can’t handle kid’s. Get a person that is a mother and can be a mother. That exemplifies motherhood characteristics.

Who Could Have Made a Difference

Most of the fathers indicated that the role and influence of their mother, grandparent, or father would have been instrumental in all aspects of their lives. At least two fathers had difficulty acknowledging, accepting, or understanding that various influences, both positive and negative, made on their lives, choosing instead to assume a macho image of complete independence.

Five of the responses to the protocol answered by the participants probed into what or who would have been helpful in their transition to fatherhood.

P9: Who do I think would have helped me? My grandmother. She had passed away. She had gotten to see my first kid a couple of times. My grandmother would have helped me a lot. she always did. She was a very good woman. She stayed with me and my mom for a little while. She looked out for me a lot. She would tell me what was going to happen and to get out of here before it happened. My grandmother basically would have been the one to be sure that everything went right. If I was low on a little money she would be right there. If I needed diapers, she gonna make she that my kids got diapers. Today? I would have to say my mom’s friend. Yeah, she’s known me since I was young. She knows how my mom is. She knows how my mom is, but still they go back so far that she can’t disrespect her. She
knows. Even though she says that you mom has always been there for you. Blah Blah Blah. She made sure that you had a roof over your head. Yeah, she did. But she wasn’t there all the time. She wasn’t there when the door closed. I’d say her. It would be my mom’s friend.

P3: Just. I can’t get know better. I got my son and my daughter. I get anything they want me to. My son is getting up there in age. Also four uncles. I could call each one of them up. Hey, uncle I need help. I need this. I need that. They never let me down man. I can say they always been there for me.

P8: I think uh, probably my mom. She put a lot of effort in it. By her being a female she wouldn’t want something done to somebody else that she don’t want done to herself. So I think she put quite a bit of pressure on me. I think now just the time spent. The quality time spent.

P5: My mom. She helped me out a lot. Telling me that I could either go to work, take care of that baby and help that girl out. She didn’t do it on her own. You know. She didn’t do it on her own. You know. She needs your support. She doesn’t need to be out their looking for nobody else to help her support him.

P10: What would have helped me? You know. Really just time. Time having to go by. You know. Just because you turn eighteen doesn’t mean that you are a man. You know. It still takes you time. You can be twenty-five and still not be a man. You know it takes the knowledge, the mind, you got know. You got to know your rights and your wrongs. Your do’s and your don’ts. You got to know these things. If you don’t you never going to be a man. You never going to know. You know. You got to take responsibilities first. Dealers come first. Not drugs. Not shoes. Different things have to come first before you know. Business before pleasure. That’s when you know you’re a man. When you say that.

Needs

Consistent with the macho image that was often portrayed by many of the fathers was the idea that having a place of employment would alleviate their struggles. Although most of the fathers indicated that they were not prepared to be a father to their first offspring, only one made any reference to the impact that a
parenting class would have had on his development. A couple of the fathers who had had some recent college experience indicated an interest in completing their degree or certification to put them in a better position for employment.

Three of the responses to the protocol by the participants explored their perceived needs to be a more effective father.

P1: I just need a job. That’s all I need. I’d be out of everybody’s way. I’m not a burden, but you know what I’m saying. I tend to do stuff. Yeah, I need to go to work. So I can come in the house and go to sleep.

P6: I’m ready to be father. It’s just one thing that I need. And that is a job. A job would help me become a better man.

P8: What do I need now? I need a chance to prove myself. I need to. We need to work on things together instead of a triangle (referring to his child’s mother). Instead of being a three way target. Just me and her communicating. It’s jus that her mother always has an opinion and that is usually what she goes by. Mom knows best. Sometimes that ain’t true. Sometimes it takes the one on one conversation to figure things out.

Reflections of Lost Youth

All of the fathers shared many similarities in their experiences of growing up in their environments. Perceptions of racism, discrimination, poverty, unemployment, and the effects of substance abuse were continuously mentioned by these young fathers as they reflected on their experiences. All of the fathers indicated that aspects of their childhood development were interrupted by having a child, regardless of whether or not they were actively involved with the child.

Three of the responses to the protocol answered by the participants asked them to reflect on their preparation for fatherhood.
P4: I got prepared when she first told me she was pregnant. I really wanted to. I went to the library and got a couple of books about pregnancy. And how going about having it and the second time I went and asked a couple of aunts and uncles. They also got me prepared. They really did help me a lot too.

P1: I have done a whole lot of stupid things in my life. I knew they were wrong when I did them. I can’t blame anyone but myself. You know what I’m saying. That’s why I am trying to deal with it and get it over with. You know. I always got my kids with me every time they see me. I take them with me all the time until it gets dark (laugh). They got to go home.

P9: I see a lot of kids out here today doing the same thing that we were doing. The generation was doing before them and now I guess it’s their turn. We did the same things that their doing. It’s just been a repeat. From generation to generation to generation. But now I see black on black killing black. You know. Just make us feel like we’re bad. Killing each other, stealing, jacking people for shoes, that shit is ridiculous man, you know what I’m saying. Killing over drugs. That ain’t no way to go out man. It just makes us other Blacks feel like, it ain’t right. We just need to stop man. Stop this killing. We all Black. We just need to stop killing each other.

Life as a Young Black Man

All of the fathers acknowledged their understanding that racism and other forms of discrimination exist within society. They indicated an awareness of knowing that their color would always be a factor in all aspects of their lives (i.e., driving while Black, employment qualifications, education opportunities, judicial system, obtaining loans, purchasing homes).

Three of the responses to the protocol answered by the participants queried as to what role the young black fathers felt that their color played today.

P4: I love life. My role is to just go with the flow. You know. Do what everyone is doing. Most people have jobs, but I know quite a few who don’t. It’s just like me. I don’t know anybody who likes to work, but you got to work. Or you gonna be in jail sooner or later or broke. That leads to
jail as soon as you get broke. You want to do something. My role in the community is to take care of myself. Don’t bother nobody. I just want to take care of my kids. Yeah and me to. I’m gonna take care of me. The future for me has got to get better. Just being free. For those who look like me, I hope that they get free to. Free from everything. Just be free and do what they want to.

P8: It plays a big role. For the simple fact that they always think that you’re going to play them. Their always going to think that your not going to be better than me. You know. Your black and I’m not. He’s never going to be able to raise his kid to be as good as mine. You know. So it plays a big role. Having color.

P2: I really don’t have a role in society, because like I said I can go both ways. I can mingle with this crowd and mingle with that crowd. You know what I’m saying? I can go out with this girl and I can go out with that girl. It’s a lot of advantages and it’s a lot of disadvantages. Like most of my friends are all black. Okay. Now when we are out at the club or something. Or going to a girls house and she has parents who are white. They’re going to send me up to knock on the door. Because her parents are going to except me. That’s like when we go to the club, they always want take me along. Because they know that I have the opportunity on both sides. To holla at white girls or to holla at black girls. Mexican girls. On and on and on. They always want me there with them. They really always have to have me there with them if they want to, you know what I’m saying.

Three of the responses to the protocol answered by the participants gauged what being Black meant to them.

P10: I think they see. I think they overlook a lot. I mean. I mean there are a lot of unfair advantages. I feel you know what I’m saying. When you get pulled over or you go look for a job. You know what I’m saying. If you ain’t got what they are looking for. You know what I’m saying. The disadvantages? That clean cut look. You know the talk or the walk. You know what I’m saying. You got to have that certain, what they’re looking for. I mean. I’m a pretty good actor. I could act pretty good. But still you know what I’m saying. When it’s written all over your face. It’s really not much you could do. That says it all right there. And that’s the answer for them right there.

P5: I think society sees me as young black father. Another person that they have to pay taxes to support my kid. Cause I’m not going to support my kid. Almost like a menace. I don’t think that there is an age where society would
not see me as a young black father. I don’t think so. I think you get stereotyped either way.

P7: As a black man you are always going to be marked. That’s just how society is. They always are not color blind. They always see color. I don’t know. I can’t answer that. I don’t know that one. But I can tell you how society thinks of being a black man with a white girl. I can tell you that. They think it’s a disgrace. You know. It’s not right. Whites should be with whites and blacks with blacks. What am I suppose to do. Who am I suppose to be with? I think society is very unfair. If they just sit down and think they would realize that everyone is human. Where you just ain’t a color. Like a black paint or a white paint. You just ain’t that. You ain’t just that white wall. You ain’t that. You human. Regardless of what you say or what you did. Or how you did it. Society doesn’t look the same at white guys and black women or Mexican women. If a black woman goes out with a white guy they see that she made that choice. A black guy with a white girl, they kind of look at it like she was forced. Or she wanted to fit in or she wanted to be cool. It’s something. I don’t know.

Three of the responses to the protocol answered by the participants focused on how they felt society saw them as a Black male.

P1: I think that they really look down on you. Being so young and having a kid. Well, why weren’t you in school at the time? Instead of always being fast and always having sex on your mind. Sex is always on a black persons mind. Instead of hitting the books. Instead of reading or getting married first or something like that. It’s really just labeling you again.

P9: The community is basically the same. You know. They don’t never give you a chance. They don’t see you as yourself. They don’t respect the fact that you grew up different from the next person. You know. You didn’t have it easy as what they had. You didn’t have the parenting, the money background. You know just the things that other people are blessed to have. It’s just you. That’s just the way the community looks at you. Their always going to label you. Always going to have their own opinion about you. You know. You wear your pants a little low. Your always going to get labeled. Umm. You know some slang terms, they always going to label you. They don’t ever respect that you might have a little smarts (forceful and stem). You know you might be smart. You know you might be. You might be a criminal, but you might be a smart one on top of it. they don’t ever give me the opportunity you know. To really listen or talk to you. Or just listen for a minute. When I first got here I talked to the guy (white staff person) and he said, “When you first got here, I though you were going to give me
problems.” You. How is he thinking that I am going to give him problems? You know. You don’t know me from nowhere. And the he was like, “the first ten minutes you were here proved me wrong”. I mean. I could have gave him problems if I wanted to be myself. You know. I probably would have given him problems. That’s how I grew up. That’s where I came from. But like I said, I’m a good actor. I can go with the flow. For a job I can go, “yes sir, thank you.” I can do it all. I know how to do it. You know it’s not me, I don’t want to have to talk to you like that. I just want to be myself. Just because I might talk like that and walk like that doesn’t mean I’m not a good worker. That I’m not a good person. It’s just a label that’s written on you. Your skin color. It’s there. You can’t do nothing about it. You can’t change who you are.

P4: How I think? I think it’s really messed up. when you look at like the system. It’s really messed up. I mean like I said, they label us. I don’t think we all get a fair shot. Just being around this place I see my fair share. I ain’t even been here but a week and I see a lot. I can sit down and I can see straight threw people and tell exactly what their thinking just by watching. You have to act like somebody different. I do to get by, to get the advantages. You know what I’m saying. In life. That’s what I like about myself. But I don’t. I could sit down and watch and shack my head, like that ain’t right. You know, it just ain’t right.

Three of the responses to the protocol answered by the participants asked them to probe into what they perceived the future to look like for those who look like them.

P3: The future for those who look like me? I think it looks a lot better now because there are a lot more of us (bi-racial kids) out there. There’s a lot more bi-racial kids. Like they say, the worlds only going to be bi-racial in time to come. I think it’s going to look a lot better. As of right now, it’s a toss up right now. But as it goes on, it will get a lot better I know. Like I said the people you come across you have to face in front of you. It’s really up to yourself to tell you the truth. If you want to make it like that. if you really want to act like that. if you just want to act one color, your going to get treated like one color. It’s as simple as that. You know. If your going to act like it, your going to get treated like it. Like I said, I can act. I can con you. I can do whatever you want me to. I can look at how the guys talking to that guy and how he’s talking to the next guy. I will know what to do when I go up there. You know. That’s basically what I go by is how he treated the next person.
P7: The future for black men or fathers? It's gonna be more struggles. It seems like every time you get there something is bringing you down. Young males? You mean with or without kids? We struggle period. Young black males struggle period, cause it don't seem like all the opportunities that young white males get. Like I see young white males run around here and I see seventeen year old white boys running around in 2000's (vehicles) and stuff. You know what I'm saying. But you got young black males riding in 80 something's hoping for a clean Cutlass and they riding in 2000's. It's like. What is they doing different? You got black males out here going to school everyday. The same things. I don't know man.

Three of the responses to the protocol answered by the participants asked them to consider what their own future looked like.

P9: What does the future look like for me? Like I've been saying, being me the future. The future with me could really be anything. It can go both ways. It's really. It's just the people. The people. Who ever you're going to run in front of. As my life goes on, who am I going to come across. Am I going to come across the right people? To get ahead or am I going to come across the people who are always going to down grade you. It's really a toss up. You really just don't know. I just take it day by day. I just don't know what lies in front of me. I hope that it's for the better you know.

P6: Future? Just hope that everybody can make it, that's all. I hope that everybody can get their head together. Out here in this world just, everybody stop killing everybody. I just want to make a happy place. They got to feed their family somehow, I ain't mad at them. Cause I did it. Can't find no job so you got to do something. You gotta survive out here. If it were up to society I'd be in prison. Just things going on man. Just things going on. You got probation offers on your butt. You do anything. If you do right they still want to lock you up. If you do what you suppose to do, they still want to have you up and drop. I don't know man. Just can't win or lose. If you tell them you're paying your probation penalty, they still gonna get same with you.

P1: Umm, it depends. I mean as young black to me you are always still stereotyped just because I mean. You got nice clothes and nice cars. If you got rims on there they assume you're selling dope. Which ain't the case. And uh, like if you get into some kind of trouble they tend to knock you. Once bad always bad type of deal. Or if your going to college you doing something with yourself. there are some ou there who would be supportive of you and some out there who would, naw he will never make it. That type
of deal. He'll always be such and such. Or he'll end up back doing something else. You know. I don’t know society (pause) is a weird thang.

Three of the responses to the protocol answered by the participants probed into how these young men felt their future would be if left up to society.

P3: Umm. Really to be a young father, that is a whew. Just really just not thinking. You know. They look at you like you were not thinking. You know. I really don’t know how to answer that. Immature. Not being responsible enough. Rowdy. Gang banging. You know. The basics really. They always got their eye on you. Regardless of if you’re thinking that or not. You know. Thinking of doing criminal activity or not. There always going to have their eye on you.

I’m just another man trying to make it. It’s plenty of them out here. What do I want out of life? Man, I want what everybody wants to be rich. That’s what everybody else wants.

If it were up to society or my future? Man, I wouldn’t want to put it up to them I know that. I bet they could care less. I remember when I was in school and was one of two black males there. My sister and her boyfriend were older and this was like an alternative school. It was like every time. It was about one hundred and something people who went there. It was like every time something was going to go down. Like if the school was going to go bowling or skating or something or having a picnic. It was always something that me and my friend—did to get suspended. Every time it came down to something a field trip or anything. Well you missed this or making outrageous claims that you missed so many days and you know came because you wanted to do this. You wanted to go on this field trip with everybody and your knowing that you sit up and try not to miss any days. And it basically makes you want to give up, cause it was like every time you try to do good. It’s one person. It’s like me and my friend — would always get called down to like the day fore. And it’s always for some reason why we can’t do this. Okay, but you telling me this now so how come I wasn’t wrote up for this or something when it happened? Then now all of a sudden that it is a field trip that you want to bring this up. How I wasn’t wrote up and received the punishment then. You want to wait now to it’s something going down so you can take me out of it. Cause you think that I am going to go there and do something. You know what I am saying. I ain’t never done nothing in school to make someone think of me like that. That’s why I say there are certain people who do certain things, that have too much control. I feel that it’s certain people who have to much control and hatred in there heart.
Four of the responses to the protocol answered by the participants allowed for some self-exploration into their current live and dreaming.

P10: My dreams probably are to be financially stable and provide for my family like my father did. If it were up to society, society would probably have me in prison. Because of multiple drug felonies. But I think uh, the fact that I have done so much good with my life besides that as well. I think the good outweighs the bad, that’s how I learned it. If it was up to the community. They probably think uh, he ain’t gonna do nothing but sell drugs and get caught. Or something happens and he probably get shot up. I mean a lot of times in your own community you have a lot of blacks down grading other blacks instead of uplifting them. Instead of somebody coming up to say like hey man, you were on the right path doing this. Why you doing this? You know what I’m saying? Why don’t you go back to school? And stuff like that. I don’t find a lot of that. I find a lot of man he involved, he got this and that. I think honestly that would probably have made a difference for me. Cause I’m the type of person, I always listen to what people got to say. Whether I take heed to what they have to say or not, I always listen. At least I listen and give it a thought. I think I would have.

P2: I personally have a goal to be a millionaire. I do a lot of different things on the side. Because I know from where I come from that there is no financial backing from home. No money. No fund that was saved up for me. No land or stock. No job that is guaranteed to have my name on it because of who my parents know. No guarantee or no issue for me as a black male. Survival of the fittest. And that is what it is here. I try to convey to the kids in my hall. You either make it or break it. In the future maybe I can have these things in place for my kids. I don’t really know the meaning of vacation. Vacation for a black kid is going to grandma’s house. Vacation for a white kid is we went to Disney World. To Europe. I have never been on a spring break. I either worked or went home to see my daughter. I would like to experience life a little bit and put things up for my children. And not searching or wondering where your next check is coming from. This probably the most discouraging thing that I have ever had to go through, is living life check by check. Not knowing who was going to pay this bill. I want my children to be able to go to school and just go to school.

P9: Everybody’s got dreams. For those who say that they don’t have dreams, it’s because they’ve been through the mill. The people that they have come across have always treated them like they are being treated. From day one. They think that in the future it’s not going to better, it’s just always going to get worse. I’m always going to get treated like that no matter what. My dreams? Uh, I just want to be a better person. Just, you know what I’m
saying. Get a good job. Work hard at it. You know, I just want to live. If it were up to them (society or community). It really depends on the person. You know. Umm. I say it’s really a toss up. It’s really a toss up. That one you can’t really answer until you step into it. It’s really just. When you come in front of things like the society or the community, it’s the person. You know what I’m saying? You’ve got to go in front of the person. That will give me your options. Right there. It could either go that way or this way.

P7: I want to be successful in life at whatever job field I choose to be in. I want to have love and respect by my peers and be the best father I could possibly be. The future. I say in the short term in the next two years, I will have a computer engineering degree and uh, and maybe in a five year outlet I will have a masters working somewhere. I’m not sure exactly where. Just making good money. The future for those who look like me is really what they make of it. It’s a lot of opportunities out there. It just you make your own path. You come to the fork in the road and try to make your money illegally or you try to make it legally. And uh, like I said we live in a society that still experiences a fair amount of racism and that can be overcame easily with determination.

Three of the responses to the protocol answered by the participants asked them about their opinions regarding fathers who were or were not involved in their children’s lives.

P9: Those fathers involved in their children’s lives? I feel that they should be really into them more. Instead of leaving them in their mother’s hands and put them in their own hands. And maybe try to stretch their child’s life to them. That’s how I figure it. You probably ain’t get that answer form what I am saying. Basically, being optimistic. When I think about that. Can I think about that. That was another good question. I probably would tell you that being involved in fun activities with your child. So we can get to know or get acquainted to one another. I’d probably take ‘em somewhere like Peter Piper Pizza up here and he get all riled up and he start smiling at me. I’d probably like to take a little snap shot of that. For those involved I think it was their choice to be involved and not someone else’s I can use myself as an example. I got involved to do these things everyday. Not one day.

P3: Those father not involved? I think of them as not having nothing to do with their kids. I also think of them as not being a good father figure. One of the things I think of them is why put yourself in that predicament to have a child? That’s a tough question. Reasons may be that they are scared and don’t know how to act. Another one, that they don’t know what to do when
they feel bad or something like that. Instead of something like that, I'm going to say a lack of confidence.

What am I going to do when I go knock on the door and he (son) opens and he say, dad? Or what am I gonna do when he is sitting there talking to me and I don't give him no type of answer to his question. Or questioning me. What am I gonna do when he sits there and says when am I going back home to see my mom or something like that. Or why aren't you and momma together. That would be real difficult to explain to them.

P1: Those not involved don't get a lot of respect from me because it's just a sad situation. To have a child ask a question like, cause I have had this happen to me. Are you my daddy? Cause they ain't seen their father in so many years. I mean that's sad. I mean they don't get no respect from me. It didn't make me feel good at all. Actually, it upsets me. It was with my niece and was one of my brothers. And I called him immediately and we got into a big argument. Cause I mean it really don't make no sense to me for a child to be put in that predicament and have to ask me are you my daddy, cause she ain't seen her father in the long since she was a baby. Exactly. That's the thing that really gets you. You know. You wasn't raised like that. You didn't see that. So why is you doing? Just a lack of morals. Want to live a carefree life. We come from the same household. Living the care free life and get high all the time and party and run the streets. You know just not giving the damn, just made him the way he is. It's very selfish.

Three of the responses to the protocol answered by the participants asked them to initially reflect on their own childhood and then consider what they would or would not want to use in their own child-rearing practices.

P6: I can tell them (young fathers) to take it one day at a time. I would tell them it may be hard for them now. and I would also tell them that if you and you old lady put your minds to it, things might happen the way you want them to happen. About being a man? Trustworthy.

P7: I would want my kids to see me having a loving relationship with a quality girlfriend or what not. Or having a close relationship with you friends. You know. I would want them to see all that. Now, if the question was reversed the other way. What I don't want them to see. Would be me fighting with their mom or my lady friend that I have now. I don't want them to see me opening a bottle of beer or something.

P2: Talk to them (children) and be there. Don't run out of their life. Go to school. Stay in school. Don't take them around negative things. Don't want
to use foul language around them. Don’t want to bring drugs into their life. Don’t want to do none of that.

Three of the responses to the protocol answered by the participants asked
the young fathers what they felt was important for their child(ren) to experience and
grow up seeing.

P4: This might sound stupid. But seeing me incarcerated is important because for the simple fact that I want them to know that when you are bad this is what happens. I mean it’s not something to see. But for them to see that when you are bad this is where you will wind up. This is where you have to sleep. These are things that you have to go through.

P10: Be in my kid’s life. Take care of them like they supposed to be. Go to work everyday. Try to go back to school. Try to get something. Some type of assistance. You know. That will help. I’m out here to work. Working hard like she is (mother of children). I’m staying with her. Or I could be staying with her and paying child support. So it goes right back to the family. You know. So it’s all good.

P1: Seeing their father and mother getting along. Doing stuff together. Taking them to school. Coming home and doing their homework with them. Wanting them to see teachers and tutors if they have to. I just don’t want them to see any of the stuff that I have seen.

Three of the responses to the protocol answered by the participants asked
them for additional thoughts that they may have about being black and or a father.

P10: And you know like being me (bi-racial), it’s hard to fit in both places. You know what I’m saying? You know. It’s real hard to explain. You really got to see it to believe it. It’s really hard to explain. You could be called this name and then that name. You know. You jus don’t understand what to do. It’s very hard (to fill out application that ask for race). What I label myself as, you know what I’m saying is one thing and what I put on the application is another. You know, cause I want the job. That’s the reason why I do that. You know what I’m saying? If I label myself as something, I am doing it to benefit me or give me opportunities. That’s the community. That’s society. That’s the system. You know what I’m saying? When I go in front of a judge. I don’t want to have to say yes sire. I want to let you know what I’m thinking. I’m not trying to disrespect nobody, it’s just who I am. I know what goes on. I’m not that dumb believe me. I know what goes on. It’s just
a lot of disagreements and a lot of labeling. That's the problem with society now. The labels. Like I just came back from community service and I told the guy that I'm doing community service. I said, "I got to be back at this at three o'clock." He asked me what for. I continued to tell him and he was like. You don't look black.

P4: Do I feel that I have control over my life? I mean. I really don't. It's up to the people (facility of men). What they want to. What they want to think. You know it's really up to them. It's not up to me. What people? You know like a facility of men. Like my girlfriends family. It's really up to what they want to call it. It's a toss up with me. You know what I'm saying? You got somebody else in here, there going to say he's going to be no good for me from here on out. I'm going to run into a brick wall. You know what I'm saying? With me it's really a toss up. I just don't know how they're going to look at me and treat me.

P9: They think that almost every black person there is shady or up to something. They got to have a trick up their sleeve, their clinging pursues and locking and locking doors. You know. I mean. Stuff that goes on in the black society is blown up. In the white society it's covered up and tried to keep it hush hush. It's all the same white do same as blacks. It's just that by you being a young black you're a target and you stand out. They are going to magnify it. I say in your community most of the time people know you. So your looked upon as an individual and what your doing with your life. So if you are in the criminal activity and people see that you are making it public notoriety that you're into that, then that's how they're going to view you. If your into sports or college the same thing. It just kind of depends on how you fit in because in your own community you're not going to get as many stereotypes.

Three of the responses to the protocol answered by the participants allowed them to discuss their perceived personal responsibilities.

P5: I think my personal role is to be a strong black man. To be an overachiever. Somehow get me a leadership role where I could uh, put a title on my name. Get a Ph.D. where when I speak, people will listen. Where I can have a chance to make a difference. You don't necessary need one at all, all you have to do is speak out, but me for what I want to with myself. I want to ultimately be a college professor and from what I have seen growing up and from the different black college professors that I have seen. When they speak a lot of people generally listen.
P7: In my community I think I just uh, I try to be me personally. I try to help other kids (little boys) coming up. I see them off doing little silly stuff that could lead down a path that I possibly have already been down. So I try to talk to them and let them know that ain't the way you want to go. They're going to make their own choices regardless, but that's just where I see my role is.

P2: I didn’t like selling drugs, it was quick money. Making damn near $700 day just by doing nothing. It was like a team. I always had a team. So it was like who the snitches. When the police coming up in here. Everyday was jeopardy. It was like been doing it for like four or five years and got nothing really out of it. Just trying to role with the system. In judges faces don’t know what he is about to say. How he is feeling. How his day went before he came in. Most of the people the judge sees don’t look like me. Don’t care about me. Don’t matter if I live tomorrow. That’s why I got to change. Am going to change. I have changed. The streets were not teaching me nothing. When I go to class now and educate my brain, it’s like a lot of stuff I wish I would have knew. When I was on the streets, I used to think about school. I probably was the only person who did in my crew. I needed to go back to school. I need to go. I want to go back to school and be something. I don’t just want to be another African American out here.
CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

Summary

The identification of unmarried adolescent African American fathers, their plight, concerns, and needs was the focus of the study. Using purposeful selection techniques, 10 participants from southwestern Michigan who met the established criteria were identified and participated in the study. Semistructured face-to-face interviews of 60–90 minutes were used to collect data. Participants were asked open-ended questions to investigate their perceptions of several areas of interest. Interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed, and the transcriptions were analyzed using the constant comparative method (grounded theory). After further examination and clarification with each participant, a final set of coded categories and subcategories was identified using the NUD*IST 4 computer program.

The young fathers interviewed initially had some reservations about participating in the interview process. For young Black males, mistrust was expected and anticipated. Mechanisms were put in place, such as having a trusted friend serve as a credible source when the interviewee was told about the study and later introduced to the interviewer. In terms of their ability to "survive" in the social system, it was expected that the participants would show apprehension regarding the
interview. Their initial anxiety and trust concerned the type of information that would be asked and the way it would be used against them. Once this anxiety was reduced, the interviewees became relaxed and actively involved. It was not uncommon for them to acknowledge that this was perhaps the first time someone had expressed interest in and had been willing to listen to them, without their experiencing fear of repercussion. It was apparent that some relief was obtained from their opportunity to "tell their story."

The following conclusions were drawn from the interviews with all participants:

1. Unmarried adolescent African American fathers are more involved in the caregiver or provider role of the child-rearing practice than they are often given credit for. They are no less involved than adult fathers provided with similar circumstances.

2. Given the same opportunity and support systems, paternal involvement may compete with that of maternal involvement.

3. The lack of knowledge and awareness of opportunities may influence the self-esteem and involvement of adolescent African American fathers.

4. The African American males evaluated themselves often as a result of how they perceived they had been evaluated historically.

5. Environmental experiences with relationships and family influence how young African American males regard parenting and marriage.
6. Outside sources and experiences greatly influence one's self-regard. However, when others fail to invest in the lives of African American males in general, and young African American males specifically, particularly in terms of their cognitive development, self-regard is often lost.

7. Obstacles and barriers persist for men in general, and for African American males specifically, particularly those created by a lack of services and programs to assess and address their needs.

8. A healthy self-regard is influenced by the presence and involvement of a father or father figure in the lives of young men in general, and young Black men specifically.

9. Society continues to lag behind in terms of adequately identifying and addressing the needs of African American males.

Conclusions

Conclusion 1: Unmarried adolescent African American fathers are more involved in the caregiver or provider role of the child-rearing practice than they are often given credit for. They are no less uninvolved than adult fathers provided with the same circumstances.

Results obtained indicated that these fathers were more involved than they were often given credit for. These young men often performed negotiated or assumed roles that involved more folk tradition (informal rules or customs) than legal norms, although legal sanctions often resulted when the folk negotiations were
deemed unsuccessful or had broken down. The dynamics of these relationships, which may not have been good from the onset, often led the mothers of their children to seek advice and guidance from their own family and friends about the role that the father should be allowed to play. Frustrations were often voiced by the fathers that the mother of their child, with the assistance of her support network, chose initially to seek the involvement of the Friend of the Court, or other child custody authorities, prior to consulting or negotiating with the biological father. Anger and hostility often ensued when it became apparent to the fathers that (a) their child, whom they loved the most, was being used as a pawn to punish them (perhaps out of a sense of betrayal from the mother’s perspective); (b) their child was being used as a tool to elicit and secure monetary rewards, regardless of how limited the fathers’ resources may be; or (c) someone else could make the decision as to how often or whether they would be allowed to see their child, thus determining how active they could be as fathers. An argument could be made that the father’s role was simply to provide the mother of his offspring someone to love and to be dependent upon her, especially considering that the mothers of these children often came from single-female-headed households where out-of-wedlock, adolescent births were common. Brindis (1993) reported that some children who drop out of school subsequently drift into parenthood in an attempt to add meaningful purpose to their lives. Girls growing up in such families are three times more likely to have a child out of wedlock and 2.5 times more likely to be teen mothers; both sons and daughters are twice as likely to drop out of high school and
to be idle, both out of school and out of work (Endleman, 1997). It is unclear whether early fatherhood precedes or follows school dropout (Furstenberg, Brooks-Gunn, & Chase-Lansdale, 1989).

The conclusion often drawn by these fathers is that financial assistance is more important than their paternal involvement in child-rearing. All the fathers acknowledged being happy, yet unprepared for the responsibilities and grind of fatherhood. One father admitted to wanting to have an abortion, but concluded that he had no say-so in the pregnancy. Consistently, each father confirmed having limited, or no decision-making power, from conception to birth on termination or adoption. Research by Barret and Robinson (1982) and Hendricks (1988) suggested that many teenage fathers want to be involved with their female partners in decision-making and planning concerning their babies (Barret & Robinson, 1982; Hendricks, 1988). Yet, young fathers often are not told when the baby is born and have little input when their children are turned over for adoption or foster care (Robinson & Barret, 1985). Teenage fathers who are left out of such important decisions regarding their children report experiencing intense rejection, anxiety, and sadness (Robinson, 1988).

Many of the fathers reported having a sense of pride and accomplishment in fathering a child. Soon afterwards, however, most fathers reported that these feelings were replaced by frustration and hostility towards the relationship and the mother of their children. These disagreements were often not isolated to one particular area, but instead ranged from child-rearing responsibilities, financial
hardships, outside interest of both parties, or tension between the father and his partner's parents, resulting in added strain on an already tender relationship. Findings from several studies indicate that adolescent fathers report a wide range of reactions to an unplanned pregnancy, including happiness and acceptance, depression, anger, and denial of responsibility for the pregnancy (Achatz & MacAllum, 1994; Elster & Panzarine, 1983; Fry & Trifiletti, 1983; Vaz, Smolen, & Miller, 1983).

Most of these young men admitted they had no significant employment prior to the birth of the child and that they were being supported by their own parents and relatives or through illegal activities during the past 4 or 5 years. The majority of fathers interviewed reported having provided some folk traditional contributions that would often go unnoticed by an outside observer or legal system.

Sullivan (1985) observed that folk traditions dictate that the father experience genuine concern for his partner and her child and that he express this concern in the form of some type of concrete assistance to his partner and her family. If these steps are taken, then the paternity of the father will likely be recognized, even if he does not fulfill the legally defined responsibilities of a father, such as completing court-determined levels of child support (Sullivan, 1985). In addition, many teenage mothers hide the identity of the father from child support authorities when the father abides by folk customs associated with paternity (Sullivan, 1985; Williams, 1991). Most of the fathers expressed their desire to be involved in the lives of their children, but acknowledged having no interest in
sustaining or maintaining any significant relationship with the mother of their children, even though these adolescent parents typically were involved in what they perceived to be a caring, meaningful relationship prior to the pregnancy (Elster & Panzarine, 1983). This perception could often increase the probability of a tense relationship that lacks the support, commitment, and communication that would allow the child to grow up in a stable, loving environment.

The participants expressed their uncertainty as to whether the resources that they were able to provide actually went to the needs of their offspring. The negative feedback that the father received from the mother of his child or from her family regarding his financial contributions often wore thin for him as a father and man (regardless of his perception), and questions regarding his manhood and fatherhood were posed not only by her, but often by the father himself. With little education, maturity, and stability, struggles and questions escalated concerning his ability to provide for the child. Because teenage parents tend to receive less education, they are apt to earn lower salaries, work in less prestigious jobs, and have less fulfilling work experiences than their nonparent peers over time (Card & Wise, 1978; Kerckhoff & Parrow, 1979). These fathers lacked awareness and education regarding other methods, beyond financial contributions, that were available for them to be active parents. The father’s social support of the mother could indirectly enhance his child’s development by bolstering her positive influence on the child, and he could directly promote his child’s competence through father-child interactions (Furstenberg, 1976; Unger & Wandersman, 1985).
Conclusion 2: Given the same opportunities, resources, and support systems, paternal involvement may compete with that of maternal involvement.

The fathers interviewed did not appear to see any serious problems with adolescent pregnancy in American society. In 1993, 1 million females under the age of 20 became pregnant; 43% were pregnant at least once by that age (Shapiro, 1993). Most of the fathers in this study indicated that the mother of their offspring came from an environment similar to theirs, in which single-female-headed households were not uncommon and frequently acceptable. According to the generation recidivism hypothesis (alternatively referred to as the intergenerational hypothesis), the tendency to become teenage parents runs in particular families and is passed on through observational learning and socioenvironmental constraints (Burton, 1990; Robbins & Lynn, 1973).

In a society where divorce is increasing and marriage as a context of childbearing is declining, the number of children being raised without fathers has grown significantly. A report of the National Commission on American’s Urban Families pointed to the trend to de-institutionalize marriage and to the disintegration of the mother-father child-raising unit:

It said that all too often government policies undermine the authority of the family. Emphasis on “family values” is not, as claimed by some, indicative of racism, sexism and homophobia, but a sincere attempt to resolve some of the upsetting and depressing social problems from which society is now suffering. Some still insist that traditional marriage is no better for raising children than homosexual relationships or unmarried women or men. (Brill, 1999)
These critics are often the same ones who claim that riots are caused not by criminals or lawbreakers, but by victims who somehow have the right to destroy the lives and livelihoods of others ("Families," 1993, p. A8). The behaviors demonstrated in existing adult relationships, regardless of economic status or geographical location, have served as a model for young adolescents in their own development. At one time in these adolescent relationships, the mothers reasoned that it was safe to engage in unprotected sex, perhaps through persuasion or coercion, especially since it was with the baby's father and they were in love. Later, however, she may have regretted not waiting. Also, according to Pierce (1982), girls were ostracized if they didn't engage in sex, and young men felt that using a condom was a negative reflection on their manhood. Statistics from 1997 indicate there were 74.2 births per 1,000 unmarried Black females aged 15 to 17, compared to 11.8 births per 1,000 White females of similar ages (Wall Street Journal, 1997). Given these statistics and the fact that the majority of the adolescent mothers were not utilizing contraceptives when they became pregnant, the reasoning of both mother and father is paradoxical and evidence that, although many are capable of concrete thinking, few have achieved the level of formal operations (Harris, 1998). Therefore, it appears that the mothers were going to engage in sexual intercourse, and neither threat of disease nor pregnancy was an adequate deterrent (Harris, 1998). For example, in a study by Schamess (1993), 80% of African American adolescent mothers reported that they were in love with their sexual partner at the onset of pregnancy.
The fathers interviewed, on the other hand, had a propensity, even at a younger age, to be more sexually active than their partners and were more likely to have sex in the absence of a committed relationship. It was not unusual for these fathers to demonstrate more awareness of the consequences of unprotected sex by using contraceptives with a selective group of sexual partners or at certain times in the relationship. The mothers, unlike the father, may be more likely to include sex in their definition of intimate relationships.

For both parents, the possibility of pregnancy may not have been considered, despite their admittance that neither partner was practicing birth control at the time of conception. This incongruity is in keeping with Brookman's (1991) contention that adolescent's "it can't happen to me" attitude is a major reason for the failure to prevent pregnancy (or a sexually transmitted disease) and is a more important factor than the need to obtain, give, or retain affection (Harris, 1998). Thus, young adolescents may be biologically capable of coitus and pregnancy, but they have not reached a level of cognitive and emotional development that would enable them to develop genuine intimacy; understand the complex, interpersonal aspects of mature sexual relationships; and properly practice birth and disease control (Pestrak & Martin, 1985).

The fathers interviewed presented a range of behaviors that they perceived would fulfill manhood and parenthood, but which more often were for selfish gains and not for the advancement of their children. One behavior was simply to father a child, even in the face of crushing poverty. Somewhere along their road to
development, these young Black fathers recognized the objective of accepting the basic masculine goals of wanting to raise and provide for a family. The inclination to take this road to manhood is strong, despite obstacles in supporting a family; children are an important statement for declaring manhood (Majors & Mancini-Billson, 1992). The most effective way for the fathers interviewed to make this declaration was through sexual promiscuity and procreation. Another method primarily used to support themselves or others, also perceived as a “right of passage” or “making it” or “doing what they gotta do,” was via drug trafficking and drug dealing or alternative illegal activities, which often resulted temporarily in material rewards, which in turn elevated their ego and status within their community. The cost of possible incarceration was not significant enough to steer them away, and a unique way offered additional “clout” and “prestige” within their environment. Blacks not only commit a huge percentage of the crimes; Blacks are also predominantly the victims of all of these crimes: Blacks are four times as likely as Whites to be raped, three times as likely to be robbed, twice as likely to be assaulted, and seven times as likely to be murdered (Endelman, 1997). It becomes a struggle to refrain from regarding one’s Blackness as a badge of inferiority and as a stigma in the larger scope of the world (which, for some, consists of three or four city blocks), and instead to value and embrace the rich traditions of culture and the accomplishments that people of color have made around the world.

Financial contributions also inflated the fathers’ ego, knowing that they provided money to “drape or clothe” their child and perhaps the mother in the latest
and often most expensive "gear or fashion" available. Throughout the interviews it was evident that the fathers attributed great value to the latest fashions and material items on the market and that both parents desired to obtain these items. The choices were often simple: Dress in the latest trends and live outside of your means, or manage your resources and purchase only what you can afford. Living for the "here and now" often superseded investing and planning for the future. Within many of these young fathers' communities, success simply means "surviving" or "enjoying life now," and for African American males in particular, it has come to mean simply to live beyond the age of 18 (whether in or out of prison).

The fathers in these interviews were similar to mothers in having goals and aspirations for their offspring. These young fathers talked of providing their child with whatever he or she desired and having their child aspire to become a professional athlete or entertainer, while seldom discussing or considering the importance of educational attainment or providing essential needs. The value given to a purchasing a $165 pair of gym shoes or a $250 outfit was often stated. Additionally, many of the parents' attempts, perhaps sometimes selfish in nature, were to create a similar lifestyle or environment for themselves and their families by living beyond the resources available to them. The focus upon accumulating material possessions and living outside of one's means had more to do with seeking attention (perhaps from their peers and society at large) on the part of these young fathers than providing for the safety and security of the family. The image of "success," as measured primarily by these families, was often historically measured by developed
"White standards of living." For the impoverished, "the only way out," or the only way to "make it" for the family was to achieve the lifestyle of the rich and famous (less than 1% of the African American population) who drive expensive cars, make videos, or score touchdowns. Many of those fortunate to "make it" or become "successful" struggled and lost everything because of behaviors that, at one time, were merely a way of life or a method of survival.

The research on teenage parents' parental skills has been conducted primarily with teenage mothers. The findings of this research indicate that adolescent mothers may provide less appropriate forms of stimulation and care for their young children than do adult mothers (see Lamb & Elster, 1986). Minimum data currently exist regarding the parenting skills of adolescent fathers. In their review of a few early studies with very small samples of adolescent fathers, Parke et al. (1980) concluded that, although there is considerable diversity in the amount and quality of father–child involvement, father participation can have direct positive influences on the social and cognitive development of the children of adolescent parents (Kiselica, 1995). The results of a more recent study on the parent–child interactions between 15 pairs of adolescent parents and their infants indicated that the fathers were less sensitive than the mothers to their infants’ communications and tended to demonstrate less reciprocity (McGovern, 1990). Thus, although teenage fathers can have a positive influence on their children’s development, at least some young fathers may not know how to respond consistently to their infants’ cues in a sensitive manner. These are skills that, at one time or another, every parent struggles
to learn and master. Therefore, assuming that these behaviors can be developed in fathers through training and awareness, if given the opportunity, young fathers can be given a better hand than that which is often dealt to them.

In addition to the risk of health problems, the children of teenage parents are more likely than the offspring of adults to experience emotional and behavioral problems and academic difficulties, particularly if they are born to teenage parents from lower socioeconomic levels (Klerman, 1982). In their critique of the literature addressing the issue of child abuse by teenage parents, Bolton and Belsky (1986) reported that the data indicate that adolescent mothers may be only slightly more likely than adult mothers to abuse their children. The authors also noted that, although teenage fathers often share many of the same psychological, contextual, and offspring characteristics as maltreating adults (e.g., role confusion, employment difficulties, financial stress), no data suggest that young fathers are more likely than adult fathers to maltreat their children (Kiselica, 1995).

Conclusion 3: The lack of knowledge and awareness of opportunities may influence the self-esteem and involvement of African American fathers.

The lack of knowledge and awareness of opportunities frequently was evident in the accounts of the experiences felt by these young fathers. Standard sex education does not prevent adolescent pregnancies, and there is a trend toward earlier sexual intercourse with inadequate attention to contraception (Brill, 1999). The point has been made repeatedly that minimal economic resources and family instability are part of a vicious, ongoing cycle in which a certain number of Blacks
are seemingly caught (Scanzoni, 1971). Social and economic forces throughout American history have combined to keep African American males from assuming traditional masculine roles (Staples, 1983; Wilkinson & Taylor, 1977). This process has been an integral part of the dynamics of oppression and racism that have pervaded the Black experience in America (Grier & Cobbs, 1968; Thomas & Sillen, 1972). The development and self-esteem of males in general, and Black young fathers specifically, has commonly been hindered by their lack of preparedness to assume responsibilities. The historical persistence of barriers to manhood has significantly impacted the psychosocial development of African American males (Crawley & Freeman, 1993). Unsuccessful endeavors, discrimination, the lack of preparation or development for opportunities, and unsupportive or underdeveloped support systems prevent these young fathers from consistently experiencing positive situations that may increase their self-esteem and self-regard. The general inability to fulfill masculine roles has resulted in rage, frustration, powerlessness, and hopelessness as pervasive themes in their developmental dynamics (Lee, 1997). These themes are often evident in antisocial and self-destructive behavior patterns (Cordes, 1985; Gary, 1981; McGhee, 1984). When they continually experience situations in which they perceive themselves as powerless to do anything about their future relationship with their child, these young Black fathers often resign themselves to the situation, become depressed, and, worst of all, shut off their feelings for their child. In a society where a man’s worth (and ultimately his manhood) is often judged by his ability to accumulate wealth and power, the lack of
opportunities for the Black male to achieve either one has serious consequences on his psychosocial development and detrimental effects on the family dynamics.

Findings from several studies indicate that adolescent fathers report a wide range of reactions to an unplanned pregnancy, including happiness and acceptance, depression, and denial of responsibility for the pregnancy (Achatz & MacAllum, 1994; Elster & Panzarine, 1983; Fry & Trifiletti, 1983; Vaz et al., 1983). Sometimes the coping strategies Black males use seem involuntary, always appearing to reflect a narrow range of alternatives “for coping with the immense and overwhelming forces of life and situations over which their control was so cruelly limited” (Phillips, 1971). Compassionate attempts to reach these young men can aid them in coping with these uncomfortable experiences. Even if the adolescent father is accepted in a supportive manner by some or all of the grandparents involved, his relationship with these adults will still be altered as he attempts to renegotiate his role as both a son and an emerging parent (Kiselica, 1995). Even among the most well-adjusted and intact families, role confusion and boundary issues are likely to develop for these young Black males. Those fathers who reported having a small or informal relationship with their own parents may have felt added stress from an altered relationship with peers. Teenage fathers often experience stressful changes in their relationships with their peers (Achatz & MacAllum, 1994; Elster & Hendricks, 1986; Hendricks, 1988; Robinson, 1988).

The responsibilities and demands that often result from dropping out of school, securing and maintaining employment, or caring for the baby may hinder or
diminish opportunities for the young father to socialize with other adolescents. This loss, coupled with the absence of important experiences gained from relating to other teenage boys and from experimentation with dating, may hamper the growth and development of young Black fathers.

**Conclusion 4:** The African American males evaluated themselves often as a result of how they perceived they had been evaluated historically.

In keeping with the research questions posed, the nature of the protocol served two additional purposes. The initial purpose was to provide young African American males a voice for expression and perspective of their lives. Secondly, the protocol served as catalyst for making inferences to the “intergenerational trauma” that exists as a result of the legacy of slavery and enslavement that continues to permeate society.

Lerone Bennett (1961), in his book *Before the Mayflower: A History of the Negro in America 1619-1964*, alludes to the psychological, sociological and economical effects that 200 years of bondage inflicted on black, brown, and yellow men and women in American. During these 200 years, “a social system coercive as any yet known,” (Bennett, 1961, p. 70) was erected on the flimsy framework of “the most implacable race-consciousness yet observed in virtually any society.”. From the trials and triumphs of revisiting the beginning of the human drama, in which the African presence was revered and for a period of time the “only show in town,” for some 600,000 years, Africa and Africans led the world.

Civilization started in the great river valleys of Africa and Asia, in the Fertile Crescent in the Near East and along the narrow ribbon of the Nile in Africa.
In the Nile Valley, that beginning was an African as well as an Asian achievement. Negroes, or people who would be considered Negroes today, were among the first people to use tools, paint pictures, plant seeds and worship gods.

Back there, in the beginning, blackness was not an occasion for obloquy. In fact, the reverse seems to have been true. White men were sometimes ridiculed for the "unnatural whiteness of their skin."

Black people were known and honored throughout the ancient world. Ancient Ethiopia, a vaguely defined territory somewhere to the south of Egypt, was hailed as a place fit for the vacation of the gods. (Bennett, 1961, p. 5)

Towards a time in which the systematic deprivation of every right of personality and presence afforded to man has been replaced with disregard, disdain, and self-hatred of and for the African American family in general, and the African American male specifically, the rite of passage for the African American family, as well as that of the African American father over the years, has lost its value and at times been outlawed, even within the 21st century. Court judgments and social programs and policies continue to convey to fathers in general, and African American fathers young or old, that "irresponsible behavior is expected and accepted" and "your parental involvement is not needed, respected, or accepted."

Such attitudes have their prints well rooted within the legacy of slavery or enslavement, both mentally and/or physically.

The sanctity of the family was violated; children were sold from mothers and fatherhood, in effect, was outlawed. The rape of a slave woman, a Mississippi court ruled, is an offense, unknown to common or civil law. The "father of a slave," ruled a Kentucky court, "is unknown to our law."

Out of this system came the American Negro and, though some would like to forget it, the American white man, for everyone—Negro and whites, free men of color and slaves, slaveholders and non-slaveholders—was strained by it. In this system, in this back alley of American history, the American Dream was temporarily derailed for millions and fear, hate, prejudice and guilt were generated for millions more. It is not possible to
know much about the Negro or the white man unless one knows a little about those terrible two hundred years through which they came together. "The pro-slavery theory of the ante-bellum South," Gunnar Myrdal writes, "is basic to certain ideas, attitudes, and policies prevalent in all fields of human relations even at the present time." (Bennett, 1961, p. 71)

The issues identified by these young men, in terms of their experiences and perceptions of society, confirm that the historical implications of racism and discrimination continue to inflict a variety of harsh injustices on African Americans in the United States, especially on males. Being male and black has meant being psychologically castrated—rendered impotent in the economic, political, and social arenas that whites have historically dominated (Majors & Mancini-Billson, 1992).

Scores of African American men have developed survival strategies, coping mechanisms, and forms of resistance to overcome societal barriers successfully, but it must be understood that systematic forces have historically been stacked against their psychosocial development (Chestang, 1980; Hilliard, 1985; Madhubuti, 1990).

These young black males have continued to develop and refine distinctive coping mechanisms that have served to counter, at least in part, the dangers that most black males encounter on a daily basis. One method of coping is known as "cool pose." Cool pose is designed to render the black male visible and to empower him; it eases the worry and pain of blocked opportunities (Majors & Mancini-Billson, 1992). Serving as an ego booster for young black males, being cool in this fashion has been equivalent to the kind of recognition white males gain from attending good schools, landing prestigious positions, and bringing home above-average wages. Cool pose is constructed from attitudes and actions that become
firmly entrenched in the black male's psyche as he adopts a façade to ward off the anxiety of second-class status (Majors & Mancini-Billson, 1992). It provides a mask that suggests competence, high self-esteem, control, and inner strength (Majors & Mancini-Billson, 1992), while hiding the self-doubt, inner turmoil, and insecurity that, if exposed, may render the black male vulnerable.

Beginning with the slavery experience, the African American male has been an object of fear (Grier & Cobbs, 1968; Hilliard, 1985; Staples, 1978). He and his implied physical prowess and leadership ability have been perceived as a significant threat to the social order and economic power structure (Lee, 1997). Both during the era of slavery and in the succeeding decades, the American power structure has initiated various social and economic actions that have resulted in the subordination of the African American male and the virtual elimination of his masculine advantage in the larger society (Staples, 1978; Taylor, 1977). The racism inherent in such actions has operated to impede the sex role socialization of African American males and has kept them, in many instances, from realizing even the most basic aspects of masculine privilege and power, namely, life-sustaining employment and the ability to support a family (Staples, 1978).

The inner struggles for these young fathers may be protected by acting aloof, calm, emotionless, fearless, and tough. This portrayal allows the individual to convince himself that he is “somebody” and may show the dominant culture that he is strong and proud. Hidden beneath this layer of armor may be a black male scared and unsure of what his role is in society. He is a survivor, in spite of the systematic
harm done by the legacy of slavery and the realities of racial oppression, in spite of
the centuries of hardship and mistrust (Majors & Mancini-Billson, 1992).


Finally, a caution is in order concerning the degree of purity assumed to exist in the African traits to be reviewed. Because of the emotional "loading" of attitudes toward the problem under discussion, the attempt to trace Africanisms is too frequently met with the counterassertion that the Negroes of the United States are not Africans, regardless of the fact that no implication of this kind is involved. In this discussion the point of view is held that, as in all scientific inquiry, the data must be followed wherever they lead; and that an open mind on all phases of the problem must be retained until all possibilities of analysis have been exhausted. Negroes in the United States are not Africans, but they are the descendents of Africans. There is no more theoretical support for an hypothesis that they have retained nothing of the culture of their African forebears, than for supposing that they have remained completely African in their behavior. The realistic appraisal of the problem attempted here follows the hypothesis that this group, like all other folk who have maintained a group identity in this country, have retained something of their cultural heritage, while at the same time accommodating themselves, in whatever measure the exigencies of the historical situation have permitted, to the customs of the country as a whole. (Young, 1932, 1937)

For these young fathers, the barriers and doubts presented by society, community, and all too often by other Black people who have given up on them, reign supreme within their psyche and may threaten their mere existence. In our society, the terrorizing and murdering of Black people by other Black criminals may be seen as "socially understandable." Less is expected of Blacks than of Whites, which, for some, explains why it is unfair to Blacks if the criminals among them are incarcerated (Brill, 1999). Social Black leaders may have consciously or unconsciously aided in glorifying Black criminals and encouraged their belief that
they were "political prisoners." Huey Newton, Eldridge Cleaver, and Angela Davis politicized the romance of criminality, projecting the ideas that the Black criminal is a hero-victim, an unconscious revolutionary who represents the community's anger at the unfairness of society, and that the police are villains representing the brutal ruthlessness of the prejudicial order (Brill, 1999). This behavior allowed the responsibility and guilt of criminal behavior and activity to be shifted to White society and condemned middle-class Blacks for their attempts to act or be White. For this reason, counseling with African American male youth and men must be based on an understanding of the historical context in which their psychosocial development occurs (Lee, 1997).

The rapid social changes toward conformity that for years caused people of color to sacrifice their families, culture, and, in many cases, their dignity, may no longer maintain the same power it once had. Negative societal expectations and social forces have often made young Black males extremely vulnerable. Although in many instances struggles to overcome the obstacles of slave-like wages and positions and mental enslavement of "living while Black" still persist, new rules are emerging throughout and within our communities. However, some are being met with resistance and may not receive the full commitment from all members of society. Nonetheless, they are challenging the status quo and are causing an uproar within the White community, as young White boys and girls are purchasing the music, clothes, and styles of the very people once seen as criminals and "less than equal," who are now are known as the Hip Hop generation. The cultural context of
the Black experience has, however, served to nurture the socialization and psychosocial development of male youth and men, even though American society has characteristically stifled the expression of African American manhood (Lee, 1997). Nowhere is this more evident than within the African American community where identity development and a “sense of existence” has galvanized a people whose rich culture and history was blatantly removed and retaught to them in a way that would ensure that they would think less of themselves, and who developed a dependency attitude and, in most cases, hated themselves and those who looked like them. According to African American scholars, African American cultural experience has a positive relationship with optimal mental health and psychosocial development for men and male youth (Akbar, 1991; Crawley & Freeman, 1993; Hare & Hare, 1985; Lee, 1997; Majors & Mancini-Billson, 1992; Oliver, 1989) because African American male development and socialization is enhanced in a cultural environment characterized by rudimentary African- and African-American-oriented philosophical assumptions. These assumptions constitute cultural traditions among African Americans that place a high premium on kinship, cooperation, mutual respect, commitment, and spirituality (Lee, 1997).

The assumptions have thus contributed to the development of positive attitudes, values, and behaviors among African Americans, often despite the social pressure of racism and oppression in the larger American society (Lee, 1997). Significantly, from an early age, African American males are generally socialized into these cultural traditions—the foundation for optimal African American male
socialization and mental health—in the home and larger African American community (Allen, 1981; Barnes, 1991; Crawley & Freeman, 1993; Lee, 1997; Majors & Mancini-Billson, 1992; Staples, 1983). The psychosocial development that is derived from these traditions often forms the meanings that assist African American males in interpreting the larger American social milieu.

Conclusion 5: Environmental experiences with relationships and family may influence how young African American males regard parenting and marriage.

Interviews indicated that environmental experiences involving relationships and family influenced how these young men perceived women, sex, parenthood, and the institution of marriage. Consistently these young fathers reported having some form of relationship with their offspring, but they admitted they were not actively involved nor were they seeking any significant relationship with the mother of their child. Only two of the fathers (20%) indicated that they had interest in furthering their relationship towards marriage with the mother of their child.

For many of these young fathers, a continuous circularity of the causes of negative events in their short lives has made relationships (especially with women) more difficult for them to envision beyond the immediate sexual gratification, with no sentiment or understanding of the long-term implications of childbirth. From school enrollment and attendance, to gangs, to neighborhood conditions, to “family” systems, to employment opportunities, to police, to parental responsibility, to anything related to the justice system—young Black males have seen these entities as nonsupportive at best, or even as hostile and destructive. These negative
environments and social constraints have led to the deterioration of the family unit, as hostility, rebellion, and aggression for material goods and resources have become catalysts for despair within the African American community.

The destruction of the African American was accomplished by destroying marriage, fatherhood, and motherhood (Akbar, 1984). Frederick Douglass, born in slavery in 1817, when reflecting on his family experience wrote in his autobiography:

The reader must not expect me to say much of my family. My first experience of life, as I now remember it, . . . began in the family of my grandmother and grandfather. . . . The practice of separating mothers from their children and hiring them out at distances too great to admit of their meeting, save at long intervals, was a marked feature of the cruelty and barbarity of the slave system. . . . It had no interest in recognizing or preserving any of the ties that bind families together or to their homes.

My grandmother's five daughters [one of whom was my mother] were hired out in this way, and my only recollections of my own mother are of a few hasty visits made in the night on foot, after the daily tasks were over, and when she was under the necessity of returning in time to respond to the . . . call to the field in early morning.

Of my father I know nothing. Slavery had no recognition of fathers . . .

Old master . . . only allowed the little children to live with grandmother for a limited time; . . . as soon as they were big enough they were promptly taken away . . .

The time came when I must go. . . . I was seven years old.

(Douglass, 1962, pp. 27–33)

Booker T. Washington, born in slavery in 1858 or 1859, presented a similar statement of family separation:

I was born in a typical log cabin. . . . In this cabin I lived with my mother and a brother and sister till after the Civil War, when we were all declared free. Of my ancestry I know almost nothing. . . . I have been unsuccessful in securing any information that would throw any accurate light upon the history of my family beyond my mother. . . . In the days of slavery not very
much attention was given to family history and family records—that is, Black family records. Of my father I know even less than of my mother, I do not even know his name. (Washington, 1965, pp. 15-16)

My mother’s husband, who was the stepfather of my brother John and myself, did not belong to the same owner as did my mother. In fact, he seldom came to our plantation. I remember seeing him there perhaps once a year, that being about Christmas time. (Washington, 1965, p. 3)

While battered but unbroken, the Black family has stood the test of time. The most remarkable accomplishment of the Black family is that despite the family breakups resulting from the internal slave trade, it has survived and grown stronger over the years. During the first part of the century, a vast majority of Black children, like the majority of White children, lived in families with both parents. Despite or because of the Civil Rights Movement, dramatic changes have occurred to the Black family unit since the 1980s. Now 83% of births to Black teenagers are illegitimate, and more than half of all Aid to Families with Dependent Children goes to women who are or were teenage mothers (Brill, 1999). M. Lansky, in his book Fathers Who Fail, has convincingly identified the failure of fathers as one of the cardinal issues facing America today, where alternate family styles are advocated and defended (Los Angeles Times, 1992, p. B7).

Getting researchers to study the Black family as a social institution on its own terms remains difficult. White social scientists such as Jerold Heiss and Daniel Moynihan have presented the case against the Black (Willie, 1991). Some social scientists have tried to explain the higher proportion of broken families among Blacks than among Whites as a direct outgrowth of slave experience (Willie, 1991). For example, Andrew Billingsley stated:
The slave system had a crippling effect on the establishment, maintenance, and growth of normal patterns of family life among Negro people. . . . This crippled the development not only of individual slaves, but of families, and hence of the whole society of Negro people. . . . The consequences these conditions wrought for Negroes under the slave system were direct and insidious. The consequences for succeeding and even modern generations of Negroes are, perhaps, less direct, but no less insidious. (Billingsley, 1968, pp. 68–69)

Today the struggles faced by the Black family have increased, involving drugs, AIDS, Black-on-Black crime, divorce, family discord, unemployment, and even health concerns due to poor diets, maintenance, or stressful environments. Both Blacks and Whites suffer from high rates of unemployment and poverty, and such economic instability is highly correlated with marital instability (Hill, 1981).

For young fathers looking at the prospect of dealing with these added stressors beyond what they have experienced at a young age, fatherhood and marriage seldom appear very attractive. The rise of divorce and illegitimacy has been a major disaster to the welfare of children. In the United States as a whole, just from 1960 to 1990, the percentage of births outside of marriage rose from 5.3% to 28%; divorced males per 100,000 males increased from 27.4% to 112.5%; male prisoners per 1,000 males grew from 230% to 574%; and children living apart from their fathers rose from 17.5% to 36.3% (Blankenhorn, 1995).

Ronald Brownstein, of the Los Angeles Times, writes that the new census report underscores the futility of talking about poverty without addressing the responsibility of men and women to jointly support the families they create. 13.7 percent of Americans remain in poverty but only 5.6 percent of married couples are poor. In these, with only one partner working full-time, no matter how menial the job, just 1.8 percent are poor. In contrast one-third of
families headed by a single woman are poor. It suggests that the poverty crisis is related to the decline of the two-parent family. In 1976, approximately 16 percent of families were headed by a single parent. Now the figure is nearly 25 percent. The impact on Black families is especially great with the majority of these families headed by a single parent—mostly women. Black families with two parents have an income that is 84 percent of what White couples earn (cited in Brill, 1999).

Coming from an ancestral background in which the foundation of a man’s mere existence was that of his family, the Black male’s relationships have become distorted and damaged. Others have reacted negatively toward those Black men who have worked to get out of the “hood,” saying that their inclusion and participation in mainstream activities is “soft,” that they have “forgotten where they came from” or that they have “sold out to the establishment,” which has often led these men to feel lost. Wanting to offer their family a better life than they may have had is a noble act for these young fathers, but being Black has frequently resulted in some form of punishment or alienation within the community in which they were raised. Confusion, acceptance, ignorance, fear, and alienation are often on the horizon for those young fathers who may be fortunate to relocate their family to better environments (i.e., suburban community), as is often experienced by more prominent Black males and their families with whom they have sought refuge. The myth that money can bring happiness has resulted in many young women, both Black and White, from across all economic strata being taught to secure a man who can offer “security” or “the finer things in life.” This has influenced many young Black men to work (often unsuccessfully) towards accumulating wealth and material
possessions out of fear that, without them, they will be unable to compete for the attention of women or satisfy their materialistic appetite.

Relationships have become more of a competition for time and interest of another party as opposed to an institution of love, affection, and devotion that may ultimately lead to a union of marriage. The need for attention, whether it be through material possessions, alternative lifestyles, interracial dating, or inappropriate sexual behavior, has continued to erect a barrier between Black male–female relationships within the African American community and has staged a war on families.

These variables have caused many of these young Black fathers to experience difficulty in disclosing their deepest feelings, even with those with whom they are expected to be the closest: good friends, brothers and sisters, mothers, fathers, girlfriends, and children. Their belief that they must keep their guard up with White people makes it nearly impossible to let their guard down for the people they care about and who care about them. The masking of true feelings for young Black males interferes with their ability to establish strong bonds with family, children, and friends. Unfortunately for the Black male who constantly puts himself under pressure to prove his manhood and simultaneously is unable to show or discuss his feelings and fears, the risk is very high for Black-on-Black crime, especially assault and homicide (Majors & Mancini-Billson, 1992). These pent-up emotions of frustration and disappointment often explode into aggressive acts (i.e., domestic violence, rape, homicide, suicide, theft) against those who are closest in his daily life—other Black people. Results include educational underachievement,
unemployment, delinquency, substance abuse, homicide, and incarceration in disproportionate numbers (Cordes, 1985; Gibbs, 1988). The pervasive nature of this inability or difficulty in communication may result in tragic consequences for young Black fathers’ relationships with males and females, Black and White.

**Conclusion 6:** Outside sources and experiences greatly influence one’s self-regard. However, when others fail to invest in the lives of African American males in general, and young African American males specifically, particularly in terms of their cognitive development, self-regard is often lost.

For many of these young fathers, acceptance and respect is desired more within the environment in which they reside than from the community at large. Society has far too often indoctrinated African American male youth with the belief that their future is limited to athletics, entertainment, prison, or the morgue (Cordes, 1985; Gibbs, 1988; Jones, 1986). Their world may encompass a small area in which growth and development may be strengthened or hindered by their approach to everyday experiences. The expectations of poor academic performance, drug use, violence, teenage fatherhood, and disrespect for authority, in many instances, become self-fulfilling prophecies for young African American males (Lee, 1997). Considerable evidence suggests that a student’s performance in an academic setting is influenced in both subtle and obvious ways by his concept of self (Brookover et al., 1965; Purkey, 1970; Santrock, 1970; Zimmerman & Allenbrand, 1965). Many of these secondary responses are often reactions to seldom-considered negative environmental stressors encountered by these young Black fathers. These
environmental stressors include cultural insensitivity and a generally oppressive system that fears the empowerment of African American male youth (J. M. Patton, 1995).

**Learning the Game**

Very little has been written concerning the self-concept of Black adolescent boys or how they perceive themselves when their fathers are absent from or present in the home (Alston & Williams, 1982). For many of these young Black males, learning how to use posing and posturing to communicate power, toughness, detachment, and style is often more important to their survival than anything learned from a book. Cultivating a keen sense of what to say, as well as knowing when and how to say it, may prevent punishment and pain and may even enhance their life chances within society.

According to J. M. Patton (1995), the responses of African American male youth to these stressors have been identified as dysfunctional cultural adaptations and can include fathering a child out of wedlock, disrespecting women, and adopting a macho image. These functional and immediate reactions to systematic insensitive stimuli may result in a young male's attempt to attain manhood, without an understanding of why or a realization of the possible self-destructive outcomes.
Stages of Survival Start Now

Theorists and researchers have suggested that major aspects of human development unfold in a series of life stages and are influenced by both heredity and environment (Erikson, 1950; Havighurst, 1972; Kolberg, 1966; Piaget, 1970). Mastery of a series of developmental tasks is essential for individuals as they proceed through the life stages. Mastery of tasks at one stage influences similar results in subsequent stages. Conversely, failure to master developmental tasks at a stage may have negative connotations in later stages.

For young African American males, successfully completing these early developmental stages and tasks has often been problematic due to a complex set of historical and social factors (Lee, 1997). In many instances, these factors interact in such a manner that African American male youth are forced to deal with additional developmental tasks in their psychosocial development (Crawley & Freeman, 1993). For these young fathers, such tasks are most directly influenced by race, ethnicity, and culture and are often negatively impacted by the convergence of environmental forces (Lee, 1997; Madhubuti, 1990; Majors & Mancini-Billson, 1992), including extreme environmental stress in home, community, or school during the crucial early years of life (Hilliard, 1985; Myers & King, 1980). Successful completion of developmental tasks can, for example, be hampered by school experiences marked by ineffective teaching strategies, as well as educators' predetermined negative views of African American male youth and their learning potential (Lee, 1997; Washington & Lee, 1982). Thus, instead of developing the sense of industry that
comes with mastering fundamental skills in reading, writing, and computing during the all-important elementary school years, many young African American male students experience a sense of frustration with the teaching-learning process, which lays the groundwork for future academic and social failure (Lee, 1997).

Because African American male youth are often prevented from mastering both the crucial universal and race-specific developmental tasks in childhood and adolescence, this lack of mastery negatively influences their academic, career, and social success in the later stages of life (Lee, 1994, 1997). It is not unusual, therefore, for African American males to reach adolescence with a basic mistrust of their environment, doubts about their abilities, and confusion about their place in the social structure (Lee, 1997). For these young Black fathers, developing an identity and self-regard during the crucial boyhood-to-manhood transition of the adolescent years becomes extremely problematic.

**Conclusion 7: Obstacles and barriers persist for men in general, and for African American males specifically, particularly those created by a lack of services and programs to assess and address their needs.**

A common but alarming theme recurring in these young fathers’ statements was the admission that they had no awareness of any services available to them. The researcher felt helpless as he observed the faces of these young Black fathers, whose futures are increasingly jeopardized by each added barrier. Similar to other animal species, Black males struggle for existence within the context of their social and physical environment. Although much has been written about counseling men in
recent years, very little literature has focused on specific issues of counseling with African American men in general, and young African American males specifically. The literature has suggested that, although there are issues common to counseling all men (Moore & Leafgren, 1990; Scher, Stevens, Good, & Eichenfield, 1987), the unique psychological and social pressures on African American men make mental health intervention with this client group particularly challenging (Gary, 1985; Gary & Berry, 1985; Jones & Gay, 1982, 1983; Lee, 1990; Washington, 1987). In order for these young Black fathers to receive the services needed for a smooth transition into fatherhood, a framework must be developed for issues pertinent to their needs that will aid in creating policies and programs. These include racism, problems of aggression and control, cultural alienation, self-esteem, dependency, and help-seeking attitudes and behaviors (Gary, 1985; Gary & Berry, 1985; Jones & Gay, 1982, 1983).

An argument can be made regarding the variations in the responses from the young fathers regarding their awareness or experience with service programs. One argument can be attributed to the amount of responsibility that existed on the young fathers’ side in terms of seeking services. The possibility of “history lessons” obtained from fathers, young or old, in similar situations that often reported negative or debilitating outcomes could easily serve as motive for their reluctance. In addition, being too proud to acknowledge their limitations and the need for additional services or resources often beyond their families’ capabilities might pose external as well as internal questions regarding their manhood and fatherhood.
Appearing incapable of addressing even the basic needs of their offspring may begin from experiences with the mother of their child, her parents and support systems, or even the young father’s family. For a young male and specifically a Black male, the existing stereotypes regarding his parental responsibilities and capabilities are often consciously or unconsciously placed under a microscope. Even for the most successful fathers who have the financial abilities to provide for the needs of their child(ren), there isn’t always a guarantee that involvement, acceptance, or the opportunity to play an active role in child-rearing will be welcomed or even allowed.

It is important to understand that in order to understand African American males, one must first accept and appreciate the significant differences in their socioeconomic status, traditions and cultures, educational attainment and interest, lifestyles, and value orientations. However, all African American men share the common reality of racism (Gary, 1985; Gary & Berry, 1985; Jones & Gay, 1983). Young Black males’ responses to stressors may vary, depending on their background and upbringing, but the persistence of this oppressive dynamic significantly impacts the quality of life for African American men and should be considered a significant factor in both problem etiology and counseling intervention (Gary, 1985; Gary & Berry, 1985; Jones & Gay, 1983). Black males, traditionally, struggle to reach out for services, perhaps in fear of the stigma attached by family, peers, or service providers. The existing barriers, as perceived by young Black fathers, render most Black males powerless and limited in what they can offer outside of the masculine roles defined by the majority. This is evident in the way
most Black males deal with their problems. African American men often find nontraditional counseling, however, within community kinship networks (Taylor & Chatters, 1991). Seeking trusted friends or family members, rather than a professional counselor, for problem resolution or decision-making is not uncommon. African American males may also obtain guidance from a minister or other religious leader and typically have found nontraditional counseling services from fraternal/social organizations, barbershops, local taverns, or community centers where male social activities are likely to occur. The resistant attitude towards counseling may be a defensive mechanism among many African American males (Majors & Nikelly, 1983; Vontress, 1971, 1995). Because they generally consider counseling to be conducted by agents of a system that has rendered them virtually powerless, the counseling process can be seen as just one more infringement on African American manhood (Lee, 1990).

**Conclusion 8:** A healthy self-regard is influenced by the presence and involvement of a father or father figure in the lives of young men in general, and young Black men specifically.

The literature reveals that the conception an individual forms of himself is usually acquired through socialization (Alston & Williams, 1982). For the young fathers interviewed, though involvement varied, most continued to hold their fathers in high regard. Despite the negative images of paternal involvement that they inherited from media portrayals, most of the fathers attempted or desired to replicate some of the fun childhood memories they experienced with their father. What an
individual acquires depends largely on the kind of personalities he is associated with, the culture in which his activities are patterned, what important persons in the environment think of him, what their attitudes are toward him, and who those important persons of the environment are (Jersild, 1952, 1953). There is much evidence to support the view that the father is one of those important persons (Cavin, 1959; Dai, 1953; Jourad, 1957; Kardiner & Oversey, 1971; Kuhn & McPartland, 1954; Lynn & Sawrey, 1959; Smith & Suinn, 1965; Wylie, 1961). Thus, when the father is absent from the home, it is highly likely that the children, especially the boys, will experience some damage (Blanchard & Biller, 1972; Kvaraceus, Gibson, Patterson, Seasholes, & Grambs, 1964). The majority of the young fathers stated early in the interview that, although they maintained a relationship with their biological father, they wanted to be more involved in the lives of their children than their father had been with them. It was remarkable just how highly many of them viewed their own fathers, regardless of the lifestyle or choices they may have made in their own lives. Anger, hurt, or feelings of abandonment were often masked by their thankfulness in knowing of a father who existed. Because they had friends or partners who had no relationship with or knowledge of their biological fathers, those who knew of their father and maintained some type of relationship felt relief—that their plight or their misfortunes were not as severe as others they knew. In most Black families to which these young fathers were exposed, a father living in the home was rare.
This perception of maladaptive behavior existing only in Black families was presented in the 1965 report, *The Negro Family*, in which Daniel Patrick Moynihan states, “The white family, despite many variants, remains a powerful agency . . .” (Moynihan, 1965, p. 35). Despite the fact that the same could be said about Black families, no conclusions were drawn. Moynihan declared that “white children without fathers at least perceive all about them the pattern of men working” (Moynihan, 1965, p. 35). Again, conclusions that the same could be said of Black children did not occur. What Moynihan did conclude without producing comparative evidence was that “Negro children without fathers flounder and fail” (Moynihan, 1965, p. 35). Implications that White children without father involvement do not flounder and fail has been a common theme.

**Building a Case Against Father Absence**

As with the plight of Black families and fathers, the stereotype that there is no pathology among White families and fathers, rich or poor, must be corrected. The case against the Black male is being prosecuted in the mass media, with White public opinion serving as both judge and jury and some Blacks participating as accusatory witnesses (Willie, 1991). Failure to document the majority of Black male involvement in the lives of their children continues to have long-term implications as to how Black males are portrayed in Black communities, where the vast amount of their lives are spent. For many rural, suburban, or isolated families, television is the sole contact with the inner city and the barometer used to measure “life in the
outside world." As a result, ignorance and assumptions persist in terms of Black families and Black male involvement in the lives of their children and families. Poor White men are as likely to project their frustrations on poor White women by means of violent behavior as are the poor in any other population (Willie, 1991). Despite novels, newspaper articles, and television documentaries about poor Blacks, comparative social science data indicate that pathology and maladaptive behavior are not limited to poor Black men (Willie, 1991). The reality is that no limitations can be placed on any racial group or social class category. Whites, like Blacks of all class levels, including the affluent and the poor, have their share of pathology (Willie, 1991).

Through the years, some interest has been shown in the effects of paternal involvement, yet interest in the topic still lags far behind that shown for women, and when race is added to the variable, interest in Black paternal involvement is even more limited. In some studies, the focus has been on White women, yet researchers have attempted to show that father involvement in the lives of these women had significant effects. For example, in a study of White women who had reached top management positions in business and industry, recognition was given to father influence and involvement in their lives. The researchers discovered that successful White women in business and industry "had extremely close relationships with their fathers" (Henning & Jardim, 1976, p. 99). These high-achieving daughters had fathers who took them places, taught them athletic skills, praised them, encouraged them, and instructed them never to let others impose limits on their level of
achievement (Henning & Jardim, 1976). These successful women had fathers who believed they could do much more than other women had done in the past, just as successful men have had mothers who believed that they could succeed (Willie, 1991).

Black to Black Relationships

Though many articles that discuss the stresses of Black male–Black female relationships often pit the two groups against each other, perhaps with severe consequences on subsequent paternal relationships, others discredit the notion that there is competition between the two groups. Editor Susan Taylor said, “The reality is that there is a war on Black people in America,” and that neither Black men nor Black women should “buy into the myth” that one or the other is enjoying some kind of privilege (Willie, 1991). Taylor concluded that the myth has been cultivated as a way to further pit Black men and women against each other (Reynolds, 1985). Young Black males, since birth, have been exposed to portrayals of Black males as those who have no aspirations of attending college; of becoming a professor, politician, attorney, or doctor; or of attaining a high position in “corporate America.” Instead, they are characterized as experiencing high rates of unemployment, violence, crime, and incarceration. Often they are portrayed through popular television shows such as “COPS” as those who hang around the street, sell drugs, and get into trouble, which ultimately is the leading cause of an unbroken cycle of poverty and little upward social mobility. What these young Black males
need is a male figure in their lives. Unless a stable and supportive system is consistently in place, emphasizing "self-help" in collaboration with male models (i.e., grandfathers, stepfathers, mothers' boyfriends, teachers, coaches, religious leaders, or social activity leaders, commonly known as part of the extended family), the obstacles and struggles faced by many young Black males may become too overwhelming for them to overcome alone. A system that allows older adult men, Black or White, to invest in the lives of these young Black fathers will result when older men recognize the need to share with others what they have learned from their own experiences. They must also be willing to acknowledge that injustices continue, which ultimately will move them beyond merely empathizing or sympathizing with young Black males over the barriers that exist in their lives.

Conclusion 9: Society continues to lag behind in terms of adequately identifying and addressing the needs of African American males.

Many investigators approach the study of the Black family today with predetermined, and often stereotypical and inflexible, attitudes (Willie, 1991). Most of the attention given to the Black family focuses on the plight of the poor, which represents only one sector of the Black population and is not representative of the whole. The information often reported regarding Black families has primarily focused on low-income and working-class communities. Even when this error is not made, the Black family is described as a deviant adaptation of an "ideal type"—the family form that allegedly exists among most Whites. The problems faced by Black families in general, and Black males specifically, go well beyond those of White
attitudes. The higher incidence of out-of-wedlock births among Blacks is attributed to a more culturally permissive and tolerant attitude towards premarital sex and out-of-wedlock pregnancy associated with their lower socioeconomic status (*American Medical News*, 1984). Society needs to take a hard look at the messages these young men receive from portrayals of them as inadequate fathers and men, who have grown up surrounded by poverty, violence, crime, and dependence on welfare. In order to impact the problems that persist in the lives of these young Black fathers, changes in values regarding sexual activities must occur in society, including in the schools, family, religious organizations, government, and the media. Failure to provide age-appropriate education, both in the home and at school; irresponsible presentation of sex in the media; and poverty explain, in part, the higher rates of pregnancy and STDs in the United States as compared to other Western countries (Brill, 1999).

Self-Help

A persistent misunderstanding is that African Americans are asking for “dependency” allocations to overcome the existing discrepancies that have harmed their communities. Resources and programs that stimulate and enable “self-helping” ventures are most valuable, particularly when they ensure that opportunities exist for creating, producing, and marketing products that will result in fair and adequate compensation. The “self-help” tradition is so embedded in the Black heritage that it is virtually synonymous with it (Franklin & Norton, 1986). The idea of “self-help”
not only could stimulate the economy (some would argue that it would have limited impact) but would also teach behaviors and provide further educational opportunities for young Black and White children.

For years, the contributions of Black scholars and inventors have been minimized or absent from history books. Some practices, such as identifying an inventor by name only, without a face, or portraying Cleopatra VIII as White, have subtly minimized the contributions that have been made to the world as we know it. Such subtlety has often led us (including this author, in reflecting on his own childhood experience) to believe or assume that White people have always ruled the world and are responsible for all of its accomplishments. The author can recall from personal experiences and observations, well into adulthood, the excitement, interest, and pride that overcomes people of color when learning of the accomplishments of a Black pioneer, inventor, or scholar. The impact of such knowledge on children of all races may be profound. Discriminatory statements in or omissions from textbooks continue to be covertly or overtly encouraged by primarily White, middle-to-upper-class district and state school board leaders and federal-level policymakers. The information provided to children is filtered through such actions, resulting in the miseducation of Black people. Without assistance from the larger society, and often in spite of resistance from society, self-initiated efforts have, for Blacks, flourished and found expression throughout the history of this country. Recognition of these efforts, on the other hand, has always been the problem. The tradition of building institutions and initiating efforts, both to defend and to advance themselves within a
hostile society, has long been a hallmark of Black American life (Franklin & Norton, 1986). In the decades following the Civil War, Black Americans often donated the land, built the schools, and paid the teachers when city and country governments refused to provide schools for them (Franklin & Norton, 1986).

The concept of “self-help” was later identified in the work of prominent Black leaders, including Booker T. Washington, in Black higher education, in the Black churches, and throughout many Black-led organizations that stressed the value of education, thrift, enterprise, advancement, family/community, and the dignity of labor. Some of the earliest pioneering organizations that offered assistance were The National Business League, the Tuskegee Farmers Conference, and the National Association of Colored Women. At the same time, the tradition of self-improvement found a different but equally profound expression in the philosophy of W. E. B. DuBois, who believed that education was critical, not only to Black social and economic advancement but also to political freedom (Franklin & Norton, 1986).

**Educating the Black Boy**

Education that teaches young Black men how to deal with racism and how to “love thyself” must begin at the preschool and elementary level. Black male educators can serve as father figures and male models to the young during the impressionable stages of the preschool and elementary years. Summer programs that incorporate athletic prowess with fundamental tools needed to improve the...
community are scarce. The exploitation of these young Black fathers contributes to their irresponsibility and perpetuates the idea that even high-profile entertainers promote—that frequent or infrequent financial contributions and visits may be sufficient to demonstrate fatherly or manly behavior. A warning was issued by William Haskins, Director of Human Services of the National Urban League, regarding the increasing numbers of teenage pregnancies and fatherless families threatening Black advancement. Black communities with a high incidence of teen pregnancy and a culture of drugs and crime were encouraged to strongly reject these influences. In a study of Black teenage pregnancies across the country, Haskins, like many others, found a strong correlation between the single-parent family and child abuse, truancy, substandard achievement in school, high unemployment, and juvenile delinquency (Brill, 1999). Fatherless boys were involved heavily in crime, and Black teenagers seemed unaware of the long-term consequences of their actions (Brill, 1999).

The origins of and changes in family life and sexual conduct are important areas for young Black fathers to study, but we cannot wait for a few scholars to provide answers, or for a few allocated dollars to make a difference. While only one tenth of White Americans are poor today, more than one third of Blacks are trapped in poverty, many with only dim prospects for escape (Franklin & Norton, 1986). The influx of single-parent female-headed households has produced even more complaints, and the continued funneling of dollars into programs has proven to be merely a “band aid” to the real problem—the struggles within and around the
concepts of family and the family unit. These struggles have steered males and females, particularly in the Black community, further away from "unions" and more towards "financial providers" and "donors." Although in the South out-of-wedlock births and teen pregnancies are common, southern families tend to be fairly stable, extended families, and a religious culture provides some continuity to the Black family experience. In the northern cities, however, the situation is often different, with less influence from the church and the absence of community life. For Black families to survive, not only must they save their young Black daughters, but a collective and persistent attack must be undertaken to save their young Black sons from social, economical, psychological, and judicial systems that do not have a primary interest in these young men.

Pulling Families Together

The conditions associated with the profound urban poverty among Blacks—declining male labor force participation, very high rates of out-of-wedlock births and female-headed households, a high level of welfare dependency, poor educational performance, and high crime rates—inevitably prompt questions about the character and role of values in the Black community (Franklin & Norton, 1986). A return to African tradition and culture may be of value to people of color in general, and to society as a whole. The African tradition emphasized community and kept families together; it also enabled the enslaved to look to ancestral spirits and higher powers for direction and salvation in order to survive and progress as a people. For
example, commitment to the family historically has been one of the most powerful forces in Black life (Franklin & Norton, 1986). First as slaves, then as sharecroppers and farmers, and finally as urban workers, Blacks have always embraced a strong family ethic as central to their lives, and the great majority have managed to maintain strong, intact families, often in the face of enormous adversity (Franklin & Norton, 1986). The extended family, for example, has been a valuable asset for many Black families, providing a means of coping with special pressures and hardships, while for others it has been a means of sustaining tradition. Throughout African American history, the existence of the extended family has been widespread, and it has been crucial to the survival of the family.

Change Is Amongst Us

Although many will agree that slavery has left an enduring imprint on Black family life and particularly the Black male, and has provided an ancestral history that has been instrumental in developing the very foundation of America as we know it today, few can refute the idea that the plight of Black males and Black families continues to result in numerous casualties. Actually, Black men, along with Black women, have contributed to a revolutionary practice in family relations in this nation (Willie, 1991), and similar to other contributions Blacks have made, the source of this practice has been ignored or has remained invisible. It is evident that changes in equality and representation within the family during the 1980s and 1990s have profoundly altered the characteristics of both Black and White families in the
United States. In fact, some conditions that once dominated the literature as evidence of the unique family disorganization within the Black community are increasing at extremely rapid rates in the White community (Blackwell, 1991). For instance, in 1990, more White women were represented in the labor force than Black women, increasing the need for alternative child care arrangements. In addition, the battered wife syndrome and child abuse are no longer the exclusive domain of the Black working class (Blackwell, 1991). Changes and opportunities in educational endeavors within and outside of marital unions and in single-headed households have drawn more White females towards patterns of behavior characteristically reserved for Black families. The White teenage pregnancy rate is showing a steady, significant upturn, while the Black teenage pregnancy rate is decreasing (even though the Black teenage pregnancy rate is still alarmingly higher), and the highest increase in female-headed households during the decade of the 1970s was for college educated women (Blackwell, 1991). Many White females are choosing to keep their children born out of wedlock, just as most Black women have done under similar circumstances (Hill, 1983).

In order to fully understand the plight of Black fathers and the systems they encounter, it is necessary to examine the degree to which other factors contribute to the changing characteristics of both Black and White families. Black, in general, have demonstrated great resiliency over many years with respect to the magnitude of American racism. Relentless discrimination and prejudice have contributed to the ineffectiveness of Black men in maintaining and sustaining viable family units. Black
men have displayed resilience at times, as demonstrated by the contributions made for the betterment of society, and at other times they have succumbed to racial hostility and discrimination within the American society, as is evidenced by numerous incarcerations and deaths. Unemployment, lack of access, and opportunities have led to relational discord within the home and workplace, contributing to the creation of an "angry Black man" with survival attitudes. Access, opportunities, and wealth have, for some, cracked the "glass ceiling" that has persisted for centuries, although casualties for the vast majority continue to rise. However, since the unemployment rate for Blacks is usually twice that of Whites (even higher in some cities); and since the Black teenage unemployment rate is three times that of White teenagers; and since Blacks are more likely to be relegated to the lower tier of the split-labor market, making a fraction of the wages paid to White workers, it should be expected that Blacks are doubly impacted by those factors associated with family instability (Blackwell, 1991).

Discussion

The findings of this study alluded to the existence of gender and racial discrimination against Black males in general, and young Black fathers specifically. It is worth noting that the sample obtained for this study consisted of young fathers from working-class and low-income families and therefore should not be generalized to the entire population of unmarried African American adolescent fathers in the same age group. According to Banks (1987), the discrepancy between espoused
democratic and egalitarian principles and actual social conditions exists largely because “dominant ethnic and cultural groups develop ideologies to defend their attitudes, goals, and social structures” (p. 537). Among other things, these ideologies justify existing discrepancies in the distribution of vital resources (Houser, 1996). Similar accounts of discriminatory practices and the barriers they created were consistently described by the young Black fathers throughout the interviews. These practices and barriers served to limit or isolate these young Black males from social, psychological, and economic resources, effectively hindering their ability to be productive and contributing members of society. At the same time, such barriers created a hostile environment for these unmarried adolescent African American fathers. Hence, the ideology of the dominant culture “legitimize[s] its control over the life chances of subordinate ethnocultural groups” (Bullivant, 1986, p. 103).

Although racism and discrimination are very sensitive topics within the literature as well as throughout society, substantial inquiry and further studies are needed to facilitate discussion. Researchers need to examine the lives of Black fathers and the families with whom they live from their perspective, as well as the effects of a mental enslavement that originated in the history of slavery. According to Annie Barnes (1983), studies often conducted on lower income and working class communities of Black families emphasize matrifocality, a concept describing domestic units dominated by females. Barnes said, “This is a type of family among [some] lower-class Black families in which [the man in the house] appears to be
unsuited for steady employment" (Barnes, 1983, p. 55). The error in most studies of Black families, Barnes asserts, is “the phenomenon of lumping all Blacks together and sometimes comparing them with the White middle class” (Barnes, 1983, p. 56). The environments described by most of these young fathers were limited or lacking available resources and systems to stimulate education, entrepreneurism, or advancement beyond generational and environmental stimuli. Such an environment has generated cycles of dependency and poverty, especially mental poverty. Mental poverty refers to a mental dependency on others, namely White individuals or entities (a result of a lack of trust in other Black leaders and professionals or the assumption that they are incompetent or powerless), to purchase, sell, guide, or provide a service to those who may be uneducated or ignorant of their privileges and rights.

The institution of slavery continues to present an ugly portrait of society both mentally and physically. Although slavery was “legally” ended over 100 years ago, more than 300 years of experienced brutality and unnaturalness continue to inflict a severe psychological and social shock on the minds of African Americans in general, and young Black males specifically. Because this shock has been so destructive to natural life processes, the current generation of African Americans, though five to six generations removed from the actual experience of slavery, still bears the scars of this experience in both their social and mental lives (Akbar, 1984). The persistent problems in their mental and social lives that are deeply rooted in the legacy of slavery remain an area which many psychologists and sociologists fail to
fully address. Only the historian has given proper attention to the shattering realities of slavery, and he has dealt with it only as a description of past events (Akbar, 1984).

Clark (1972) observed that most social scientists would object to a discussion of slavery as a "cause" of contemporary behavior because it happened "too long ago." While segments of our society believe that they bear no responsibility for the millions upon millions of lost lives, both mental and physically, they also struggle to deal with the personal and societal guilt, objections, and anguish associated with the history of segregation, oppression, and slavery, as its story continues to unfold. Clark identified the origin of this objection in 19th century conceptions of science, articulated by the British philosophers Locke and Hume, and practiced by the scientific gain, Isaac Newton. Clark observed:

In the Newtonian scheme of things, "a body at rest remains at rest unless acted upon by some external force." The behavior (movement) of things was thought to be the consequence of some antecedent and external event. . . . Newtonian conceptions of absolute time and space have so conditioned many of us that it is impossible for us to conceive of events that have occurred "long in the past" (e.g., slavery) as having as much effect in determining present behavior as those events of relatively "recent" occurrence.

The argument posed by Clark, an activist, and some scholars is that the history of slavery has shaped the mentality of the present-day African American and society at large, more than any other single event.
Divided We Stand

The effects of racism, as often seen today, have further alienated, divided, and angered both the perpetrators and the victims throughout history. Shortly after World War II, the word *racism* emerged in the literature dealing with race, racial prejudice, and prejudicial beliefs.

The Nazis' experience brought this word into use and, with it, confusion. The Nazis, as racists, had been racist against Jews, in particular, but also against Slavic and Black people, homosexuals, and gypsies. The Jews had been White, the Slavs had been White, and Black people had been Black. Yet the Nazis treated them all in a racist fashion. This meant that racism cut across race. But the literature did not significantly pick up on this larger understanding, because the word *racism* immediately became used interchangeably with the word *race*, and phrases like *race prejudice, racial beliefs,* or *racial discrimination,* which could be seen rendered in the literature as *racist discrimination.* Another way of saying what had occurred is that the word *racism* not only became associated almost exclusively with race, but specifically with the White race and the Black race in America, with White people being the racists and Black or Black people being the victims. The more expansive view of racism was not seen, or not seen clearly by people and, effectively, lost.

In Black America, the understanding of race and negative racial practices against Blacks was related directly to the question of leadership and its appropriateness or legitimacy, to the power of individuals or groups, to various kinds of monetary rewards—governmental grants, salaries, donations, or scholarships—or to ameliorative, corrective, or progressive social programs, public or private. The word *racism,* when it came into use, was not associated with any of these things. But when Blacks took on that word, they quickly associated it with race, and all the things that race stood for or that were associated with race in Black life, from leadership legitimacy to corrective, liberating social programs. It is doubtful that this co-opting was done consciously or even selfishly. It occurred primarily because of a traditional understanding and a long-standing historical practice of thinking and acting on race, which meant that it mainly occurred in an unconscious fashion among Blacks. (Wright, 1998, pp. 20–21)

This idea led to beliefs and social behaviors that subjugated individuals to conform and often caused some sense of self-hatred for African Americans. This
self-hatred, provided through the educational institutions and shown uncensored throughout the world via print and visual media, ensured the oppressors that confusion, alienation, segregation, and conformity would prevail.

At no point in time is there an attempt to attribute all behavior of African Americans to one singular cause, but instead the tendency is to look at the behaviors as a continuing influence on the psychology of African Americans via the characteristics of a multiplicity of causes. The effects that slavery has had on the lives of people of color due to the ill-will of the dominant class are not highlighted to provide an excuse for the choices made by people of color. Instead, such emphasis is an attempt to make a distinctive determinant of African American psychological functioning, which has a unique causative influence on the actions of the person of color. Responsibility and accountability for the actions conducted years ago have been ignored; instead, such actions have been glorified and passed down through generations as part of a “prosperous” history for ancestors of the dominant class. The instilled beliefs and behaviors of “superiority” have been manifested in certain actions throughout the centuries—the taking of ideas and land, the concept of cheap labor, manipulation, coercion, and deceit—and such beliefs and behaviors have become embedded in the psyche of the remaining White middle and lower classes, becoming part of their ancestral heritage known as “living the American Dream.” Rewriting the history books to provide true “history” instead of “his story” will allow for a full appreciation of the unique contributions made by and stolen from people of color across our country. Reporting the truth may also dispel
the prolonged belief that we (as a people) are (or should be) striving to become
“One America,” and that we should ignore our ethnic and cultural differences unless
condoned and permitted by the dominant group. This remains a land of many
Americans, as demonstrated by the subjugation of people of color and the disparities
between the classes: wealthy versus middle class, middle class versus lower class,
the haves versus the have-nots, and the fortunate versus the less fortunate. We are
introducing a behavioral determinant, which does not have great legitimacy in
Western psychology: the notion that individual behavior can be influenced by
collective factors, which are also historically remote (Akbar, 1984).

The findings in this study support the idea that teenage pregnancy, especially
in the African American community, remains a highly significant issue involving
many people and one in which accountability and responsibility consistently vary.
Sexual encounters or “quests” for adolescents continue to occur at an early age.
Sexual exploitations not only occur to young ladies, but young males, assuming an
unwritten “rite of passage into manhood,” also take part in sexual exploits, perhaps
at even a much higher rate. With a significantly large segment of single-female-
headed households described as having limited to no paternal involvement, it is not
surprising that a young father would struggle to assume paternal responsibility or
commitment in relationships. A father who lacks a good relationship with the mother
is at risk of becoming a nonresponsible father, especially if he does not reside with
the child, similar to a father who lacks adequate employment and income (Doherty,
Kouneski, & Erickson, 1996). Limited resources and support systems are available
to educate these young fathers and to encourage further education for the
betterment of their child, without making the assumption that there will be longevity
with their partners. In order to understand young Black fathers, one must first gain
an understanding of the dynamics of young fatherhood. The contextual forces that
may be prevalent in the family and the community may influence fathering even
more than mothering. On the other hand, this contextual sensitivity means that
fathering can change in response to shifts in cultural, economic, institutional, and
interpersonal influences (Doherty et al., 1996). The losses felt by absent fathers are
tremendous and may have long-term effects, but the neglect of or limitations on
those fathers who want to be (or attempt to be) involved can be devastating to all
parties concerned. Young fathers who are turned away by the mother or the
grandparents of the child and are told to “be a man and take care of your
responsibilities” by providing only financial assistance have a growing resentment
towards women and the judicial system. The threats or incidences of using the child
as a pawn to hurt or terrorize the biological father, as well as replacing the natural
father with another partner, have resulted in numerous violent/domestic altercations
or complete withdrawal of the biological father (who is likely to produce another
offspring with a subsequent partner soon afterwards) from the child’s life, which
jeopardizes of his parental rights.

One tragically ironic scenario in Black (and many other) communities
concerns fathers who have a great deal to offer their sons and daughters and who
are involved in jobs where they serve as role models for others, but are unable to
spend quality time with their own children (Boyd-Franklin, Franklin, & Toussaint, 2000). These men provide much-needed male bonding and close relationships for other children, but, although such relationships are important and often rewarding for these young children, they often do not fill the void in the father of being absent or limited in his own child’s life.

The findings in this study suggest that for fathers in general, and young Black fathers specifically, a healthy self-regard and fatherhood in itself have become universally problematic in human societies. The belief in fathers has waned, and if change is to occur, cultures must mobilize to devise and enforce the father role for men. Our society, at this point in time, has chosen to assume that the father is irrelevant, instead of encouraging his involvement and celebrating the ideal of the man who puts his family first. What it means to be a “real man” has progressively undergone change. How fathers view themselves and their families has consistently been inconsistent. Human beings have investments, or stakes, in the things that they believe in or know best, those things that matter the most or augment their lives, the things that they do in their lives, or the things that detract from or diminish both realities (Wright, 1998). The behaviors that young Black fathers engage in today have stayed the course of time, and over time, new words, ideals, beliefs, and social practices have been broadened under old labels or understandings to conserve and preserve the traditional, old orientations or realities. With the fragmenting of fatherhood comes a change, not in the degree, but in the kind of identity and social
definition of the father. The rules for young Black fathers frequently change, but the game remains the same.

An anomie has plagued American life throughout the 20th century. "Anomie" or "normlessness"—rejection of the rules of the game or confusion over how they apply—opens the door to arbitrary behavior and systematic deviance (Majors & Mancini-Billson, 1992). Young Black fathers are engulfed in a culture that places an inordinate value on materialism, success, prestige, pedigree, personal possessions, and wealth. These young Black males are not immune to the video images of attractive and seductive women, and fancy cars/toys, nor to the attention that they bring. A quest for this type of success persists within low economic areas and even some areas considered to house middle and upper class citizens. People of color, regardless of economic status, do not differ from any other ethnicity that has developed a similar concept of "success" or "The American Dream." Through the years, people of color have witnessed the accumulation of material possessions that a minority of Europeans have obtained and flaunted, often through inheritances and on the backs of various ethnic groups who were enslaved, deceived, or eliminated for the betterment of the oppressor. Hidden or repressed within these images of wealth and material possessions are the all-too-real instances of substance abuse, depression, greed, deception, and violent or murderous tendencies that wealth or financial gain often brings. For these young fathers, the benefits of accumulating (often by illegal means) material possessions outweigh the risks involved. As a result, the vast majority of the population finds it difficult to comprehend the way in
which these young men view themselves and their social behaviors. What they were taught, formally or informally, about the role of the Black man in the family during and after slavery has influenced their own conceptualization of how society sees them as a Black male and as an adolescent Black father.

The findings in this study suggest that how African American men evaluate themselves is often a result of how they have been evaluated. Historically, the African American male was evaluated by his ability to endure strenuous work and to produce offspring, and he was presented, sold, and seen by a master or slave seller as a stud and a workhorse. Young Black males’ concept of a family foundation may vary based on the foundations that have been presented to them. The family has frequently been observed as possessing major components that lead to a healthy, constructive personal and community life among its members. The lack of a strong foundation, which influences all aspects of community and individual life, results in an unstable environment. With so many distorted images of manhood; persistent racism; and the street influences of drugs, crime, and gangs, the need for clear instruction from male role models on how to develop a positive identity is even greater (Boyd-Franklin et al., 2000).

The findings do not suggest any significant differences beyond what would be expected of any caregiver among (a) those fathers who are known by the mother/child and are sporadically involved in the child’s life, (b) those who remain unknown and uninvolved, and (c) those who are present/known and are actively involved. This is primarily due to how involvement is interpreted and defined by the
majority society. The perception that involvement requires presence in the home has worked against Black fathers and has resulted in labeling or stereotyping. Involvement does not always constitute living in the same household, as demonstrated by these young fathers. Because of relational difficulties and family discord, most of the fathers in this study were no longer, if they ever were, in an exclusive relationship with the mother of their offspring. It was difficult to grasp any significant differences beyond the obvious when looking at the various fatherhood outcomes. It is extremely challenging to generalize and categorize the way of life for Black families, regardless of whether they are rich or poor. No significant conclusions can be generalized beyond assumptions, as demonstrated by the Moynihan Report (Moynihan, 1965) and by Jerold Heiss, who compared White middle-class families to middle-class or poverty-stricken Black families. Moynihan’s (1965) assertion that the family structure among Blacks has seriously retarded their progress “because it is so out of line with the rest of American society” (p. 29) has been widely publicized. The Moynihan Report, although criticized by most knowledgeable family sociologists, nevertheless influenced the development of stereotypic notions about Black families that are widespread today (Willie, 1991). Less well known is the “indictment . . . handed down against the Black family” by Heiss (Willie, 1991, p. 194). The key point of the accusation claims that Blacks would be “better off if the differences in family form did not exist” (Heiss, 1975, p. 3). His study, entitled The Case of the Black Family, sought to determine if “the characteristics of Black families . . . differ from those of White families” (Heiss,
1975, p. 5). In summary, according to Robert Staples, social scientists who study the Black family "have been concerned primarily with its deviance from . . . middle-class White family behavior (Staples, 1978, p. vii). In his opinion, studies are needed that "concentrate on the unique structure of the Black family and its evolution in meeting its own unique functional prerequisites" (Staples, 1978, p. v). The prevailing image of most Black families being single-parent, matriarchal structures influences the employment/educational practices or habits of young Black fathers. If the way of life for middle-class Black males is not representative of all Black males, then neither can the life of poor Black males be representative of all Black males.

Black families do not constitute a monolithic pattern of relationships; such families vary in behavior by social class as do White families (Willie, 1991). Adaptation of the Black family in general, and the Black male specifically, to external as well as internal constraints has occurred for years. Research must be sensitive to the variety found in Black family lifestyles and must recognize that there is validity to varying lifestyles, that there is no one best family structure for all people in all situations (Willie, 1991). The ever-changing institution of family dynamics requires that those studying it be cognizant of the qualitative adaptations that families, and particularly Black males, make. Black families are often similar to other families, but they may also differ from White families in specific and fundamental ways due, in general, to their subdominant status in the nation's power structure (Willie, 1991).
Looking at My Shadow

The way in which young Black fathers and Black males, in general, view themselves and their circumstances, without social support systems, may be the difference between "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" and mere survival. These young Black males need to be given an understanding of their purpose in this nation: that they play a fundamental role in enabling this nation to fulfill its mission. This idea is mentioned and supported by three of America's most eminent citizens. Robert K. Merton, sociologist and Professor Emeritus of Columbia University, said, "It is not infrequently the case that the nonconforming minority in a society represented the interests and ultimate values of the group more effectively than the conforming majority" (Merton, 1968, p. 421). Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall (1973) stated:

Some of the oppressions of the past have been overcome today simply because some of the oppressed had sufficient faith in the Constitution to confront the anomalies in society and to insist that they conform with the basic principles upon which this nation was established. (p. 3)

Finally, former U.S. Secretary of Transportation William Coleman echoed this view when he said, "American Whites owe a debt of gratitude to American Blacks for making the Constitution work" (quoted in Willie & Edmonds, 1978, p. 3). All three concluded that when the Constitution works for the minority or the subdominant people of power, it also works for the majority.
Recommendations for Practice

The following recommendations for clinical practices are based on the results of this study and are aimed at four audiences: (1) policy planners and decision makers who allocate funding for programs and services in cities and states, (2) researchers and writers who discuss or are invested in Black male/female relationships, (3) therapists and counselors involved in training programs who are mandated to provide adequate services to these young males, and (4) those who desire to add to their understanding of the influences of fatherhood.

Policy Planners and Decision Makers

The implications of early fatherhood on society in general are often underestimated or simply ignored. Unfortunately, this has been continually portrayed as principally "a Black problem." The current tendency for the media in this country to portray teenage parenthood as a Black phenomenon may represent a continuation of the Eurocentric tradition of misunderstanding and judging the African American experience while, at the same time, concealing parallel practices in the White community (Kiselica, 1995). Thus, the physical and psychological well-being of Blacks is not only poor compared to that of Whites, it also is "sliding backwards" (Children’s Defense Fund, 1985, p. vi). The historical restriction of opportunities and the bleak future of a substantial number of African American adolescents have been identified by several scholars (e.g., Abrahamse et al., 1988; Battle, 1988/1989; Butts, 1989; Scott-Jones et al., 1989; L. A. Smith, 1988, 1989;
Sullivan, 1985) as playing a major role in the high teenage pregnancy rate among African American teenagers. Well researched studies of adolescent fathers will aid policy planners and decision makers in recognizing that making fathers, particularly young Black fathers, more of a priority will have long-term benefits to our social, judicial, and economic systems.

Data from studies examining the help-seeking behavior of African American men (e.g., Gary, Leashore, Howard, & Buckner-Dowell, 1982) and teenage fathers (e.g., Hendricks, 1988; Hendricks et al., 1981; Hendricks & Solomon, 1987) indicate that African American males are likely to rely on themselves, a family member, or a friend and are unlikely to use an agency for help with a personal problem. If the objective is to reach out to a population that is frequently fighting an uphill battle while waging a war on acceptance and equality, then it is difficult to condone mental health and social service examiners' frequent neglect or stereotyping of Black males who have attempted to seek services, because of the realization that they were not trained to deal with fathers in general, and young Black fathers specifically, who may have primary custody of their child.

Often subtle opportunities arise for professionals to involve young fathers. In my own professional experiences, I have observed young couples in an agency's waiting room, waiting for their opportunity to see the doctor for prenatal care (another underutilized service for young adults). After calling the young mother's name, the nurse will escort her to the examination room, leaving the father-to-be, or a male companion who has expressed some interest in her condition, in the lobby.
No one recognizes the missed opportunity to increase the involvement of the young father-to-be or concerned partner in the prenatal care and subsequent birth. Proper training could have provided the medical staff with an understanding of what “reaching out” entails and would allow them to challenge existing norms and stereotypes of which they may also be victims. If provided with programs, training, and opportunities, many fathers, as indicated in this study, would more likely feel involved, valued, needed, and wanted. Parenting classes and training resources could afford these fathers (and those who assume primary custody or child care) both the struggles and benefits inherent in child-rearing. Conventional wisdom suggests that because teenage parents enter parenthood prematurely in the face of economic and psychosocial stresses, they are likely to have inadequate parenting skills and might be at risk for physically abusing their children (Kiselica, 1995). Although there is limited empirical support for the former of these hypotheses, there is virtually no support for the latter (Kiselica, 1995).

If education and the future of our country are indeed priorities, then it is necessary for our legislatures to invest time and money in overcoming a stigma that continues to hinder the progress of the entire society, not just one segment of the population. L. A. Smith (1988) wrote, “Service providers must become active politically to ensure that the high-risk status of young Black males, including fathers, becomes an issue on the national agenda” (p. 270). African American adolescents will be well served by mental health professionals through political activism of supporting policies and programs designed to address their vulnerabilities.
Those who express interest in Black male–female relationships or pregnancy beyond the negative connotations or images must help this population of young fathers to develop a positive self-regard. Findings from studies of African American adolescent parenthood suggested that the vast majority of African American adolescent parents neither consciously planned their first sexual intercourse (Rogel, Zuehlke, Peterson, Tobin-Richards, & Shelton, 1980; Sullivan, 1985) nor intended to conceive a child (Moore, 1992; L. A. Smith, 1989; Sullivan, 1985; Williams, 1991; Zelnick & Kantner, 1980). However, as Abrahamse et al. (1988) and L. A. Smith (1988, 1989) have argued, many of these youth see less opportunity in their own futures and hence they have less to lose by becoming single parents.

The reliance and trust that society places in authors and scholars is similar to that given to political and social leaders to educate or decipher informative (or perceived accurate) information to the masses on a social, political, medical, and economical basis. Often great value is given to negative, scandalous, or malicious gossip about high profile individuals as being enlightening and relevant to individual lives. Other events that may affect everyday life or, if left unchanged, the future are seldom emphasized unless the majority media deems them newsworthy. The plight and neglect of Black males in general, and young Black males specifically, is a prime example, and a disturbing one, of the “majority rules.” According to Gabriel and McAnarney (1983) and L. A. Smith (1988, 1989), because African American males perceive so many adult roles valued by American society as being closed to them,
they may view parenthood as a way to achieve maturity and a sense of achievement.

"Thus, although most Black male adolescents do not plan fatherhood, neither do they strenuously avoid it" (L. A. Smith, 1988, p. 270).

**Professionals in Counselor Training Programs in the Helping Field**

Training programs are simply specialized facilities, as are schools, mandated to educate and enlighten a society of the "true history" and not simply "his-story" of a developing nation. Programs must challenge existing norms of mere tolerance and empathy towards people of color and their situations. The same methods strategically utilized to remove a culture and identity from a people or minimize their contributions (i.e., print and video media, history books, and visual images portrayed through predefined roles and characters assigned in movies for African Americans) are needed to significantly alter how African Americans are specifically viewed and eventually learn to view themselves. The portrayal of African Americans, both internally and externally, overtly and covertly, as dependent, uneducated, baby-making, hostile and crime ridden, or simply an ignorant population, regardless of their economic status or societal contributions, has had generational effects on the cognitive development of society as a whole.

Training programs must emphasize the importance of understanding where one comes from, which may have an influence in how trainees treat others. An entire program is required, not just one or two unusual and creative professors, to move a group of potential professionals beyond a nonthreatening and safe examination of
racism towards an introspective look at how their environment or predetermined position may hinder change instead of facilitating it. Training programs must emphasize that, for many people of color, this is a struggle and that generalization is more of a hindrance to advancement than a means to solutions. Young African American fathers, especially those from the inner city, may also experience pejorative reactions from fellow African Americans, including service providers (Kiselica, 1995). Division in attitudes toward adolescent fathers in general and Black males specifically often undermines well-intended attempts to affect the condition of African American males. This is readily seen in communities where members often volunteer to serve as mentors for adolescent mothers, but not for adolescent fathers. Many community members characterize adolescent fathers as "no good" (L. A. Smith, 1989, p. 217). Like many of their White counterparts, these professionals generalize that adolescent fathers in the community are irresponsible individuals for whom outreach efforts are a waste of time (Kiselica, 1995). Black, as well as White, service providers must take specialized courses to examine their own perceptions about the African American family in general, the African American male primarily, and African American adolescent father specifically.

Training programs must be a catalyst for pushing the community’s own governing bodies towards change that will effectively influence a society that looks to leaders for guidance, moving beyond mere disclaimers or awareness that differences exist.
For training programs, the importance of having African American male models or mentors can no longer be ignored. Battle (1988/1989) added that such services particularly appeal to teenage fathers when staff members are adult African American men who provide younger males with their time, energy, and attention. Although a small contingent of African Americans, through assimilation or learning to “play the game,” have successfully overcome the obstacles and barriers placed before them, at some point in time, these African Americans, who have established rewarding and successful lives for themselves and their families, are reminded that their money or status does not hide their pigmentation. Whether it is attempting to acquire a home, property, loan, or business venture; engaging in recreational activities with friends and family; or simply improving the educational opportunities for their children, they will have to face the hard and disturbing reality of where America as a nation stands in terms of race, particularly as it relates to African American males. For young Black males, regardless of their demographic or economic condition, modeling and mentorship concerning racial barriers may prove to be valuable tools that make the difference between merely “surviving” and “succeeding.” At times the harsh realities of profiling, police shootings, or discriminatory practices occasionally seen in the media, yet experienced daily by people of color, are not enough evidence. Many appointed or self-appointed African American leaders have disappointed their communities by following their White counterparts in dismissing, minimizing, or redirecting these and similar incidences away from race. If change is to occur, training programs are prime candidates for
influencing change by recognizing the number of people that can be affected through their efforts.

Those Interested in the Influences of Fatherhood

As they travel through the developmental stages of life, males and females experience critical changes in their perspectives and social roles. Despite their cultural, gender, and individual variations, they invariably proceed through a relatively orderly and predictable set of developmental stages. While development through infancy and childhood has been researched extensively (Erikson, 1963), the research community has revealed less knowledge about the complexities of the transition to adulthood, and parenthood in particular (Bozett, 1985). Much of the research on the transition to parenthood focuses primarily on intact married couples having their first child (Belsky, Lang, & Rovine, 1985; Goldberg et al., 1985; Hobbs & Wimbush, 1977; Miller & Sollie, 1977). The research on African American males' involvement in relationships and family dynamics in general, and African American fathers' involvement specifically, has lagged in comparison to the amount of literature concerning their inactivity or negative behaviors associated with criminal misconduct, relationships, substance abuse/misuse, judicial involvement, and educational attainments.

The behaviors demonstrated by these young men (i.e., seek-and-conquer-females attitude, part-time or uninvolved father having numerous excuses, multiple uncommitted relationships, hanging out with no responsibilities, "leeching" off
females) were passed down from individuals whom these young fathers admired, considered “players” or “pimps,” and were able to emulate. Data from several studies suggest that most African American teenage fathers meet these folk criteria, at least during the early stages of their children’s lives (Kiselica, 1995). As time passes and the frustrations or responsibilities regarding paternal involvement mount, these fathers are more likely to father other children, relocate, start new relationships, avoid paying child support, or maintain only a part-time relationship with their child.

Most of the fathers who did not reside within the home of their child often faced labeling (sometimes undeserved) as the Deadbeat Dad, the Visiting Father, the Sperm Father, or simply Uninvolved or Absent Dad. A distinction needs to be made between those fathers who may live apart from their child and yet are actively involved, and those fathers who have chosen to limit their involvement or not to be involved at all in the lives of their offspring. Those fathers who chose to be involved have inherited or developed some form of paternal mission towards childrearing. Recall the lodestars of the paternal mission: teaching children right from wrong, embodying and passing on a way of life, preparing children for the future, and encouraging their competence and success in the larger society (Endleman, 1997). Those fathers who have chosen to limit their involvement or not to be involved at all in the lives of their offspring may have succumbed to the frustrations of adolescent paternal responsibility. Sometimes the mother of the child may arbitrarily, or with the encouragement from family and friends, choose not to allow the father to be
involved in the childrearing practices, due to his lack of financial assistance or assumed immaturity in taking responsibility. However, recent research indicates that most Black males who have the opportunity to work do, in fact, support their children (Major & Mancini-Billson, 1992). Many times the choice of the father to not be involved is not his alone. The young mother’s parent(s) may decide that the biological father should not be involved, the mother may decide that she no longer has interest in him, or the young father may not have a support system available to assist him in asserting responsibility and involvement. Teenage fathers who are left out of important decisions regarding their children experience intense rejection, anxiety, and sadness (Robinson, 1988). The biological father who perceives no recourse or support from his own family or friends may simply choose to avoid his paternal responsibility.

In today’s childrearing practices, even good fathers may believe that paternal responsibilities are increasingly difficult to achieve. Pessimistic and alarming conclusions regarding the ability of a man to offer protection and security to his family continue to arise.

Suggestions for Further Study

The present study offers several ideas for further study on the plight of African American adolescent fathers, their experiences, and their needs. Possibilities include, but are not limited to, the following:
1. This study could be replicated to investigate a larger demographic population of African American adolescent fathers who are presently experiencing the joys and tribulations of fatherhood to gauge their education, awareness, support systems, and training needs, as well as the impact of each area on parenting.

2. This study could be replicated to investigate whether minority males use sexual activity to express their masculinity, because they perceive that more conventional methods are closed to them.

3. Additional studies need to be conducted to investigate the impact of slavery on the psychological and social development of Black males in general, and on manhood and fatherhood specifically.

4. Researchers could conduct a retrospective examination of adult Black fathers who had their first child during their adolescent years, and compare these fathers' experiences with those of their own sons or other adolescent fathers to determine similarities and to enhance existing research on Black males.

5. Further studies are needed to investigate the cognitive development of African American adolescent fathers, from their offspring's conception until their graduation, to assess paternal influence and effect.

6. Additional studies could investigate the experiences of adolescent fatherhood and development across ethnic, demographic, and economic levels to provide a profile for program and policy development.
7. Further research needs to be conducted on the social and psychological implications for family dynamics when resources from policies and programs are limited for Black males and fathers.

8. Other studies should investigate the willingness of young Black fathers to assume parental responsibility for their offspring.

9. Further research needs to be conducted to develop training programs and policies for agencies and organizations that are designated to provide mental, social, and physical assistance to children and young adults.

10. Researchers could investigate the parenting behaviors of nonresidential Black fathers and residential Black fathers to enhance the existing literature.

The present study explored the perceptions held by Black adolescent fathers about society and their needs. The results of this study revealed several important connections/effects of manhood and parenthood for young Black fathers. This study suggests that not all fathers, whether actively or inactively involved in a teenage pregnancy, were necessarily adolescent fathers themselves; an underestimation persists as to the ages of paternal parents. This has implications on the stereotypes and prejudices developed and demonstrated by agencies, organizations, and communities at large regarding the needs and support systems of young Black fathers. The power and influence of these stereotypes often reflect the negative attitudes of society towards Black adolescent males in general, and Black adolescent fathers specifically, and create opposition towards even culturally sensitive interventions for these groups.
These results also demonstrate that young Black fathers do demonstrate involvement and responsibility, but in ways not always characteristically recognized or approved of by the majority population. From conception to birth training, programs should be offered and encouraged to involve the biological father in parenthood without fear of punishment or repercussions. The first year is often the most crucial year for male involvement, as either the father-child bond is developed in conjunction with the mother, or the mother, who once had a dependence/relationship with the father, develops a bond with the child to the point where the father is no longer needed or welcomed. Programs should be devoted to increasing fathers’ active involvement in all aspects of parenting and the relationship with the mother of his child—from the prenatal phase, to and beyond the delivery, and well into planning a future for the child, whether or not the parents of the child are together.

Program Development

Programs should be developed and devoted to relationship building (i.e., intimate, male/female, male/male, family) for Black males. Commitment to policies and programs for males in general, and Black males specifically, needs to be made to teach emotional expressiveness and socialization skills that will reduce or prevent the incidences of domestic violence, rape, sexual assault, violent acts against other Black males, or other behaviors that may considered deviant or antisocial. Programs that develop or enhance self-esteem or self-awareness may increase the willingness
to be involved in the practice of parenting. How the father sees himself will dramatically influence how he presents himself.

**Influence of African American Churches**

Involving the African American church as a lead agency may prove to be more valuable for the success of a program than any other mechanisms available. Lee (1989) and L. A. Smith (1989) argued that service programs targeting African American adolescents are likely to be successful if they are offered in settings trusted and used by the African American community. Because the African American church has a long tradition of functioning as a source of support for African Americans, it is considered by many scholars to be an ideal location for community-based programs (e.g., Anderson, Eaddy, & Williams, 1990; Lee, 1989; A. Smith, 1988/1989; Solomon, 1990).

In terms of its help to African American males, historically the African American church has provided men with leadership experiences; served as a center for the social and political activities of men; offered men job opportunities; and assisted troubled men in changing their lifestyles from illicit street lives to legal, productive, and stable ones (A. Smith, 1988/1989). Yet, concern may be expressed that using the African American church in this manner may pose problems in reaching African American adolescent fathers for participation in service programs. For example, although the church has been a benefactor in many ways to African American men, it has failed to recruit large numbers of men as members (A. Smith,
1988/1989). A recent national study of religious life among African Americans by Taylor and Chatters (1991) suggested that males, especially younger males, are less likely than females to be actively involved in the church. Other data gathered by Hendricks suggested that African American unwed adolescent fathers are unlikely to be active church members (Hendricks, 1981, 1988) and are unlikely to use the clergy as a source of help (Hendricks, 1988). Further opposition to the churches' ability to reach adolescent fathers was expressed by Asante (1981), who contended that the church has harmed African American male–female relationships in several ways. First, Asante charged that the African American church in the United States is out of touch with the African roots of its people (Kiselica, 1995), therefore making the education and administration of service programs irrelevant to the African American tradition of male–female relationships. Asante further criticized the church for a presenting a history of predefined sexist roles for males, which in turn often could lend itself to the further subjugation of women. Finally, Asante contended that the church has preached duty above love in regard to relationships, teaching male and females to remain together long after the relationship has ended. This has ultimately caused the traditional church, according to Asante's conclusions, to inflict more harm than good onto male–female relationships.

Service Delivery

Responsive counseling with African American males, at any age, must be predicated on an understanding of the historical and cultural context that shapes the
psychosocial development of this client group (Lee, 1997). First, the African American father may need to be taught strategies to cope with racism, such as those described in detail by Shade (1990). Counselors should be trained first to identify the needs and characteristics of adolescent Black fathers and then to improve their conditions and provide services. Counseling that is focused on the father’s potential cultural value conflicts can help him to clarify his personal values (Kiselica, 1995). It is mandatory for professionals to possess not only solid intervention skills and culturally sensitive process skills but also an understanding of the historical forces that have impacted African American male development.

Counselors should be trained to understand the stereotypical tendencies and prejudices that are inherent in policies and programs for Black males and in the administration of such programs. Understanding Black males’ perspective on the world is an art that requires education for many counselors. Such education in understanding and communicating may influence and improve the educational/occupational pursuits for young Black fathers and their families. Counselors should be trained to promote family involvement and commitment. Counselors, particularly those of other ethnicities, must lobby policy planners and policy makers for the resources needed to improve the condition of Black males in particular, and young Black fathers specifically. If change is to occur, the majority who currently make the decisions must be committed to and invested in bringing about change. Continued failure to address the needs of Black males in general and young fathers specifically
will have long-term yet immediate implications for families and the community, and eventually for society at large.

Counseling training programs should incorporate the African American male development process into all aspects of education, including career counseling and academic studies, as a part of the multicultural counseling course. The American Psychological Association (APA) must be the frontrunner in requiring training programs, and other associations or governing bodies, to move beyond encouraging awareness or “superficial” training (i.e., one multicultural class being required, a multicultural class taught by someone other than a ethnic minority, or no practicum training being required in low economic or impoverished areas) of counselors, psychologists, or other professionals who are entrusted to provide services to all equally and without prejudice. Failure to change how training is conducted and how services are administered will continue to hinder both the provider and recipient for future generations. History is often our best indicator for the future and it frequently repeats itself. Therefore, our history should no longer encompass “his story,” but instead it should be a reflection on the true experiences shared by all.
Appendix A

Human Subjects Institutional Review Board
Letter of Approval
Date: 30 October 2000

To: Robert Betz, Principal Investigator
    Michael Till, Student Investigator for dissertation

From: Sylvia Culp, Chair

Re: HSERB Project Number: 00-09-19

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project entitled “A Perspective on Teaching My Son to Be a Father: A Qualitative Study on the Plight of Unmarried African American Adolescent Fathers” has been approved under the expedited category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note that you may only conduct this research exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date noted below. In addition if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSERB for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: 30 October 2001
Recruitment Script

Below is the text of the statement I will make to the participants during my contact with them.

"I am doing a research project on the condition of unmarried African-American adolescent fathers. I will be interviewing 10-12 adolescent fathers around your age about their perceptions and thoughts about manhood and fatherhood. I will then be transcribing the interview tapes and writing up a report about my findings. The information from the interviews will be used to make people aware of the attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs held by young fathers. All information about you will remain confidential. I will not tell anyone who I interviewed, and your names will not be mentioned in the written report. If it is permissible, I will also like to tape record our interview so that I don't lose any of the information. You are free to turn off the machine at any time if you feel uncomfortable. Would you be interested in participating in this study?"
Appendix C

Participant Consent Form
October 24, 2000

Dear Prospective Research Participant(s):

My name is Michael Till and I am a Counseling Psychology doctoral student at Western Michigan University. I am working on my dissertation under the direction of Dr. Robert L. Betz, Professor and Committee Chair. I am asking for your help in completing this research project entitled: A Perspective of Teaching My Son To Be a Father: A Qualitative Study of Unmarried African-American Adolescent Fathers.

The purpose of my dissertation is to examine and understand the perceptions of fatherhood and manhood held by unmarried African-American adolescent fathers. It is important to provide these young men with a voice and an opportunity to express their needs, support, neglect, understanding, and perception of how society views them and its impact on the functioning of the family unit.

Participation requires that each participant agree to a 60-90 minute audio taped interview. A possible follow up session for clarification purposes lasting half this time may occur. I know your time is valuable, so the packet information provided will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. You are asked to complete the enclosed Demographic Information Form and return them in the addressed, stamped envelope, which has been provided for your convenience. This form will determine whether you meet certain criteria needed for this study. If you agree to participate, you will be contacted by telephone to schedule an interview at a specific site.

Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you may discontinue without penalty at any time. To ensure confidentiality, your name or the names of anyone you identify will not be associated in any way with the reporting or presentation of the results of this research project. The only risks that can be foreseen are those of discomfort and anxiety as you reflect on your experiences before, during, and after the birth of your first child. In case of any discomforts during the interview, you may terminate at any time without penalty. If you feel you would like to discuss your uncomfortable feelings and thoughts further, I will provide you with a referral form to the University Counseling Center and outside agencies.

If you have any questions or concerns arise, please contact me, Michael Till (616) 345-9123 or my advisor, Robert L. Betz, Ph.D. (616) 387-5105 (or E-Mail: robert.betz@wmich.edu). The participant may also contact the Human Subjects
Institutional Review Board (616) 387-8293 or the Vice President for Research (616) 387-8298 if questions or problems arise during the course of the study.

This consent document has been approved for use for one year by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) as indicated by the stamped date and signature of the board chair in the upper right corner. Subjects should not sign this document if the corner does not show a stamped date and signature.

By signing below, you are indicating that you have agreed to participate in the research. Once more, I want to thank you for taking the time to participate in this study.

Participant's Signature Date

Sincerely,

Michael G. Till, M.S.W., C.S.W., C.S.C. Robert L. Betz, Ph.D.
Doctoral Student Dissertation Chair
Appendix D

Parental Consent Form
October 25, 2000

Dear Parent of Prospective Research Participant(s):

My name is Michael Till and I am a Counseling Psychology doctoral student at Western Michigan University. I am working on my dissertation under the direction of Dr. Robert L. Betz, Professor and Committee Chair. I am asking for help in completing this research project entitled: A Perspective of Teaching My Son To Be a Father: A Qualitative Study of Unmarried African-American Adolescent Fathers.

The purpose of my dissertation is to examine and understand the perceptions of fatherhood and manhood held by unmarried African-American adolescent fathers. It is important to provide these young men with a voice and an opportunity to express their needs, support, neglect, understanding, and perception of how society views them and its impact on the functioning of the family unit.

Participation requires that each participant agree to a 60-90 minute audio taped interview. I know each prospective participant's time is valuable, so the packet information provided will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. Each prospective participant is asked to complete the enclosed Demographic Information Form and return them in the addressed, stamped envelope, which has been provided for your convenience. This form will determine whether you meet certain criteria needed for this study. If you agree to allow participation, you will be contacted by telephone to schedule an interview at a specific site.

Participation is entirely voluntary, and may be discontinue without penalty at any time. To ensure confidentiality, each participant's name or the names of anyone identified will not be associated in any way with the reporting or presentation of the results of this research project. The only risks that can be foreseen are those of discomfort and anxiety as participants reflect on their experiences before, during, and after the birth of your first child. In case of any discomforts during the interview, participants may terminate at any time without penalty. If participants feel they would like to discuss uncomfortable feelings and thoughts further, I will provide them with a referral form to the University Counseling Center and outside agencies.

If you have any questions or concerns arise, please contact me, Michael Till (616) 345-9123 or my advisor, Robert L. Betz, Ph.D. (616) 387-3105 (or E-Mail: robert_betz@wmich.edu). The participant may also contact the Human Subjects...
Institutional Review Board (616) 387-8293 or the Vice President for Research (616) 387-8298 if questions or problems arise during the course of the study.

This consent document has been approved for use for one year by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) as indicated by the stamped date and signature of the board chair in the upper right corner. Subjects should not sign this document if the corner does not show a stamped date and signature.

By signing below, you are indicating that you have agreed to participate in the research. Once more, I want to thank you for taking the time to participate in this study.

______________________  ______________________
Parental/Guardian Signature  Date

Sincerely,

Michael G. Till, M.S.W., C.S.W., C.S.C.
Doctoral Student

Robert L. Betz, Ph.D.
Dissertation Chair
Appendix E

Criteria Information Form
Criteria Information Form

The unmarried African American adolescent fathers who meet the following criteria must agree to participate in a 60-90 minute interview. Each participant must complete all items on this form. Please check or write in the spaces provided corresponding to your best answer.

1. Current age: ______

2. Age at the time of first child’s birth: __________

3. Age of girlfriend at first child’s birth: ____

4. Are you currently married?
   Yes ___  No ___

5. Are you the biological father of first child you are claiming?
   Yes___  No ___
Appendix F

Follow-up Postcards to Schedule Interview
Date

Dear Participant,

Approximately two weeks ago, I sent you information regarding experiences of unmarried adolescent African-American fathers. This project is part of my dissertation, and I would appreciate your response to agree to schedule an interview with me.

If you have misplaced your information and would like a second mailing, please contact me at (616) 345-9128. Thank you for your participation in this research project.

Sincerely,

Michael G. Till, MSW, CSW
Western Michigan University
Dear Participant,

Approximately three weeks ago, I sent you information regarding experiences of unmarried adolescent African-American fathers. This project is part of my dissertation, and I would appreciate your response to agree to schedule an interview with me.

If you have misplaced your information and would like a second mailing, please contact me at (616) 345-9128. Thank you for your participation in this research project.

Sincerely,

Michael G. Till, MSW, CSW
Western Michigan University
Appendix G

Semistructured Interview Protocol
AFRICAN-AMERICAN FATHERS' 
SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview questions for adolescent fathers or fathers to be regarding their adolescent experience. Initially, I want to ask some questions about you and your relationship with the mother of your child.

RELATIONSHIPS

1. Describe your relationship with the mother of your child prior to the conception of your first child. Probing questions if necessary:

   Unique features of relationship
   Communication style
   Did/Do you feel prepared

2. Describe your relationship with the mother of your child during the pregnancy of your first child. Probing questions if necessary:

   Unique features of relationship
   Communication style
   Did/Do you feel prepared

3. Describe your relationship with the mother of your child after the birth of your first child. Probing questions if necessary:

   Unique features of relationship
   Communication style
   Did/Do you feel prepared

4. This is your opportunity to brag about your child. Tell me a little about her/him. Starting with their age.

Okay we have initially begun our conversation having you reflect on your relationship with the mother of your child and those variables that may have been influential early on. Now I would like to ask you some questions about your thoughts about the male figures in your life and the education you received even during your own childhood regarding becoming a man and/or father.

EDUCATION REGARDING MANHOOD/FATHERHOOD

5. What is your understanding of manhood? Probing questions if required.

   What does manhood mean or require in your opinion?
   Where and who did you learn this from?

6. What is your understanding of fatherhood? Probing questions if required.

   What does fatherhood mean or require to you?
   Where and who did you learn this from?
7. What is your current relationship with your father now? Probing questions if necessary:

If you communicated with your father, what is your understanding of his role or lack in your own child development (upbringing or raising) from his perspective?
If known, what was your father's role in your family?
As you reflect back on that role how do you feel about your father today?
What is your current relationship with your father now?
If you communicated with your father, what is your understanding of his role or lack of role in your own child development (upbringing or raising) from his perspective?
As you reflect back on that role how do you feel about father today?

8. Who served as a male figure during your development providing a father figure or mentor ship role to you? Probing questions if required.

What was your relationship with him/them at the time of conception, during birth, and currently?
Who has served as your primary caregiver or legal guardian?
What was your relationship with them at the time of conception, during birth, and currently?

9. As you reflect on your childhood what are the memories that you carry that brought you joy, sorrow, pain

What do you think your role is in society or your community?
What do you want out of life?
What does the future look like for you? For those who look like you?
What are your dreams for the future?
If it were up to society or your community what would your future look like?

15. What are your thoughts about the services that are available to Black males (of African descent) young or old? I am referring to the legal, medical, social, educational, training, employment, mental health services and support systems. Probing questions if necessary:

What are the services available to black males (of African descent)?
How and where did you learn of this information?
Whom do you know who has used and/or benefitted from these services?

16. What are your thoughts about the services that are available to young fathers or fathers to be. I am referring to the legal, medical, social, educational, training, employment, mental health services and support systems. Probing questions if necessary:

What are the services available to fathers or fathers to be?
How and where did you learn of this information?
Whom do you know who has used and/or benefitted from these services?

What you have shared with me has been valuable and rewarding to me. Although this interview only allows me a few hours to get to know you, I now feel that I have an ideal of what you have and are experiencing as an African-American or Black adolescent father. I would like to conclude this interview with learning more about you and allowing you to share your expertise with others young
and old, black and white, in your neighborhood or outside of your neighborhood as an African-American adolescent father.

**VOICES OF YOUNG DADS**

17. While considering your own experiences what are your thoughts about fathers young or old who are actively involved in their child or children's life? Probing questions required.

Are they truly involved?
What might being involved in their child's/ren life look like?
Why do you think or what might be the reason that one would choose to be involved in the lives of their children?
Do you think it was their choice or the choice of some else or others?
Who might this someone or these others be?

18. While considering your own experiences what are your thoughts about those fathers young or old who have little to no involvement in child rearing? Probing questions if necessary:

Are they truly not involved?
What might not being involved in their child's/ren life look like?
Why do you think or what might be the reason be for one to choose not to be involved in the lives of their children?
Why do you think they are not involved?
Do you think it was their choice or the choice of someone else or others?

19. While considering your own experiences of having become an adolescent father what do you think is important for other adolescent fathers or adolescent fathers to be to know about or parenting?

20. While growing up describe how the males and females interacted in relationships? I am referring to ways in which they solved problems; ways in which they handled conflict; ways in which they expressed their emotions, and ways in which they should affection?

21. While considering your own experiences of having become an adolescent father what would you want to tell others young men around your age about becoming an adolescent father or father in general? About parenting.

22. What or who do you feel would have helped you prior to the pregnancy to be a/an (more) effective and/or active father? During the birth? Currently?

23. Did or do you feel prepared for fatherhood? What might have helped you or helped you further?

24. Who did you or do you feel is their for your when things are difficult or scary for you? In other words, who can you turn to when times get hard? Probing questions if necessary:

What would you consider hard times to be?
How have you responded to those hard times?

**REFLECTIONS OF LOST YOUTH**

25. What are your thoughts about your preparation for manhood? What might have helped you or may help you now to be a better young man?
26. What are your thoughts about your preparation for fatherhood? What might have helped you or may help you now to be a better father?

27. What are your thoughts about your preparation for relationships? What might have helped you or may help you now to improve your relationship with the mother of your child?

28. What do you feel you need now to be a more effective and/or active father?

29. As you reflect on your own childhood experiences what do you want to take from them and use in your own child rearing practices? What don’t you what to use?

30. What do you feel is important for your child(ren) to experience and grow up seeing?

31. Suppose I was a new father or an expectant father. What are some things that you would feel important for me to know about fatherhood? About manhood.

32. Where did you grow up what and what was your neighborhood, school, and community like?

33. What is your neighborhood, school, and community like today?

34. Suppose someone you trusted asked you how you really felt about being a father. What are something that you would want to say to them?

Life As A Young Black Man

Finally, I would like you to reflect on your short life as a black young man. I am interested in how you view yourself and how others view you as someone of African descent. This may be the most demanding segment of our interview and cause the most emotions. I initially, want to remind you that you can decline to continue at any time. I also want you to know that what you may or may not feel is real. And the feelings regardless of how you may describe them are yours and are important.

35. What does it mean to be Black or of African descent to you?

What was your experience as a young man of African descent during your school years?
What has been your experience as a young man of African descent as a father?

36. How do you think society sees you as someone of African descent?

37. How do you think society sees you as someone young of African descent with a child?

38. What were you taught about life as someone of African descent?
39. What can you recall Black men (someone of African descent) experiencing that you were exposed to while growing up?

40. What can you recall Black women (someone of African descent) experiencing that you were exposed to while growing up?

41. What can you recall Black families (of African descent) experiencing that you were exposed to while growing up?
42. What can you recall Black children (of African descent) experiencing that you were exposed to while growing up?

43. What are Black men (someone of African descent) experiencing today?

44. What are Black women (of African descent) experiencing today?

45. What are Black families (of African descent) experiencing today?

46. What are Black children (of African descent) experiencing today?

47. What role if any, does your color play today as a Black male (someone of African descent)?

48. What role if any, does your color play today as a Black adolescent father (someone of African descent)?

Thank you again, for the help that you have been. I hope that the information that you have given me will someday allow Black Males (of African descent) in general, and young Black fathers specifically, to have better services available to them.
Appendix H

Semistructured Interview Protocol
Disclosure Statement
UNMARRIED AFRICAN-AMERICAN ADOLESCENT FATHERS’ SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

Primary Researcher: Robert Betz, Ph.D.
Secondary Researcher: Michael G. Till, M.S.W., C.S.W.

Thank you for choosing to participate in this interview. The information that you provide will be of value to other young fathers, young mothers, young families, and perhaps communities in understanding what adolescent fathers experience. It is important to remind you that some questions require much thought. Some questions may result in you experiencing various emotions.

Although the importance of understanding what you are experiencing or have experienced as an adolescent father, or father to be, is important, my primary concern is for your well-being. The questions may cause you some distress or uncomfortable feelings as you reflect back on your experiences. At anytime you feel that the interview is becoming too overwhelming, you always have the option of stopping the interview. Choosing to end the interview will not result in any penalty. We will appreciate your time and effort just the same. Only I will utilize the information obtained and your name will remain confidential (under lock and key) until the data has been collected and the analysis is complete. At that time your name will be destroyed.

The entire interview process may take one to three sessions or visits. Each session will be audio taped to ensure that all of your responses are accurately understood and documented. Any subsequent sessions will focus on clarification of statements or answers. The interview may become time consuming, therefore, breaks and food/beverages will be provided to minimize fatigue.

I, again, thank you in advance for your participation. Any questions or concerns can be made by contacting Michael Till (616) 345-9128, Dr. Robert Betz at (616) 387-5100, or the Human Subject Research Board at (616) 387-8298.
Appendix I

Clarifications/Corrections Made by Participants
Clarifications/Corrections Made By Participants

# of Participant:

#7 Clarification to question #2 regarding whether things changed

We wrote each other a lot and she would send me picture’s of my son a lot.

#7 Clarification to question #6 regarding understanding of fatherhood.

I did not want to be like my father. I wanted to be there for my son. Never wanted to leave him. It hurt when I had to come back.

#7 Clarification for question #9 regarding oldest brother being involved in drugs

Mom would let him come back home with that stuff. Knowing that he was selling drugs. At first I didn’t understand, but now I do. I don’t blame her.

#7 Clarification for question #11 regarding being taught about sex.

I didn’t have anyone in my family to talk to. I wouldn’t know what to ask them anyway. I just heard about the things other guys would say they did and then when I got my chance, I tried them.

#7 Clarification for question #13 regarding seeing society as a dangerous grounds.

Society doesn’t care me. Society doesn’t care about anybody black. Especially black fathers. I feel that if they could make us go away tomorrow they would.

#7 Clarification for question #15 regarding thoughts about services available to Black males.

There are none. If they are, they are not in my neighborhood.

#6 Clarification for question #10 regarding whom as served as primary caregiver

Both my parents have been there. And are still there.

#5 Clarification for question #15 regarding thoughts about services available to Black males.

I think that they are needed. That it’s sad that when we don’t have any. The kind of services that you are talking about are needed. We got to have.
#3 Clarification to question #4 regarding age of son.

My son is three right now and growing.

#3 Clarification to question #15 regarding thoughts about services available to Black males.

We need them. Brothers are out here struggling and trying to get out of the game. They just gonna keep slanging the dope and killing and robbing people if things don’t change.
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