

ABSTRACT

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McCovery, Ebony E.

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A CONCEPTUAL STUDY LINKING AFRICAN AMERICAN FATHER  
ABSENTEEISM TO THE ACADEMICS AND BEHAVIOR OF SCHOOL-AGED  
AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES

Advisor: Erika Walker-Cash, MSW, J.D.

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This paper will explain the factors that contribute to absenteeism among African American fathers and conceptualize a relationship linking father absence to the academic and behavior outcomes of school-aged African American males. Through a systematic review of literature, the author was able to link father absence to the academics and behavior of school-aged African American males. Using the Afrocentric Perspective and the Family Systems theoretical framework, this relational study provides insight to father absenteeism as an urgent social issue, the impact this issue presents to school-aged African American males, and recommendations to help resolve the issue.

A CONCEPTUAL STUDY LINKING AFRICAN AMERICAN FATHER  
ABSENTEEISM TO THE ACADEMICS AND BEHAVIOR OF SCHOOL-AGED  
AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES:

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MCCOVERY, EBONY E.

CLARK ATLANTA UNIVERSITY

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	ii
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	2
Purpose of the Study .....	3
Significance of the Study.....	4
II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	7
Historical Perspective .....	8
African American Father Absenteeism and the Contributing Factors.....	13
Link Between Father Absence, Academics, and Behavior.....	15
Afrocentric Perspective.....	19
Theoretical Framework.....	23
III. METHODOLOGY .....	27
Methods of the Study .....	27
Limitations .....	29

IV.	PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS .....	31
	African American Father Absenteeism and the Contributing Factors.....	31
	Link Between Father Absence, Academics, and Behavior .....	35
V.	SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION.....	40
	Discussion.....	41
	Implications for Social Work.....	42
	REFERENCES .....	46

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The epidemic of absent African American fathers in today's society is vastly spreading and becoming more of a problem (Screven, 2013). According to the 2011 U.S. Census, over 24 million children live in a home where the father is not present (Screven, 2013). Even more disturbing, a 2011 News One article reports that 72% of African-American children are being raised by a single parent (NewsOne Staff, 2011). Based on the presumed risk factors and potential adverse consequences, father absenteeism puts many African American children at a significant disadvantage (Desmond- Harris, 2015). The statistical research found on Fathers.com, concludes children from fatherless homes are more likely to be poor, become involved in drugs and alcohol abuse, drop out of school, and suffer from health and emotional problems (National Center for Fathering n.d.). Research also asserts that African American male children are more likely to become involved in crime as a result of their father's absence (Desmond- Harris, 2015). Screven reports deficiencies related to the social behaviors and academic progress of school-aged African American males are associated with the absence of their fathers (2013). There are many factors that contribute to the phenomenon of father absence and the impact it has on children varies (Gadsden, 2010). This paper will explain the factors that contribute to absenteeism among African American fathers. Additionally, this paper

will conceptualize a relationship between father absence to the academic and behavior outcomes of school-aged African American males.

### Statement of the Problem

Father presence or the lack thereof results in subsequent outcomes that are linked to the academic and behavior outputs of their children. African American males with absent fathers often engage in criminal activity, are academically unsuccessful, and continue the cycle of father absenteeism by not being present in the lives of their children (Edwards, 1996). Statistical and literary research reveal specific disparities within the African American community that are directly linked to father absenteeism. Many publications separately explore the factors that contribute to father absenteeism, the effects of father absence, child behavior development, and the educational achievements of African American males. Despite recognizing these phenomena as areas of concern, few publications interconnect these concepts into one multidimensional social issue.

The following conceptual paper focuses on African American father absenteeism and the potential risks this social issue imposes on the behavior and academic performance of school-aged African American males. Careful examination of the factors that cause father absence will help to explain the prevalence of African American father absenteeism as a social issue. An analysis of the potential negative impact of African American father absence will present this phenomenon as a societal problem while uncovering the connection between this social ill and African American school-aged male academics and behavior. Lastly, an exploration of the benefits associated with father presence will assist in educating, restoring, and provoking positive transformation within



African American families and the community as a whole, which is the intent behind this conceptual investigation.

#### Purpose of the Study

This conceptual study seeks to not only examine the factors that contribute to African American father absenteeism but also to determine how this phenomenon relates to the behavior and academics of African American male children. Identifying a link between African American father absence to the behavioral and academic manifestations of their school-aged sons as the central social problem provides a basis for this paper. This also raises questions that drive the conceptual research such as: what factors contribute to absenteeism among African American fathers? How do the widespread occurrences of African American father absence relate to and impact the overall academic performance and behavior exhibited by school-aged African American males?

The absence of a parental figure has a more direct and negative impact on the cognitive abilities of boys than girls (Dubowitz, Black, Cox, Kerr, Litrownik, Radhakrishna, Runyan, 2001). In addition to the potential impact absenteeism has on cognition and behavior, studies consistently reveal the trend of absenteeism often positions African American boys for great academic vulnerability (Edwards, 1996; Slaughter-Defoe, Nakagawa, Takanishi, & Johnson, 1990). These facts make it necessary to center the focus of this study on absent African American fathers and their sons.

The targeted population for this conceptual study is absent African American fathers and their male children from preschool to twelfth grade. This particular demographic population was chosen based on the researcher's previous work experience

as an Early Intervention Teacher in a primarily Black, all-male charter school. The high rate of behavior issues and low student achievement sparked the researcher's interest in discovering a connection linking African American father absence to childhood male academics and behavior. It is hypothesized that a variety of factors that contribute to the abundant incidences of African American father absence. In addition, a hypothesis is offered suggesting the occurrence of African American father absenteeism can be directly correlated to the academic and behavior trends of school-aged African American males.

Civil Rights Activist Malcolm X once stated, "... the future belongs to those who prepare for it today" (X, & Breitman, 1970). With this in mind, the purpose of this conceptual research is to identify factors that contribute to African American father absenteeism while determining the affect this social issue has to the behavior and academics of male children. The following relational study will be completed in an effort to decrease the occurrences and underline the potential consequential effects of African American father absence. The ultimate goal is to guarantee future generations of African American men have the support, resources, and a fair opportunity to prepare for the future that awaits them as it relates to their behavior characteristics, intellectual pursuits, and raising their own children.

#### Significance of the Study

African American father absence is a prevalent, persistent social issue that is growing (Screven, 2013). Research has shown the trend of African American father absence poses a severe threat to their sons (Desmond-Harris, 2015). It is necessary to explore the connection father absence has with the academics and behavior of their male

children primarily because the consequences of one's father-son relationship can be detrimental to their overall development and ultimate success in adulthood. This research is significant as it can potentially prevent at-risk African American male youth from succumbing to their circumstances and/or continuing the dangerous cycle of father absenteeism. Pinpointing the factors that influence father absence and linking it to male child effects is necessary for understanding and rectifying the social problem absenteeism presents.

In contrast, there is an abundance of research that highlights the positive impact father presence has on children's success. Thus, conceptualizing the relationship between the impact of father absence, academics, and behavior of male children within the African American community adds to the body of scholarly knowledge and literature. This is true, specifically because this conceptual work recognizes African American father absenteeism as a social problem. It also explores the factors contributing to father absence and the manner in which it may negatively affect school-aged males. Furthermore, this research seeks to address the high rate of absenteeism within the African American community directly. This is significant because many issues that plague African American males, in general, are often ignored or minimized.

The findings from this conceptual investigation can be useful to future researchers studying related topics. Social service agencies, professionals, and clinicians can gain insight from the information found in this paper when providing treatment and resources to their clients. Innovative scholastic practices and curriculum can be developed by education professionals and systems based on the conclusions of this study. Policy influencers can develop their legislative agendas specific to family matters, fatherhood,

child welfare, child development, and education using the evidence presented in this paper. Community leaders may also find this research useful in their efforts to bring awareness to the issue of father absenteeism, encourage positive action, and ensure all school-aged males have access to viable educational, social, and personal support from their fathers or father-like figures.

The implications of this research rest upon the Afrocentric Perspective, a strengths-based framework, and the Family Systems Theory, a unifying theoretical framework. Employing strategies related to these frameworks will help professionals restore familial bonds while facilitating positive academic and character development opportunities for African American male children. Professionals can help facilitate this by ensuring their clients maintain consistent and direct father-child relationships.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The following literature review serves to outline this research and provide reasoning for its necessity. It offers a historical perspective, literary and statistical insight from past studies, information on program initiatives that have been implemented, legislative action history, and scholarly opinions regarding the factors that contribute to absenteeism among African American fathers. The literature review also explores various consequences father absence imposes on male child intellectual and behavioral outputs. Compiling, analyzing, and conceptualizing the research information is beneficial to the process of linking the African American father absence with the repercussions it has on school-aged male academics and behavior to form one multidimensional social problem.

This literature review details principle concepts of the Afrocentric Perspective and Family Systems-theoretical framework. The Afrocentric Perspective and Family Systems Theory are utilized to carry out the methodology process as well as provide recommendations at the conclusion of this conceptual study. Both ideological systems take the position that the whole is greater than the individual parts. The Afrocentric Perspective, however, refutes a deficit model and focuses solely on the strengths of an individual to help them achieve their maximum potential. On the contrary, some concepts of the Family Systems Theory involve the acknowledgment of conflict, transference of

issues, and dysfunction within the unit. The Afrocentric Perspective and Family Systems Theory will help give relevance to this research. They will also help professionals working to decrease the rate of father absenteeism employ strategies which aid in their efforts to prevent this social problem from having damaging effects on male child behavior and academics. Moreover, professionals will be capable of treating their client base more effectively while improving society as a whole through having a clear understanding and application of the Afrocentric Perspective and the Family Systems Theory.

#### Historical Perspective

To identify and combat African American father absence as a social issue, one must have an in-depth understanding of fatherhood. This understanding includes having knowledge of the historical facets of fatherhood beginning with its cultural origins. The cultural origin for African American fatherhood is Africa. Conceptualizing African American fatherhood, exploring how it has transformed over time and determining what factors have contributed to the phenomenon of widespread African American father absenteeism is essential for one to gain an accurate understanding of this social ill.

This section provides a historical context to the social problem of African American father absence by first framing the facets of Black fatherhood from its origin - Africa. The ideals of Westernized fatherhood are then detailed. Further historical information follows explaining how the frameworks for Black fatherhood and Westernized fatherhood blended to form what has traditionally been perpetuated as fatherhood within the African American family post slavery. Historical events, societal

shifts, personal factors, and legislative policy help illustrate how African American fatherhood has transformed over time. Statistical information adds detail to the transformation of African American fatherhood, exposing factors that have historically contributed to the development and prevalence of African American father absence. Next, an explanation of how father absenteeism has affected the African American family is provided. Finally, relevant interventions, scholarly research, program initiatives, and legislative action related to fatherhood are discussed with the intention of supporting a need for this conceptual study and other progressive societal action.

Traditionally, in the African culture, the father was fully engaged in raising his children, particularly his sons (Madhubuti, 1990). The acquisition of food and hunting, medical expertise, the construction of houses and communal facilities, and military tactics were some of the skills fathers passed on to their male children (Madhubuti, 1990). Young boys were taught to be providers and protectors of their families. Additionally, boys were provided with instructions in the art of healthy lovemaking (Madhubuti, 1990). Direct contact, intimacy, knowledge and skills training, and character building through lessons allowed elder men within the society to play a fundamental role in introducing young African males to manhood (Wade, 1994). By contrast, patriarchy centered on White men's possession and control of assets laid the foundation for the ideals of Westernized fatherhood (Hamer, 1997). From this perspective, fathers earned both public and private status (Hamer, 1997). Interestingly, the ideals of Westernized fatherhood placed little emphasis on the father-child relationship but instead, was based on the historical socioeconomic and political realities of White men and their female counterparts (White, 2007).

Historically, family has existed as one of the strongest and most influential traditions in the African American community (McAdoo, 2006). Family culture and traditions offered an open institution that encouraged commitment among African American slaves who could not openly or legally commit to any other institutions. Families also provided support which helped African Americans survive the abuse and cruelty of slavery (McAdoo, 2006). The Emancipation of slaves caused African American families to establish social systems analogous to the male-dominated European family structure (Frazier, 1948). Between 1880 and 1925, two-parent families were the norm in poor African American communities (Wade, 1994). Female-headed African American families existed scarcely, if at all (Wade, 1994). The Great Migration tore some African American families apart as a result of the urban expansion and industrial development that took place during this time (Wade, 1994). Since many African American men were unable to find work, African American women became domestic workers at increasingly high rates (Connor, 1988). Similarly, during World War II, African American males migrated to large industrial areas in search of employment. Consequently, this population shift created an uneven ratio between the male-female populations, which led to a breakdown in African American family units and family life (Connor, 1988). Though challenging, African American families still survived the Great Migration and World War II. During this time, most African American marriages were long lasting, and both parents had attachments to their children (McAdoo, 2006).

In the late 1960s, racism and segregation peaked, the economy began to shift from unskilled labor, America's economic progress began to decline, and the social programs of the Great Society began to impact the poor (Wade, 1994). These factors, in



conjunction with the snowballing effects of poverty, led to the deterioration of the two-parent African American family structure (Connor, 1988; Murray, 1984). The deterioration which spanned several decades, also left many African American mothers to head households, provide for, and nurture their children's development without the presence of a father. According to Glick (1981), in 1950, 9% of African American homes were headed by one parent. By 1970, the number had grown to 33.3%, and by 1980, the percentage of African American homes headed by one parent was 45.8% (Glick, 1981). In more recent years, studies have shown that a large percentage of parents who are absent from the home are fathers and a high rate of children who live in single female-headed homes are African American (Gasden, 2010; NewsOne Staff, 2011).

The quandaries historically faced by African American men in the United States have affected African American families to a great extent (Wade, 1994). Fathers play a significant and authoritative role in the family (Blassingame, 1979). Social conditions, paired with personal factors, have made it extremely difficult for African American men to fulfill their familial roles (Wade, 1994). Thus, the African American single-parent family can in part be attributed to the forces of systematic oppression and economics (Wade, 1994). Father absent families are a by-product of and response to modern capitalism (Wade, 1994).

The subject of fathering and father involvement has aroused serious curiosity within the social science disciplines (White, 2007). This is partly due to the changes in the familial structure over time, information reported in statistical data, and inquiry regarding the impact the trend of father absence potentially has (White, 2007). Beyond academia, nationwide program initiatives are attempting to increase father involvement

(Dickerson, 2014). The National Fatherhood Initiative was founded in 1994 to spearhead a society-wide movement challenging the issue of father absence (White, 2007).

Similarly, the importance of African American men assuming responsibility as active, present fathers was a major topic emphasized during the 1996 Million Man March held in Washington, D.C. (White, 2007). Likewise, the mission-focused group All Pro Dad encourages fathers to persistently participate in the lives of their children (Dickerson, 2014). This group is committed to supporting fathers remaining involved with their children by sending regular advice to fathers via email (Family First, 2011). All Pro Dad also hosts bonding activities such as monthly father-child breakfast gatherings and an NFL-sponsored Father-Son interactive sports and gaming experience (Family First, 2011). Several states have launched Responsible Fatherhood programs designed to assist fathers with their child support obligations, increase father-child contact, and foster improved parenting skills (Hawkins, Amato, & King, 2007).

The effort to increase father involvement has also been a focus in the American legal system (Dickerson, 2014). The 105<sup>th</sup> Congress held a hearing in July of 1998 to canvass the societal, financial, and legal struggles of unmarried fathers with children on welfare (United States, 1999). The hearing highlighted numerous studies that found that unmarried fathers commonly: are less educated, earn lower wages and experience unemployment and incarceration at higher rates as compared to married fathers, and fathers whose children are not on welfare (United States, 1999). These factors interfere with the formation of two-parent families and thwart a father's efforts to play a positive role in raising his children (United States, 1999). Additional studies were discussed at the hearing that explored the adverse consequences of father absence revealed father absence

led to children, particularly boys, having a greater propensity to endure similar issues faced by their fathers, therefore, cycling the practice of children being raised in female-headed families into succeeding generations (United States, 1999). Historical literature implies father absence is an issue to be addressed as it poses a threat to the functioning of individuals, families, and societies.

#### African American Father Absenteeism and the Contributing Factors

The prevalence of absent African American fathers dates back to the twentieth century. Clark Atlanta University Alum Booker W. Edwards Jr. states the following in his thesis:

The father, in the family structure, is the foundation of that family system. The father should provide stability to the family which keeps the family in order and functioning. This is similar to how the sun is the stable body in our solar system which keeps the nine planets in perfect rotation. If the sun were to ever go out or move from its place in our solar system, there would be mass destruction among the planets. This is what is happening to the Black family. The fathers have been separated from the families in America since Blacks arrived on slave ships over 400 years ago. This separation was by force. Today it is by both choice and force. The results of this separation are evident and cause mass destruction in the Black family. (Edwards, 1996)

Statistics show the rate of father absence among African American men is significantly higher than that of men from other ethnic groups. For this reason, fatherhood

involvement has been made an urgent issue on the agenda of American interest (White, 2007).

The principal frame of reference for previous investigational studies on African American fathers was White, middle-class conventional families (Cochran, 1997). The westernized exploratory framework led to many stereotypes being applied to African American men, including notions that they are lazy, secondary, or nonexistent parental figures (Boyd-Franklin, 1989). Some quantitative studies, however, concur with the stereotypes suggesting that a large number of young African American fathers have no involvement with their children (Smith, Krohn, Chu, & Best, 2005). In 84% of cases where a parent is absent from the lives of their children, the father is the absent parent (Gadsden, 2010). Astonishingly, there is compelling evidence which reveals the number of African American fathers living apart from their children stems from structural systems of inequality and poverty (Ressler, 2014). This evidence rules out the unfounded assumption that African American men somehow place less value on parenting (Ressler, 2014). Much of the literature related to African American father absenteeism has perpetuated a stereotype characterizing absent fathers as dysfunctional and deviant young males (Smith et al, 2005). Before the mid-1980s, accessible information regarding African American families generally ignored, skewed, or minimized the function of African American men as parents (Boyd-Franklin, 1989). The resistance to unbiased research in the social science fields demonstrates the fact that racially motivated stereotypes are easy to perpetuate but particularly hard to escape (Ressler, 2014).

There are many causations for absenteeism among fathers in the African American community (Gadsden, 2010). To address a societal issue, one must first

identify the existence of an issue, form an understanding of what factors contribute to the prevalence of the issue, and explore the present and potential impact of the issue. Father involvement, especially for African American men is a multidimensional, ever-evolving concept in academic and societal realms (White, 2007). African American fathers have access to fewer resources, limited education, and generally have low literacy skills which prevents them from being active in the lives of their children (Gadsden, 2010). Literature also points to the relationship the father has with the custodial parent or mother as a factor that contributes to absence from his child's life (White, 2007). Economic status and systematic oppression including, but not limited, to racial inequalities, unemployment, underemployment, and discrimination also play a role in African American father absenteeism (Alan & Doherty, 1996; White, 2007). Incarceration is another factor that contributes to African American father absence (Dickerson 2014; Mumola, 2000). Finally, recent literature explains the relationship a man has with his father can be a contributing factor to the role he subsequently plays in the lives of his children (Edwards, 1996; White, 2007).

#### Link between Father Absence, Behavior, and Academics

A lack of presence on part of African American fathers and the effect absence has on the development of African American male children has raised great concern (Gibbs, 1988; Mincy, 1994). Literary-based information from several investigations report children are exposed to a wide variety of problems as a result of parental separation (Edwards, 1996). This is particularly true as it pertains to the presence of a child's father. Whether good or bad, the social and emotional characteristics of a child are significantly

influenced by the father (Dobson, 2001). Evidence from the literature shows that on average, children lacking present fathers are more likely to display symptoms of psychological instability, more likely to have school-related problems, withdraw from school early, and achieve fewer educational attainments (Lamb, 1996).

The father serves as a role model from which the male child discovers and cultivates ideations of manhood while shaping his individual social and personal identity (Taylor, 1976). A father's involvement with his son, along with the behaviors he displays, will influence the identity, behavior, thought processes, and morality his son assumes. In a lecture about men and their children, Michael Lamb asserts children of absent fathers are likely to be symbols of delinquency and unconventional social behavior based on statistics (1996). These children may also have difficulty establishing and maintaining intimate relationships (Lamb, 1996). Father absence puts many African American children at a significant disadvantage, especially males, who are more likely to become involved in crime (Desmond- Harris, 2015). It is estimated that 745,000 African American men are incarcerated, a number that is vastly increasing, and there are 1.4 million African males enrolled in college (Desmond- Harris, 2015). The number of African American males enrolled in college is far greater than the number of those behind bars (Desmond- Harris, 2015). While this is currently true, the single parent statistical data along with the risks associated with father absenteeism suggests a potential inversion of these numbers in the future (Desmond- Harris, 2015). This data implies that the social problem of father absence, which is linked to male child behavior, can also be linked to the high rate of incarcerated African American males. Scholars have even projected that

by the year 2020, two out of every three African American males age 20-29 will be incarcerated (Jenkins, 2006; Kunjufu, 2001).

Edwards (1996) concluded that, when boys are separated from their fathers, they are far more likely than girls to demonstrate aggressive behavior. Girls are trained to openly assess and express their feelings while also showing sensitivity to the feelings of others (Kindlon & Thompson, 1999). It is not common for boys to receive emotional encouragement and they are often times discouraged from being expressive in their emotions (Dickerson, 2014). Possible consequences of this are the common male indifference to others' feelings, displays of aggression, and undesirable conduct in the home or at school. The predisposition for boys to display unavailability in their emotions and subpar behavior can be tied to the influence of their fathers (Dickerson, 2014).

Dr. Jawanza Kunjufu, a scholastic expert and published author, asserts the parent or guardian's daily participation beginning at infancy is essential for the child to succeed academically (Parham, 2006). Father presence is advantageous to children educationally because they receive consistent academic support which then motivates them to excel (Dickerson, 2014). Academically, many African American male students in the United States are struggling (Clark, 2015). School-aged African American males have the highest rates of detention, suspension, expulsion, and their overall scholastic performance is significantly lower than both White students in general and African American female students (Gantt & Greif, 2009). African American males are disproportionately placed in special education programs due to emotionally disturbed behavior or mental retardation (Children's Defense Fund, 2011).

While not exclusively the cause of the issues that affect a child's ability to function in an academic setting, father absence has been linked to the various struggles that hinder African American male students from succeeding academically. Poor academic success is also often the precursor to behavioral difficulties, truancy, juvenile delinquency, and can even lead to criminal behavior (Clark, 2015). Those precursors are all potential risks that father absenteeism poses to male children. Moreover, father absence results in children living in single-parent homes. Being reared in single-parent households raises the likelihood a child will live in poverty because there is only one income available to sustain the household (Nock & Einolf, 2008). The impact of poverty can threaten the educational achievement of single-parent children (Dickerson, 2014). This further details the impact father absenteeism has on a child's academic performance.

Indications from previous research also suggest that compared to children with present fathers, children of absent fathers measured lower on numerous character attributes, in individual and group adjustment, and they were substantially more crippled in their self-estimate of skills by their teachers (Edwards, 1996). Additionally, various studies conclude African American boys whose fathers were not involved in their lives scored lower on assessments of moral development than their peers with present fathers (Edwards, 1996). Moreover, Edwards affirms teachers commonly anticipated a lower level of personal application, work productivity, and they typically held children from fatherless homes less accountable for their negative behaviors (1996). Substandard expectations consequentially enable mediocrity, poor academic performance, and persistent episodes of negative behavior. Overall, research infers frequent and consistent



father-son contact is linked to exceptional social, emotional, and academic outcomes (Howard, Burke LeFever, Borkowski, & Whitman, 2006).

### Afrocentric Perspective

Perspectives are the way individuals go about perceiving the world. These perceptions often flow from a value or position. The Afrocentric Perspective is a paradigm encompassing spiritual, intellectual, and political tenets (Early, 1995). The ideology employs a strengths-based model to help people not only reach, but maximize their potential as contributing beings of the world. This theory transcends all that social work practitioners do in their interactions with client populations. The Afrocentric Perspective teaches one to respect and appreciate all people regardless of ethnicity, culture, history, life experience, and various other factors (Schiele, n.d.). This perspective provides social workers with specific constructs that can aid them in fully understanding the African American experience (Schiele, 2015).

The Afrocentric Perspective is premised on ten concepts, which, when understood, aid in the delivery of in-depth, valuable social work practice. The first tenet is humanistic values (Waymer, 2006). This is in direct alignment to the principles of placing priority on eliminating human oppression and enhancing human potential (Schiele, n.d.). The Afrocentric Perspective also gives way for freedom of self and action to determine racial oppression and eliminate human oppression (Early, 1995). This gives one the opportunity to think independently about a situation through the concept known as autonomy (Schiele, n.d.). Functionally, the Afrocentric Perspective serves to increase the probability that an accurate account of the reality of African American life will be

given (Early, 1995). It serves as a self-empowering experience (Wiley, 1991). Rather than taking on the self-destructive definition of self by others, the Afrocentric Perspective grants the individual the ability to form their definitions of self. It differentiates African American families as being homogeneous, and it also renounces a deficit model (Schiele, 2015). The Afrocentric Perspective is unique from other worldly perspectives. In its origin, it placed emphasis on the importance of taking a look at the issues faced by those of African descent and using a historical knowledge base to highlight the ideals and contributions of Africans and African Americans (Wiley, 1991). Time and expansion of the Afrocentric Perspective have revealed it is a universalistic and particularistic theory meaning it can place focus on things both inside and outside the community of any group of people. The Afrocentric Perspective gives way for circular and linear logic (Schiele, n.d.). The ultimate goal of the research is to inform, educate, and advance society through the work of competent individuals. Reasoning from this fact, another guiding concept of the Afrocentric Perspective is matrix roles which is the personification of effective professional strategies for eliminating human oppression while enhancing human potential. This directly correlates to one of the main purposes for the field of Social Work (Schiele, n.d.). The Afrocentric Perspective can be applied to research by looking at individual scenarios, circumstances, or issues to find implications for practice. Regarding evidence-based practice, the Afrocentric Perspective leads social workers to ponder on how they can take what they have learned through their research to enhance the life quality of everyone in the future.

As mentioned earlier, the Afrocentric Perspective uses spirituality along with the notion that all phenomena and beings are interconnected, serving equally important

purposes (Schiele, 1991). A collective view of self, another Afrocentric tenant, further demonstrates the interconnectedness embodied within the Afrocentric Perspective. The Afrocentric Perspective encompasses specific constructs. The use of support systems and extended kinship is one. Communal identity and survival in an “I am because we are” mentality is another. The Afrocentric Perspective also promotes self-help (Schiele, 2015). This perspective employs a holistic approach with the notion that the mind, body, and spiritual life labor as one and are inseparable (Boyd-Franklin, 2006). The Afrocentric Perspective encourages collectivity rather than individuality, analog thinking versus European binary thinking, and lastly, a high level of spirituality (Schiele, 2015).

The Afrocentric Perspective allows practitioners to be transformed through their work from gaining insight and understanding of self via the significance of self-knowledge and personal experience concept (Schiele, n.d.). Social workers, like other human beings, can learn from their personal understandings and past work experiences. They can then employ this knowledge when dealing with their client base (Schiele, n.d.). The Afrocentric Perspective allows individuals to be intuitive, recognizing and accepting the importance of emotion in determining what is real on the client and practitioner end (Dudley, 2011).

It leads one to explore the contributions to society from more than just a Eurocentric viewpoint and seeks to highlight the influences other groups of people have had on shaping the world of today (Asante, 1987). This perspective looks to educate people, evoke a spiritual awakening in people, and elicit political power and activism in people as a means to enhance all lives (Wiley, 1991). The Afrocentric perspective is not only dedicated to bringing awareness to the greatness of people of African descent but all

people who have been left out of the league of extraordinary civil pioneers. These strides are made in an attempt to bring about positive transformation in the world.

The Afrocentric perspective is relevant and important as it pertains to this research specifically because the topic is centered on African Americans. This particular work focuses on examining the antecedents of father absence in the African American community and determining the relationship the effects of this social problem has with the academic performance and social behaviors of school-aged African American males. The Afrocentric Perspective can be helpful in offering possible strategies to remedy the social issues this conceptual study is based on. One must understand the plight of African American males young and old to in order to properly execute research, interpret the findings, and provide effective implications to practitioners who wish to keep African American fathers present in the lives of their clients who are children. The Afrocentric Perspective brings a sense of awareness to the nature of African American culture. It offers logic and reasoning behind certain occurrences and phenomena; and, it presents background knowledge on why African Americans function how they do.

The Afrocentric Perspective will also be utilized in the selection of literary works that will form the concluding determinations of this research. It will serve as the basis for implications offered to practitioners and suggestions for further research in this area. The objective in aligning the Afrocentric Perspective with this study is to ultimately alleviate the challenges father absenteeism creates in the African American community.

## Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that will be used as the structure to undergird this research is the Family Systems Theory. Families are systems of interdependent and interconnected beings that cannot be understood in seclusion from the system (GenoPro, 1998). This theoretical framework, introduced by Dr. Murray Bowen, is a theory of human behavior that considers families as emotional units. The theory employs systems thinking to describe the complex interactions within the unit (The Bowen Center, 2016). The Family Systems Theory implies that individuals cannot be understood in isolation from one another, but rather as a part of their family since the family is one emotional unit (GenoPro, 1998). According to Bowen, a family is a unit in which all members are assigned specific roles and everyone has certain rules to abide by (GenoPro, 1998). In a family unit, each member is expected to respond to each other in a certain manner according to their role (GenoPro, 1998). Roles are determined through relationship agreements (GenoPro, 1998). Within the confines of the system, behavior patterns develop as the actions and behaviors of members in the family are influenced by and in turn, influence the actions and behaviors of others within the unit (GenoPro, 1998). Maintaining a consistent pattern of behaviors within the family unit may bring about balance in the system, but it can also lead to dysfunction (GenoPro, 1998).

There are eight interconnecting concepts in the Family Systems Theory. One is the triangle which is a three-person relationship system (The Bowen Center, 2016). The triangle is considered the cornerstone of greater emotional structures because it is the smallest stable relationship system (The Bowen Center, 2016). This is based on the fact that triangles usually have one side in conflict and two sides in harmony. These factors

contribute to the development of clinical problems (GenoPro, 1998). Due to the need for people to receive attention, acceptance, and approval, families and other social groups tremendously affect how people think, feel, and act. (The Bowen Center, 2016). The variance in individuals within the family as it pertains to their need to depend on others in the unit for acceptance and approval describes another concept – differentiation of self (GenoPro, 1998). The concept of the nuclear family emotional system incorporated into the Family Systems Theory explains four crucial relationship patterns that dictate where issues develop in a family (The Bowen Center, 2016). These relationship patterns include marital conflict, dysfunction in one spouse, impairment of one or more children, and emotional distance (GenoPro, 1998). Understanding these patterns allows practitioners to recognize root issues that affect the family dynamics and possibly aid them in finding effective strategies to improve the family unit. Family projection process is a theoretical concept that describes the diffusion of emotional issues from a parent to a child (GenoPro, 1998). The projection process can impair the functioning of one or more children and increase their vulnerability to clinical symptoms, further demonstrating how individuals in the family system are interconnected and have the ability to affect one another (The Bowen Center, 2016). This theory's concept of the multigenerational transmission process describes how small differences in the levels of differentiation between parents and their children over many generations lead to marked differences in differentiation among the members of a multigenerational family (The Bowen Center, 2016). The information creating these differences is transmitted across generations by way of relationships. Transmission takes place on several interrelated levels ranging from the conscious teaching and learning of information to the automatic and unconscious

programming of emotional reactions and behaviors within the family system (The Bowen Center, 2016). Information transmitted through relationships and genetics work together to shape an individual's sense of self (GenoPro, 1998). Emotional cutoff describes the concept of people managing their unresolved emotional issues with members of their family by reducing or totally cutting off emotional contact with them (GenoPro, 1998). Bowen observed the impact of sibling position on development and behavior in his family research (The Bowen Center, 2016). It is important that theorists and practitioners look to the efforts of others to inform, guide, and provide a basis for their work. Dr. Bowen incorporated the research of psychologist Walter Toman into the Family Systems Theory as a foundation for its concept of sibling position as it was extremely thorough and consistent with his ideas. (The Bowen Center, 2016). It describes the impact of sibling arrangement on maturation and conduct (GenoPro, 1998). The rudimentary notion is that people who grow up in the same sibling position predictably have important common characteristics (The Bowen Center, 2016). The Family Systems Theory's concept of societal emotional functioning, a parallel to familial and societal emotional functioning, explains the manner in which the emotional system regulates behavior on a social level, fostering both developing and degenerating periods in a society (The Bowen Center, 2016).

The relevancy of the Family Systems Theory to this research lies in the fact that its primary purpose is to determine if and how the actions or behaviors of one individual in the family unit (absentee fathers) affect those of another individual in the family (their sons). Similar to the concepts encompassed by the Family Systems Theory, this research will explore relationship patterns, notions of self, and society's impact. Use of this theory

will assist in determining the causations for absenteeism among African American fathers and further establish or refute a correlation between the impact of father absenteeism and the son's academic performance and behavior. If the impact of African American father absenteeism is proven to have negative connections to the educational and behavior exhibition of African American male children, the Family Systems Theory will support practitioners' efforts to restore the family as a unit. Bringing and keeping members of African American families together will possibly lead to noticeable improvements in the academics and behavior of African American boys. The goal is to decrease the prevalence of father absenteeism in an effort to prevent this social issue from having a negative impact on the African American community at large. The Family Systems Theory maintains familial relationships through its concepts and practices rather than isolating the members of the family unit. This is vital for keeping fathers involved in the lives of their sons.



## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

The information found in this relational study was analyzed and interpreted using a systematic review including the collection, analysis, and synthesis of data through qualitative research synthesis. These research devices were used to address questions concerning the factors that contribute to African American father absenteeism and the relationship the impact of father absence has with the academic performance and behavior patterns of school-aged African American males.

#### Methods of the Study

The research for this systematic review was performed in the Robert W. Woodruff Library located in the Atlanta University Center. The Woodruff Library portal was used to access databases such as, Patheos, ProQuest, JSTOR, Digital Commons, the library's Woodi Cart Card Catalogue, Socindex, and GovTrack to retrieve some of the information upon which this research is based. Common search inquiries were made using Google Scholar to collect literature. The researcher also obtained print resources such as university publications from collegiate instructors, books, articles, and newsletters. The researcher avoided using literature that did not explicitly cover: parental involvement, father involvement be it, absence or presence, male children, education,

child academic performance, child development, personality development, or African Americans (historical background, family structure, societal ills). This was done to ensure the information was focused and relevant to the subject. Literature resources that could not be accessed for free through the electronic databases or the interlibrary loan system were avoided.

In an effort to collect materials for this conceptual study, 13 keyword searches were used. The keyword searches included: black males and academics, absentee fathers, effects of absentee fathers, black sons, black fathers, fathers and legislation, African American male education achievement, black boys, Absenteeism in the black community, effects of absentee fathers, African American educational disparities, African American father and sons, and African American father involvement. This paper contains information from 5 website postings, 2 magazine articles, 5 online articles, 29 scholarly journal articles, 24 books, 2 lectures, 3 university publications, 3 theses, 5 dissertations, 2 government documents, 1 newsletter, 1 descriptive report, and 5 research studies. The references, totaling 87, were found within the subject areas of education, social work, social science, psychology, religion, law, government, family, and children and adolescents. The information collected to engage in this research was according to the chapter outline and headings determined by the structure of a traditional conceptual research paper.

## Limitations

There were many limitations experienced while conducting this research. Systematic reviews require researchers to gather an abundance of information to either support or contest the hypotheses based on the questions the research seeks to answer (Uman, 2011). Maintaining an unbiased perspective in the review of the data was vital for the researcher to obtain valid information. Accessing free, reliable resources to explore the social issues this paper concerns served as a limitation. Many of the resources that were listed online allowed researchers to view the abstracts of the literature, but full versions required a fee. Another limitation of this study was the age of the literature that was available. While a considerable amount of the resources were ten years old or younger, some of the literature dates back to the 1940s which may alter the relevance and accuracy of the research findings.

As it pertains to the population this research focuses on, a large amount of the literature and previous research conducted was biased, deficit-based, and had stereotypical information. This left the researcher with limited literature options to compare in order to gain a leveled understanding of the factors that cause absenteeism among African American fathers while identifying its connection to the academics and behavior of male children. The limited perspectives and stereotypical nature of the existing literature may be due to the racial discernments African Americans have historically been subjected to.

The researcher was able to overcome the limitations experienced while conducting this correlational study in a variety of ways. In an effort to maintain an unbiased perspective, the researcher reviewed literary materials that presented facts on

the negative impact of father absence, benefits of father presence, and factors that lead to the success of boys from female-headed single parent homes. Accessing the free, full-text, downloadable version of materials was done by browsing various electronic databases, google scholar, and using the interlibrary loan system. The researcher consulted with colleagues and faculty with similar study interests for advice on resources they found relevant, current, and scholarly. Exploring the reference pages of all the literary materials for other relevant information sources was another method the researcher used to find unbiased, relevant, and up to date information. Data was collected from diverse sources and differing medium to expand the depth of information this study would present. Finally, the most pertinent and prevailing information from reputable sources was selected for inclusion in the findings and conclusions.

## CHAPTER IV

### PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

The factors that contribute to absenteeism among African American fathers and its impact on the academic performance and behavior of school-aged males was the focus of this conceptual paper. An in-depth analysis of literary works and other scholarly materials provided data that determined several factors contribute to father absenteeism among African American men. Furthermore, the study verified the academic and behavioral functioning of the absent father's African American son will be affected by this.

#### African American Father Absenteeism and the Contributing Factors

The findings from this research reveal that various factors contribute to the absence of African American fathers in homes across America. Evidence also exposes this trend as a critical social problem and details the threat it poses to future generations of African Americans. African American children are at the highest disadvantage in terms of father absence as nearly 64% of America's population of African American children reside in fatherless homes. This percentage is significantly higher than that of Hispanic children (34%) and White children (25%). With these statistics in mind, why is it that more African American fathers are not frequently and actively present in the lives of their children? What

factors have led to the elevated rates of absentee fathers within the African American community?

A primary reason African American fathers fail to parent their children is based on the relationship they have with the mother or custodial parent of the child (White, 2007). According to Rick Banks, African American men do not marry and/or stay married to the mothers of their children (2011). African Americans are the least likely to marry than any other racial group and when they do marry, their unions are more than likely to dissolve (Banks, 2011). When a child is the by-product of a non-marital relationship, they are deemed fatherless until their paternity is proven legally (Casebolt, 1988). Unwed fathers must not assume that solely paying child support gives them the legal authorization to be involved in their child's life (White, 2007). Unmarried men must involve the legal system in order to verify paternity and legitimize their children (White, 2007). Not doing so prevents fathers from being able to legally pursue visitation, custody or any other rights related to raising his child (White, 2007). Ignorance of these facts, or failure to complete the legal process contributes to the trend of father absence within the African American community. Even with the correct legal standing, the dynamics of the relationship between the father and mother dictates the amount and quality of time a father will spend with his child (Allen &Doherty, 1996). Fathers saw their child less frequently and appeared to be more discreet about the specific nature of their interaction with their child when tension existed between him and the mother of the child (Allen &Doherty, 1996). Consistent cooperation, communication, and positive interactions with the custodial parent are critical components that help ensure a father has access and quality involvement with his child (White, 2007). It is impossible for men to be active fathers if women do not permit them

to (Whitehead, 1996). According to Whitehead (1996), addressing the lack of father involvement as a societal issue cannot be done by men alone. The mothers and custodial parents of children must be willing to participate in the process of engaging fathers in the lives of their children as well. (White, 2007).

A man is characterized by his capacity to provide for his family (McAdoo, 1993). When a father's occupational and financial standing function as factors to gauge his level of parental engagement and familial accomplishments, success is defined by the competency-based skills he has acquired and the nature of employment he has access to (White, 2007). This implies African American fathers have historically fallen short of their parental goals because African American men have consistently faced issues related to the availability of gainful employment opportunities (White, 2007). In every decade following slavery, African-American men have experienced high rates of unemployment, underemployment, lower wages, and lower levels of education than White men (Hamer, 1997). Unemployment makes African American men less appealing as role models for their sons (Ray & McLoyd, 1986). Lack of employment is also related to fathers feeling less positively about their children (Sheldon & Fox, 1983). The shifting labor market has eliminated the sufficient paying blue-collar jobs, which previous generations of men relied on (Banks, 2011). In urban areas, men are disproportionately likely to lack to an adequate educational backing which is usually required to obtain employment (Banks, 2011). This further explains why absenteeism among fathers is a social issue for African Americans – all too many African American men have little hope of being able to support and provide for a family (Banks, 2011).

Incarceration is another prevalent cause of father absenteeism in African-American families (Dickerson, 2014). In an article stressing the impact of incarceration on children with absent fathers, Mumola (2000) discovered that 667,900 fathers detained in state and federal prisons had children who were minors. African-American children are nine times more likely than children of other ethnicities to have an incarcerated parent and in most cases, that parent was the father (Mumola, 2000). The mass incarceration of African American men contributes to the absence of African American fathers. A Washington D.C. based study on prison reform illustrates staggering racial disparities that pervade the United States criminal justice system (Street, 2014). According to the study's report, if current incarceration trends continue, one in every three black males born can expect to be imprisoned by the American judicial system at some point in their life (Street, 2014). This prevents them from taking care of their responsibilities as fathers (Street, 2014).

The relationship a father has with his own father can play a role in the level of involvement he subsequently displays with his children. Fathers prepare their sons for fatherhood and their lived-out example demonstrates to their sons what it means to be a man (Elhage, 1999). Many studies indicate that children benefit from an involved and nurturing father (Pruett, 1987; Sagi, 1982). An absent father gives their son nothing to form their own basic understanding of fatherhood. This lack of a role model often leaves the son unaware of the full scope of the responsibilities fatherhood encompasses. Thus, causing the son who eventually becomes a father to retreat on their offspring, continuing the cycle of father absenteeism (Edwards, 1996).

Fatherhood can increase a man's sense of failure and vulnerability if he knows or fears that he cannot provide for his wife and children (Madhubuti, 1990). Historically,



African American men have been systematically marginalized through the institutions of slavery, racism, discrimination, and poor education. These systems oppress the African American man, strip him of his power, and hinder him from providing for his family. When African American men are unable to obtain a quality life for themselves and their family within the confines of society, they sometimes respond adversely (Wade, 1994). Negative responses include withdrawing from the family or abusing it, resorting to a life of crime, developing outside relationships with other women, and/or resorting to self-destructive acts like suicide and substance abuse (Wade, 1994).

Conclusions drawn from this exploration suggest that the factors generally contributing to absenteeism among African American fathers are personally, economically, racially, and systematically charged. It is vital to address father absence as a social problem as it can cause harmful generational consequential effects for entire family systems and communities.

#### Link between Father Absence, Behavior, and Academics

Research has repeatedly shown a connection between family and achievement (White, 1994). It is reported that 87% of a child's waking hours from the time of birth to the age of 18 are influenced by the home environment (White, 1994). National data strongly supports the notion that there is a strong correlation between single-parent households headed by mothers and African American males who go awry (Clark, 2015).

Father presence was found to be associated with better child cognitive development and greater perceived competence of children (Dubowitz et al., 2001). Research findings have concluded positive father involvement is related to self-control,

self-esteem, life skills, and social competence in elementary school-age children and adolescents (Dubowitz et al., 2001). The father-son relationship has a tremendous influence on the son's social, psychological, and emotional development (Miles, 2006). It was determined that a father's involvement in their son's life resulted in the son displaying less aggression, acting less competitively, exhibiting more emotionally expressive behavior, and having the ability to communicate vulnerability and sadness (Pollock, 1998). The investigation also discovered that male children with engaged, nurturing fathers found no purpose in acting out or being aggressive in exchange for love and attention from their fathers (Pollock, 1998). Male children look to their fathers for acceptance, guidance, and approval. The father is idolized during early childhood. Although male children pull away from the father during early adolescence in a process called "deidolization", father-son closeness resumes in a more mature way during late adolescence or early adulthood (Wade, 1994). The child pursues love and affection from his father through his behaviors which are dictated by what he feels is reminiscent of his father's behaviors and acceptable to his father. Committed and responsible father involvement from infancy to early childhood helps to develop emotional security, curiosity, math, and verbal skills (Gadsden, 2010).

The research of Zulu (2015) contends there is a relationship between family structure and academic problems. Findings affirm that family breakdown or instability account for child learners facing obstacles or barriers in their learning environment (Zulu, 2015). This is based on the fact that they lack support from a significant adult. The presentation of this information makes it evident that family structures need to be strengthened (Zulu, 2015).

A child's academic difficulties can begin as early as elementary school oftentimes, leading to a large number of boys being placed in special education classes (Parham, 2006). Dr. Jawanza Kunjufu believes this time is most critical for African American males (Parham, 2006). According to experts, the academic downward spiral of young African American men manifests as early as fourth grade (Parham, 2006). African American male students are placed in special education classes due to emotionally disturbed behavior or what is perceived to be intellectual disabilities (Children's Defense Fund, 2011). Father absence is associated with a higher prevalence of behavioral and psychological problems for because it may generate feelings of abandonment and stress for children (Sigle-Rushton & McLanahan, 2002). This stress may be outwardly displayed through negative behaviors in the home or at school. A research study of younger children revealed that third and fourth graders who reported having positive associations with their fathers were more academically successful and displayed fewer behavior problems in comparison to children who reported their relationships with their fathers was less positive (Dubowitz et al., 2001).

Findings further expose father absenteeism as one of the major contributors to the high school dropout rate in the African American community (Parham, 2006). African-American boys living in father-absent homes had lower educational ambitions in comparison to Caucasian boys living in father-absent homes (Slaughter-Defoe, Nakagawa, Takanishi, & Johnson, 1990). It has been proven that young men whose fathers are absent have lower IQ levels and low verbal and school performance scores (Gadsden, 2010).

The odds of a child born into an impoverished single-parent household becoming a successful student and citizen are quite low (Clark, 2015). The possibility of African American male students achieving academic success is made much more difficult when their household is headed by a single mother (Clark, 2015). This is partly because the mother is tasked with having to financially support the family on her own. Independently undertaking a task of this nature prevents her from having extra time to participate in the child's school activities as much as she would like, assisting the child with school assignments, and consistently communicating with school officials (McLoyd, Jayarante, Ceballo, & Borquez, 1994; Taylor, 1991).

The average school-aged boy struggles to meet the developmental and academic standards of a school curriculum that stress reading, writing, and verbal ability (Dickerson, 2014). Those specific intellectual abilities develop at a slower rate in boys than girls (Thompson & Kindlon, 1999). A portion of the issue may be that males do not view reading, writing, and verbal expression as masculine activities nor do they see males commonly engaged in these activities in schools (Dickerson, 2014). Fathers involved in the learning process of their sons encourage and support activities like reading, writing, and verbal expression which contribute to academic success.

A research investigation conducted in 2001 by the National Center for Education Statistics indicated there was a greater likelihood a child would earn grades of "A" in their courses and be less likely to repeat a grade when their father had involvement with the school (Nord & West, 2001). Previous explorations also provided evidence that children in two-parent households had fewer behavior challenges and higher assessment scores compared to children living in single-parent homes (Dubowitz et al., 2001).

Father presence is advantageous in the African American community, especially for boys (Gadsden, 2010). Children benefit from parental warmth, parental involvement, family harmony, the absence of economic stress, and the absence of family conflict (Lamb, 1996). Father presence must begin early as the male child's initial knowledge of gender responsibilities is based on their observations of their father (Gadsden, 2010). The father also plays an important role in the establishment and reinforcement of behavior expectations in settings including the child's social and academic networks (Gadsden, 2010). The research findings from this study help to conclude that father absenteeism links directly to the academic performance and behavior patterns of school-aged African American males.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Through the Afrocentric Perspective and the Family Systems Theory, this paper conceptualized African American father absenteeism in an effort to assert the presence of a correlation between the impact of the social issue and the academics and behavior of school-aged African American males. The information shared within this paper has the potential to influence future research in the area of interfamilial relationships. This study provides practitioners who service this population with knowledgeable insight that benefits their clinical practice. The information shared in this paper can also charge policymakers to enact legislation that promotes father presence and benefits disadvantaged children without present fathers. This research supported the initial hypotheses that specific circumstances lead to father absenteeism and in turn, the impact of father absence is directly related to school-age African American male academic performance behavior (Dubowitz et al., 2001; Ressler, 2014).

## Discussion

The examination of the literature and the findings from this research yield evidence pointing to specific factors which contribute to African American fathers lacking a presence in the lives of their children. This absence is linked to and can have detrimental effects on the academic achievements and behavior patterns of African American male children. There have been studies conducted and literature published replete with stereotypical assumptions claiming African American men are lazy, peripheral, or unavailable (Boyd-Franklin, 2006). These claims are offered as the general reason high percentages of African American children do not have an active, present father in their lives (Boyd-Franklin, 2006). Research in the area of father absenteeism has shown that a large number of African American fathers do not abandon their children out of ill-will (Ressler, 2014). The truth is, many of these fathers are poorly educated, are not (typically) married to the mothers of their children, do not have the means to financially support their children, and do not have access to adequate resources to aid them in being present figures in the lives of their children (Banks, 2011; Gadsden, 2010; Ressler, 2014).

The sons of absent African American fathers are put at the greatest disadvantage (Dubowitz et al., 2001). Father absenteeism can cause poor cognitive functioning, the development of behavior issues, emotional distress, and interfere with the academic progress of the African American male child who already statistically struggles more than any other child in the school setting (Prager, 2011; Slaughter-Defoe, Nakagawa, Takanishi, & Johnson, 1990). An African American father's educational attainment level is a factor that contributes to absenteeism (Gasden, 2010). African American male

children with absent fathers are likely to experience academic difficulties and score low on scholastic assessments (Dickerson, 2014). In consideration of this, it is plausible to assert there is a direct connection between father absenteeism and the level at which school-aged African American males function academically and behaviorally.

### Implications for Social Work

To ensure more children, particularly those with absent fathers, develop into responsible young men, it is strongly suggested by experts that conscientious adult males present themselves as available role models through mentorship (Parham, 2006). National organizations such as 100 Black Men, the National Urban League, and Big Brothers Big Sisters have demonstrated how mentors have the capability to transform African American boys (Anonymous, 2013). An article in *Ebony Magazine* revealed that Eagle Academy for Young Men in New York City has aggressively utilized male mentors to rectify the absence of men in African American boys' lives (Anonymous, 2013). Their use of successful African American and Latino men with thriving careers to step in, open up, and share their life experiences with the student population inspires the young men to believe more deeply in themselves and take a greater level of ownership over their learning (Anonymous, 2013).

Nurturing, bonding with, and sharing life experiences with their children are a few of the advantages of fatherhood. Community-based initiatives and programming that promote these advantages may be effective in decreasing instances of father absenteeism. They may also promote positive behavior and fuel academic success in African American male children. Community programs can engage this population through offering



activities such as “Dads and Doughnuts” socials, father-child team competitive events, father-child educational opportunities, father-child community service initiatives, support groups for fathers, and making sure resources are made readily available to fathers in need of assistance providing for their children.

Social work practitioners should apply the Afrocentric perspective when working with their client base as it refutes a deficit model and promotes the ideology that all beings are valued contributors to the well-being and functioning of society. With this in mind, fathers may be more eager to participate in their children’s lives. This might rid the African American community of the issues that develop as a direct result of father absenteeism. In an effort to rejuvenate the African American community through the restoration of its family units, practitioners should also look to Bowen’s Family Systems Theory. It can serve as a means to provide a renewed foundation for positive family relations, promote the involvement of all family members in the inner workings of each other’s social, emotional, and intellectual development and practices; and lastly, it can aid families in coping with adversities as a unit rather than in isolation of each other. Doing this may keep African American fathers present and active in families and positively impact the academic performance and behavior patterns of school-aged African American males.

School systems can work to create policies and curriculums that cater to the specific needs of African American male pupils. Failing to close the educational achievement gap which disparages African American males will, in turn, contribute to the cycle of father absenteeism in the African American community. Many males with absent fathers will go on to have children of their own; it is necessary for young males to receive

a quality education and develop positive character traits (Gadsden, 2010). When this occurs, the probability these young men will have access to gainful employment and be present in the lives of their children increases. Inadequate education positions male students for failure (Gadsden, 2010). They are presented with minimal employment opportunities and have limited access to resources which are among the many factors that contribute to absenteeism among African-American fathers (Gadsden, 2010). This information indicates a portion of the responsibility lies within the school system's ability or failure to intellectually stimulate African American males while also providing them with a stable moral compass which is necessary for success in adulthood.

The "Fathers Count Act of 1999" is a legislative act purposed to amend Part A of title IV of the Social Security Act to provide grants for projects designed to promote responsible fatherhood, and other purposes (United States, 1999). This bill was introduced in a session of Congress and was passed by the House on November 10, 1999, but was never passed by the Senate (Civic Impulse, 2016). On a national level, enactment of more legislation that encourages and supports fathers in their efforts to actively participate in the lives of their children is a necessity (Gadsden, 2010). Like the Fathers Count Act of 1999 attempted newly proposed legislation should promote marriage and successful parenting through counseling, mentorship, and dissemination of information regarding the advantages of marriage and good parenting practices. Pertinent information includes pre-pregnancy education, family preparation, money management instruction, promoting child support payments, and encouraging regular visitation between fathers and their children (United States, 1999). Legislation should also help fathers enhance their relationship skills, and teach men how to control aggressive behavior. Lastly,

proposed legislative enactments need to assist fathers and their families in improving their financial condition by offering work first services, job search assistance, work training, sponsored employment, career-advancing education, job retention, and job enhancement. Should this type of assistance be provided, the legislation would allow families to evade or escape the need to rely on cash welfare benefits provided by the government (United States, 1999).

Future research should be conducted to provide a deeper analysis of the social communities in which African American male children are raised. Another area for researchers to explore is how socioeconomics affect marriage and child rearing within the African American community. A study determining how the lack of resources available to African Americans affect family relations is also vital (Gadsden, 2010). Evidence from future studies may yield results that could potentially provide direct insight on ways to strengthen the African American male child and family on a micro level, the African American community on the mezzo level, and spark the large-scale transformation of government policies affecting African Americans on the macro level.

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