

ABSTRACT

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IDENTIFYING AND UNDERSTANDING THE UNDERLINED CAUSES OF
FATHER ABSENTEEISM WITHIN THE AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY

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The literature reviewed in this conceptual paper identified some of the causes that lead to absentee fathers within the African American community. This body of work also shed light on these fathers' emotional state, and financial state in regards to being able to care for their children. The men identified in these studies all shared a common theme, despite how they are portrayed in society they all had a desire to be a part of their children's lives and needed someone to advocate on their behalf.

IDENTIFYING AND UNDERSTANDING THE UNDERLINED CAUSES OF
FATHER ABSENTEEISM WITHIN THE AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY

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I wouldn't be anything without God, the one who declared my destiny before I was even created, the One who gave me the mental stamina to complete such a task. Heavenly Father, Thank You. I dedicate this body of work and my entire graduate experience to my dear mother, the Late Minister Linda B. Lightsey. It was through her unfailing love and encouragement that I embraced the idea of pursuing a master degree and developed the courage to see it through. This process has been a journey, but it was one worth taking. Mommy I love you and miss you deeply. To my Dad, Johnny E. Nash, thank you for being the amazing man you are! I appreciate the sacrifices you've made and I love you beyond words. I also dedicate this research to my darling son, Johnathan Linden-Xavier Grant, my source of strength, pride, joy and unconditional love. Thank you for sacrificing your time in exchange for my education. I love you son and I pray that you are inspired to pursue even greater accomplishments. To my family and friends, who are too great to name, I thank you for the unconditional love and support that you have given me throughout the past three years. I am forever grateful. Lastly, to every African American man who is misunderstood, undervalued and unappreciated, along with every African American woman who feel invisible, yet has to be superhuman, taken for granted but still so faithful, strong, but yet so fragile, this work is also for you. It is my desire to use this Master of Social Work degree to bring healing and understanding to our relationships, so that we can grow, live, love and create together.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Society has painted a picture of the traditional family as being nuclear in form. This nuclear family is comprised of a mother, father, and their children living within the same household (Boyd-Franklin, 2013). For African-Americans, family comes in many shapes and forms. When considering family for African Americans, one must consider blood relatives and fictive kin. When considering a household, one must recognize every individual that exists within that family system, otherwise known as family members. This may be a nuclear family, or it may present as a family that includes parents, children, and grand-parents. Additionally, African American families may also include other extended members such as aunts, uncles, and cousins (Boyd-Franklin, 2013). When these family structures take form, it is often times a means of survival and provision. The African-American family has traditionally been known to come together during hard times to work as a community to raise children as well as take care of the elderly family members (Boyd-Franklin, 2013). Forming these familial communities has several advantages such as being a source of mutual, financial, and emotional support for one another (Boyd-Franklin, 2003).

African American families offers several advantages, however, in some instances there have been circumstances that causes the family to have to create a safety net for its members in need. The absence of a biological father in the African-American household has presented several disadvantages for the child in the household. The negative effects of father absence can include poor academic performance, poor overall health, and conflict in emotional stability and social interaction (DeBell, 2008). Sanders (1996) suggests that boys who experience life absent of their father are likely to be juvenile in thought; have no respect for authoritative figures; and overall present more delinquent behaviors than their male counterparts that have an active father.

Sanders (1996) also speaks to the consequences an absent father has on his daughter. Girls who are neglected the experience of having an active father are said to be more dependent on their mothers (Sanders, 1996). Moreover, as these daughter mature into young women, there is an increased chance of engaging in unhealthy relationships (Sanders, 1996). Additionally, these young women are more likely to consciously and subconsciously, engage in relationships with men who represent a paternal role rather than the role of a life partner (Sanders, 1996).

Statement of the Study Issue

According to research, single parent homes led by women have greatly increased, (Fields, 2004) and for African American women this phenomenon has doubled since the 1940's (Tucker & Mitchell-Kerman, 1995). "African American women represent the

leading population of single motherhood in the United States” (Burton & Tucker, 2009). Most children who are African American and under the age of 18, do not live with their fathers (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2002). More than half of African American children living in the United States are growing up in a single parent home (U.S. Bureau of Census, 2011). Research also indicates that the percentage of African American mothers who have never been married, is significantly higher than Caucasian women (Bianchi, 1995; Demo & Acock, 1996; McLanahan & Casper, 1995). However, African American women are engaging in romantic relationships that result in having children (Jackson, Lincoln, Taylor, 2008). Sometimes, these children are born into single parent homes from birth and other times the family transitions into a single parent household.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to identify and further dissect the barriers that cause some African American fathers to neglect their responsibility to their children. The goal of this study is to identify solutions that will improve the co-parenting relationship between African American men and women regardless of their relationship status. By doing this, their children will reap the benefits of both biological parents being equally involved in their lives. This study will also examine the following issues; are there any negative psychological effects on the biological father? How does systemic and governmental roles contribute to father absenteeism? What are the reasons that prevent African American men and women from successfully co-parenting? Ultimately, how can father absenteeism in the African American community be eradicated?

Significance of the Study

Biological father's living conditions and interaction levels can be categorized in one of four ways: not present in the home or in the life of their child, present in the child's life but not living with the child, both present in the home and in the daily upbringing of the child, and lastly living in the home, but emotionally and or physically unavailable to the child (Hamer, 1998). According to The National Health Statistics Report (2013), research has shown that African American men are just as involved, and in some instances more involved in the lives of their children as their counterparts who are in similar living situations. The African American men represented in this study who lived with their children showed to be very active in their children's daily routines, however the men outside of the home represented a significantly lower percentage of daily interaction and guidance with their children. In fact, only sixteen point five percent of non-custodial African American fathers played with their children who were under the age of 5 on a daily basis. Seventeen point eight percent of non-custodial African American fathers talked to their children who were between the ages of 5-18 daily. It is those low statistical numbers that further prove why this study is significant and necessary to identify the underlined factors of father absenteeism in the African American community. According to Hamer (1998) there are a few types of relationships between the father and mother that has a direct reflect on how frequently the father sees his child, they are labeled as: a friendly relationship, where the father is a consistent part of his children's lives, the intimate relationship, which is defined as the relationship type when the father spends time with both the mother and child simultaneously; therefore, not

having any issues with being able to be a part of his children's lives and finally there is the antagonistic relationship, where the mother is described as making it difficult for the father to see his child. The frequency of a man's relationship with his child, or the lack thereof has different effects on the child; which is to be expected. Studies have shown that for men who are a part of their children's lives, the child has an increase of positive performance in school, better emotional health, and more positive behaviors just to name a few. There has been time and research spent to identify how fathers who live in the same residence affect the lives of their children, as well as the negative effects absent fathers have on the lives of their children. But there seems to be very little research dedicated to identifying the cause of father absenteeism and a practical solution to fix this problem within the African American community. This present study will focus on identifying the barriers that result in absenteeism between African American men and their children. Helping non-custodial fathers become more involved with their children on a regular basis can be a major contribution to this community as a whole, as it can result in positive outcomes for the entire family system-father, mother and child.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Single parent households are not a new phenomenon in American culture, in African American culture single headed households have been an issue since slavery. African American families have been labeled as a system in crisis (Thomas, Kramp, & Newton, 2008) and are described as poor, unstable, dependent on government assistance, and void of the male presence (McAdoo, 1997). Father absenteeism has affected the dynamic of the Black family system across generations in multiple ways; slavery, death, incarceration, divorce, substance abuse and unemployment are common causes of father absenteeism within this population. Although single parent homes exist in European families, it is at a much lesser rate. African American children are almost two times more likely to grow up in a single parent home than European children. African American single parent homes are disproportionately higher than European homes. African American children growing up in a single parent household with the mother as the custodial parent is now at an all-time high. According to U.S. Census Bureau, more than 80% of African American children are being raised by their mother without the presence of their father. The rates of African American children being born out of wedlock has incessantly increased all throughout the 20th century. The first incline of children being born out of wedlock was in the 1960's, this rate continued to increase and by 1975 had

reached 49%. By 1995 the rate further increased to 70% and by 2002, the rate of illegitimate child births in the African American community had reached 80% (Rector, 2001; United States Census Bureau, 2002).

Historical Perspective

One historical view and explanation to the crisis of the low income African American family structure in the 1960's was provided by Sociologist, Daniel P. Moynihan (1965). In 1965, Moynihan, wrote a government document that attempted to explain the state of the African American family. His report, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, otherwise identified as the Moynihan Report gave an account of the state of African American families within American culture (Moynihan, 1965). The report studied the effects of the following: race, employment, gender roles, social class and family organizations within the African American Community (Melhorn, 2012). Moynihan (1965) discussed what he referred to as the "Tangle of Pathology", which he described as "The flawed family structure that significantly contributed to negative outcomes such as delinquency, arrest, alienation and failure of African American youth" (Moynihan, 1965). The report also identified several disadvantages within the African American family structure, one being that African American men were not present to head their families (Moynihan, 1965). Moynihan (1965) stated that African American men particularly have been absent from their children's lives due to the lack of employment and feelings of inadequacy. Moynihan (1965) quoted Civil Rights leader and activist, Whitney M. Young as a reference to explain the devastating effects of unemployment and underemployment on African American men:

“The effect on family functioning and role performance of this historical experience is what you might predict. Both as a husband and as a father the Negro male is made to feel inadequate, not because he is unlovable or unaffectionate, lacks intelligence or even a gray flannel suit. But in a society that measures a man by the size of his paycheck, he doesn’t stand very tall in comparison with his white counterpart. To this situation he may react with withdrawal, bitterness towards society, aggression both within the family and racial group, self-hatred or crime. Or he may escape through a number of avenues that help him to lose himself in fantasy or to compensate for his low status through a variety of exploits” (Moynihan Report, 1965 p 36).

African American men struggled to maintain a positive sense of self in American culture where he did not feel valued in society or in his home, as a result African American men felt as if they did not have anything to contribute to their families. Moynihan concluded in his report that the African American community as a whole was broken down and fragmented due to the fact that women were the head of household (Moynihan, 1965).

Moynihan’s (1965) report also discussed the disparities in education and employment within the African American community. Historically within this group of people, it is a common trend for females to have more education than men (Boyd-Franklin, 2003). African American women were more likely to graduate from high school than African American men and pursued higher education (Moynihan, 1965). Because African American women were more educated, they were appointed to higher positions

of employment. According to Moynihan's sociological report, in 1960 fifty-five percent of individuals who were not Caucasian were women enrolled in college. These women, African American women being among this group, went on to hold management positions and worked their way into leadership roles. Moynihan stated that although the workforce consisted of more African American men, women made more money as a result of their education and work experience, this ultimately led to African American men feeling ineffectual and inferior, thus leading to father absenteeism. Moynihan expressed that these disadvantages were the cause of African American families not being able to compete with European middle class family structure in American society. Moynihan blamed the psychological, social and economic issues that low income African American families faced on the Black woman for being the head of household (Melborn, 2012). Moynihan (1965) condemned the African American single mother for the defiant and unruly behaviors of their children, stating that these households produced more juvenile delinquents than educated children. Moynihan (1965) believed that households ran by women, single handedly could not be successful in the home and work place simultaneously. Moynihan (1965) also reported that households without the presence of a man could not prosper or be efficacious, even in the light of the Civil Rights Movement.

Moynihan's (1965) report offered some solutions to repair the Black family structure in America, but was also very critical and grouped all African American families, regardless of their socioeconomic status together. Some solutions Moynihan (1965) identified in his report was for the African American woman to take on a more submissive role and allow the African American man to assume his position as father, leader and breadwinner for his family. In addition to that, Moynihan (1965) concluded

that the government needed to provide programs to assist the African American man with being able to have access to dependable and profitable sources of employment. Moynihan was criticized for his report because it studied African American families on welfare whose fathers were not allowed to be in the home unless the family would lose its governmental assistance (Boyd-Franklin, 2013). Most African American social groups and coalitions criticized Moynihan for his condemnation of African American women and not recognizing or identifying the fact that discrimination and systemic racism both played an intricate role in the oppression of African Americans and the deterioration of the Black family structure in this country (Burton & Tucker, 2009). In addition to Moynihan's (1965) findings, there has been a significant amount of research dedicated to unveiling the negative consequences of the absentee father on his children in the African American community, which really supports some of what Moynihan attempted to express.

Although racism is presented in a more subtle and systemic manner, African Americans continue to be one of the most targeted oppressed populations. This historic view has evolved in today's society and continues to perpetuate the gap between the success of African American men and women (Boyd-Franklin, 2003). As welfare laws were reformed in the 1900's, African American fathers were pushed out of their homes and did not have access to vocational training and resources as Black women did (Moffit, 1998). In current times, African American men are still oppressed, unemployed or under employed (Boyd-Franklin, 2003). These factors continue to have a negative effect on the family structure, subsequently leading to the absence of the non-custodial father. This further explains the impact both study issues have on the non-custodial African American

father. The following study issues will address some common barriers that are the cause of father absenteeism within the African American community.

Psychological and Emotional Distress on the Absent Father

The first study issue that is to be explored is identifying if non-custodial African American fathers suffer any psychological and emotional distress as a result of not being present in their children's lives. Intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships have an influence on father absence. How fathers view themselves and the relationships that they have with others is a clear indication of positive or negative self-identity and self-efficacy. Research has identified several intrapersonal factors of absenteeism in regards to fathers: stress, sense of loss, pain from the separation of their child's mother, the lack of generativity and fatherhood and substance abuse (Arendell, 1995; Kruk, 1991; Kruk, 1994; Seagull, 1977). The feelings associated with a failed relationship have been identified as contributing factors that lead to the stress and pain felt by the father (Seagull, 1977). This pain can eventually lead to absenteeism due to the man not feeling needed and not knowing how to relate to his children without their mother being present. It has also been found that men have negative feelings when leaving their children, because they feel as though the promises and commitments that were made have been broken (Arendell, 1995; Kruk, 1991; Kruk 1994).

Interpersonal relationships also play a role in father absenteeism. One important factor is how the man gets along with the mother of his children. When examining African American families specifically, the following categories are used to describe the relationship between the woman and the man in relation to his involvement, (1) Father

Absent, (2) transient male relationships, (3) weak or dysfunctional father, (4) egalitarian marriage, (5) strong or authoritarian father, or (6) abusive male-female relationship (Boyd-Franklin, 2013). This plays a part in how African American men and women are socialized to view each other, which indeed affects the father-child relationship (Boyd-Franklin, 2013). If the mother and father have a stressed relationship, that contributes to father absenteeism (Allen & Doherty, 1996). As aforementioned, Hamer (1998) describes this as the antagonistic relationship. This relationship is described as one where the mother of the children makes it difficult on the father to see his children and puts unnecessary boundaries in place. Other interpersonal factors of absenteeism include: limited decision making in the lives of children; inability to relate to their children; and conflicts with the children's mother (Black, 2008). Additional causes of father absenteeism include child safety and child support (Adams & Laakso, 2006). A majority of time when a relationship has ended, mothers become the primary care provider for any children born to this relationship. As a result, fathers spend time with their children in an environment separate from the mother's home. This causes conflict for the mother and father as both become concerned with the well-being of the child while in the other's care (Pearson & Theonnes, 1998). Some mothers don't trust that their children will be safe with their fathers (Adams & Laakso, 2006, Black, 2008; Seagull, 1977). Research supports the idea that non-custodial fathers have experienced psychological and emotional distress as a result of poor self-esteem, self-identity and relationships with the child's mother (Adams & Laakso, 2006, Black, 2008; Seagull, 1977).

Government Roles and Systemic Racism on Father Absenteeism

The second study issue to be addressed is how governmental roles, systemic racism and discrimination further placed African American men at a disadvantage. Policy makers focused more attention on financial gains rather than physical presence when it came to men being involved in their children's lives. Rebecca Blank (2002) completed a review of the welfare reform legislation under the Bill Clinton administration. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996 was a composition of new rules and guidelines of the social welfare system. This policy was responsible for many African American men developing the idea that financial support was more important than emotional support and physical presence in his child's life. This federal program changed in how funds were allocated- states had more authority and could choose who they provided aide to, bonuses were given to states that could increase marriage rates without increasing abortion rates, recipients were required to participate in work or vocational programs and a time limit was placed on how long assistance could be received. Although these changes could be beneficial to women, it further perpetuated the demise and dysfunction of African American men who were a part of the low income population. African American men had little to no access to employment and vocational opportunities which further lead to these men being misplaced. Due to the lack of resources and opportunities, men felt disposable and incapable of taking care of their families. Welfare reform of 1996 played a vital role in African American men not feeling welcomed in his family, as a woman could not receive any assistance if the man was a part of the household (Moffit,1998). These welfare

policies further widened the gap between African American men and women, therefore breaking up families by empowering the woman and emasculating the man.

The state of the African American male has been in jeopardy for generations. Systemic racism affected the relationship between African American men and their families. Black men continue to deal with the disadvantages in the workforce, as they are unemployed and under-employed (Boyd-Franklin, 2003). This has also been a contributing factor to his low self-esteem and adverse self-identity. These negative feelings have resulted in some men leaving their homes and abandoning their families. During this time, as resources and vocational opportunities for low income African American women increased; low income African American men encountered a different experience because the same resources and opportunities were not available to them. This phenomenon is what led to the increase of unemployment rates and decreased vocational skills to obtain employment (U.S. Census Bureau, 1996).

Child support laws play a role in fathers feeling as though the legal system is designed to support the mother. This causes the father to feel as though he is at a disadvantage and further perpetuates father absenteeism (Arendall, 1995). In general, fathers have attempted to financially contribute to the welfare of their children. However, as a result of African American men facing job discrimination, unemployment and being underemployed, those barriers weigh heavily on their ability to consistently provide for their children (Boyd-Franklin, 2003). Some fathers often give what they can, which may be in conflict with the desired amount requested from the biological mother and the mandated payment from child support courts (Kohn, 2013). Additionally, because single mothers are more likely to have a low socio-economic status, the government has been

looked to for help. This system provides single mothers with the benefits of various programs that supplement their monthly income (Kohn, 2013). When the benefits are weighed, mothers choose to receive help from the government as opposed to relying on the father of their children. Despite the father contributing on his own to the family, the mother is mandated to put the father on legal child support. Essentially, this ensures that the government receives their funds that have been paid out to the mother, back from the father (Kohn, 2013; Roy, 1999). This in turn continues the cycle of the father feeling invisible which may eventually lead to his absence. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996 was also responsible for placing more emphasis on monetary contributions rather than a father's emotional and physical involvement in a child's life. The PRWORA (1996) placed stipulations on women who received government assistance, as she was required to disclose her children's father's identity or lose assistance. Non-custodial fathers then had to voluntarily or through DNA testing establish paternity for his child (Roy, 1999). Once paternity was established, the father was placed on child support and the mother would receive a portion of the amount that he paid; after fees were allocated to the state. This process is called "Defray," which is the act of the state keeping a portion of the child support costs to further fund child support and other programs. Additionally, the new welfare reform policies did not acknowledge or give credit for men being their child's caregiver. Fathers being caregivers was not addressed in the PRWORA, the emphasis was solely placed on paying child support. In the state of Illinois, the welfare reform policy identified support as, "A legal bond with the child through paternity establishment. Financial provision for child's well-being in the form of child support" (Roy, 1999).

Research shows that these types of programs deter father involvement because men then feel reduced to a financial value.

Afrocentric Perspective

The Afrocentric Perspective is a framework or model that acknowledges African culture and provides a way to solve human problems based off of African tradition. The Afrocentric Perspective recognizes the mission of “African freedom, justice and equality” (Waymer, 2013). This traditional African view acknowledges the struggle and social complications experienced by other cultures and provides an outline to solve those social problems (Waymer, 2013). The Afrocentric perspective consists of eight principles that reflect, “both the history of oppression and the strengths and principles of African centered culture” (Schrivier, 2011). These eight principles are guidelines to teach individuals to recognize and understand the social struggle of all people regardless of their, “culture, race, national origin, religion, creed, gender, age, disability and or handicap” (Waymer, 2013 p. 2). The Afrocentric Perspective teaches that everyone has a sense of responsibility to the community (Bent-Goodley, 2005). These principles are predicated on achieving the needs of the community, and has a communal focus rather than an individualistic focus found in Eurocentric worldviews (Waymer, 2013). The eight core values that structure the Afrocentric Perspective as defined by Bent-Goodley (2005) are: Fundamental Goodness, each person is fundamentally good; Self Knowledge, the encouragement of the practitioner to begin where he or she is; Communalism, sensitivity to the interdependence of people and the notion that group concerns surpass individual concerns; Interconnectedness, recognizes that people are dependent upon each other, and are considered one; Spirituality, the ability to recognize there is a higher source than self;

Self-reliance, members of the community are expected to contribute to society; Language and Oral tradition, the bringing together of people through language, and communication is a part of the African tradition. And lastly, Thought and Practice, which can be defined as a combination of knowledge and social action; this principle calls for individuals to take action on social injustices that they are aware of.

Afrocentricity is a model used to understand and explain the behaviors, ideals and culture of African people and is placed at the center of any examination of Africans or African Americans (Waymer, 2013). Afrocentricity has three main objectives: (1) to promote an alternative social science model that produces more of the truth and reality of African Americans, (2) to dissipate the negative stigmas about people of African descent, and (3) to promote society to a place where there is a regard for spirituality, morality and humanistic values (Schiele, 1996). According to Schiele (1996) Afrocentricity can be used to describe the major problem in the United States. Oppression and alienation are the two contributing factors. Oppression is defined as a systemic and deliberate strategy to suppress the power and potential of people. These tactics have been used to purposely breakdown the value system and support system of African Americans and their families.

All throughout history, the Eurocentric perspective and thought has prevailed and has been viewed as superior, therefore used to describe the behavior of everyone, including African Americans. The Eurocentric view has been an inaccurate and unfair account of African Americans and has disregarded African traditions. Since the diaspora of Africans from their homeland, their traditional values have been replaced with Eurocentric views and perspectives, therefore dismantling the role of the African American male and what it meant to him to be a husband, father and warrior (Franklin,

2000). The values of spirituality, collectivity, mutual aid and cooperation have been replaced with materialism, instant gratification, physical and sexual desires (Schiele, 1996). The dynamic of family, culture and customs of African people changed once they left Africa. The Eurocentric perspective has been the deciding factor of self-esteem, and has negatively impacted both the African American woman and man. In addition to stripping away the African American male's traditional values, he was taught to view and value himself based solely on his monetary worth. This reason alone has been proven to be one of the main intrapersonal issues that causes absenteeism, not making enough money and therefore not feeling valued within himself or by his family. Traditionally, African people, as young children are taught how to take care of the opposite sex. Males are socialized, trained and taught from young boys to aspire to marriage, to provide for his family, to be a warrior and to continue his lineage by fathering children. Females are socialized, trained and taught how to fulfill their roles as wives and mothers. During the slave trade, men were separated from their wives and children and were encouraged to engage in sexual acts with multiple women in order to produce more children for the work force. Also during that time, single parent homes were matriarchal, head by women who were left alone for various reasons. The issues continued into more modern times but under different circumstances. Women were left to be the head of the household because in some instances that was the only way she could receive the assistance needed. The African American woman's male counterpart was replaced with the government, which whom she went to for financial assistance. This systemic manipulation further perpetuated father absenteeism.

Theoretical Framework

Social Workers help people to conquer and defeat some of life's most difficult challenges: poverty, discrimination, abuse, addiction, physical illness, divorce, loss, unemployment, educational problems, disability and mental illness (National Association of Social Workers, 2011). One of the many roles of a Social Worker is to provide counseling services to individuals, families and communities; Social Workers also provide consultation to corporations (National Association of Social Workers, 2011). To offer evidence based practice, professional Social Workers employ various models, perspectives and theories to explain human behavior and the developmental process throughout the life span. The theoretical perspective of this study will discuss Cognitive Behavioral Theory and Systems Theory, as it applies to the study of absentee fathers. Both models offer scientific explanations and views on human behavior and interactions, both on an intrapersonal and interpersonal level.

Cognitive Behavior Theory or CBT first made its debut in the 1960's and 1970's. This new theoretical perspective was the cause of the paradigm shift from earlier behavior theories that were pioneered by psychoanalysts such as Albert Bandura. CBT is an approach that works to modify an individual's attitude and behavior by teaching the method of choosing positive thoughts. CBT is targeted towards modifying beliefs, cognitive styles and the expectations of the client as well (Galeazzi & Meazzini, 2004). CBT utilizes several interventions and techniques to assist individuals with behavior modification; such as positive and negative reinforcement, punishment, and extinction (Boyle, Hull, Mather, Smith, & Farley, 2006). In addition to this, CBT used in a therapeutic model addresses cognitive distortions, thought stopping and schemas.

Cognitive distortions are defined as irrational thoughts that make the client see himself or herself negatively. Thought stopping is the act of replacing negative thoughts with positive ones to decrease negative emotions that may lead to negative attitude and behavior. The term schema, according to its founder Piaget, is a building block of behavior or units of knowledge. In CBT, all three of those issues are addressed to move the individual to a more positive mindset. In terms of family therapy and interventions, CBT focuses on four goals (1) Defining family problems in behavioral terms, (2) educating family members about the role of antecedents, consequences and thoughts affecting behavior, (3) teaching intervention methods and lastly, (4) acting out and evaluating cognitive and behavioral changes (Franklin & Jordan, 1999). CBT can be applied in Social Work practice by using these interventions with absentee fathers on an individual basis to first address the cognitive distortions that allows him to think that he is not needed or wanted in his family. The Social Worker can also help the absentee father dispel negative self-talk by using thought replacement techniques; this will allow the father to increase his own self-esteem and self-efficacy, identify ways in which he can provide support to his children lives, as well as be a suitable helpmate and partner. In terms of the family system, the Social Worker can use CBT to help define what the real cause of the problem is in terms of behavior, as well as educate the family on the consequences that the family will be subjected to without the presence of the father. It would be extremely important for the Social Worker to highlight other positive attributes of the father so that his value is not strictly reduced to monetary gain. The Social Worker's role is to also teach interventions that will help the man and woman come

together instead of separating, and therefore creating an unbalanced family structure for their children.

Systems Theory offers an explanation as to how individuals interact with their environment and the positive or negative effects of the system on an individual's behavior and development (Boyle, Hull, Mather, Smith, & Farley, 2006). To understand Systems Theory is to know that people are in constant interaction with their environment. The Systems Theory model, "seek to find balance by understanding both internal and external factors that exert pressure on a system's growth or pose a hindrance to its development." (Boyle, Hull, Mather, Smith, & Farley, 2006). There are several concepts that construct Systems Theory and each part has an effect on the individual within the system: (1) Homeostasis; the system trying to maintain balance, (2) feedback loops; the interaction that occurs between family members, (3) boundaries; invisible lines of separation that family members give themselves in reference to communication and physical space, (4) closed and open systems; this means that outsiders are not welcomed in when the system is closed or outside activities occur when the system is open, (5) subsystems, which occurs when members of the family group together against others members of the family, (6) roles; patterns of behavior that's carried out by a member based on a certain set of expectations, and (7) rules, which are used to explain the values of the system and how the system operates. This theory can be applied in Social Work practice to bring awareness to how the micro system, such as the family and macro system, such as society has an effect on a man before he decides to no longer be a part of his children's lives, as well as after he has made the decision to leave his family and children without offering support.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of the methodology chapter is to explain the methods used to collect and analyze the data that contributed to the study of understanding and identifying the cause and explanation for father absenteeism within the African American community. This chapter will also highlight and discuss the types of articles that were used to support the current research. Lastly, this chapter will discuss the limitations that were discovered during the research process.

Methods of the Study

A systematic literature review is a vital component of evidenced based work (Khan et al., 2003). A systematic literature review is a process that identifies credible and evidenced based literature to explain research findings. Conducting a systematic literature review is a five step process that includes a very strategic and carefully organized overview of literature on a particular study. The five steps to this process are the following: framing the question for a review, identifying relevant work, assessing the quality of studies, summarizing the evidence and interpreting the findings. Framing questions for the review is defined as forming structured questions that identifies the

problems that need to be addressed. Identifying relevant work is defined as searching multiple resources that can include articles from a database on a computer or through printed literature such as books. Assessing the quality of studies is a multiple step procedure that evaluates strength and quality of an article. Summarizing the evidence means to explore how articles are similar and different in the results and how to combine evidence. Lastly, interpreting the findings means to summarize the evidence. Systematic literature reviews explains why certain literature was either included or excluded in the research. By using this method, articles are reviewed and chosen to contribute its findings to the present study. A few of the articles that were included in the current research of Father Absenteeism among African Americans, are as follows: Afrocentricity: An Emerging Paradigm in Social Work Practice, Moynihan's Report: The Negro Family, The Decline in Marriage Among African Americans and What's Love Got To Do With It?: Understanding and Healing the Rift between Black Men and Women. Excluded articles from the research included the following; Custodial Fathers: Myths, Realities and Child Support Policy, Low Income Single Fathers and Noncustodial Fathers Involvement with their Children: A Right or a Privilege. An important detail of the research process was to discover evidenced based literature that provided knowledge on the historical, afrocentric and the theoretical perspectives. In order to successfully complete this task, the Atlanta University Center's Robert W. Woodruff Research Library's database system was used as well as the Google Scholar search engine. The databases included peer reviewed journals and online articles. The databases includes: EBSCO Host, JSTOR, ProQuest Central and Sage Publications; within these databases, articles from the following journals were used; Journal of Contemporary Social Services, Journal of Black

Studies, and the Journal of Economic Literature. Keywords that were used to effectively find articles were: Father Absenteeism, African American Fathers, African American Families and Fatherless Children. One book review was also used to gather relevant literature to contribute to the present study.

Limitations of the Study

This conceptual paper research topic had some limitations of the study. During the research process, it was difficult to find evidenced based articles that discussed the cause of the breakdown in the relationships between African American men and women. It was a challenge to find literature that discussed the quality of the relationship between African American men and women. Most of the literature discussed the demise of the relationships between African American men and women to be financial challenges. There wasn't any qualitative research completed that reported and explained from the African American woman's or man's perspective as to why their relationships have not worked throughout history; the literature more so suggested that the issues between African American men and women was due to the lack of finances from the African American man.

CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings related to the study issues that have been discussed throughout this conceptual paper. How a father feels about himself, as well as his relationship with others, the lack of finances, stress and systemic biases all have played an active role in this social problem specifically within the African American community. In terms of understanding father involvement, Laakso & Adams (2006) outline some key factors that actually discredit the theory that the majority of non-custodial fathers are not involved nor desire to be involved in their children's lives. Studies have also shown that no matter what the father has experienced in his own personal life regarding family dynamics, he still desires to either emulate positive behaviors or to be present in his children's lives out of understanding the hurt and pain associated with having an absent father himself (Allen, Doherty & Park, 1996; Johnson, 2001; Reich & Sylvester, 2002).

Findings on Psychological and Emotional Distress

The first study issue explored whether non-custodial absentee fathers experience any psychological or emotional distress as a result of not being in their children's lives on a regular basis. A literature review was conducted and research supports the fact that

non-custodial absentee fathers indeed deal with emotional stress regarding being absent from their children. Depression and feelings of loneliness was reported in terms of how fathers feel when they do not have a relationship with their children. Research also supports that some of these issues that the father experiences also led to absenteeism, meaning that low self-esteem, negative self-identity and the lack of self-efficacy were the causes of father absenteeism (Black, 2008; Seagull, 1977). In addition to that, research presented on father absenteeism also highlights several other factors that have contributed to and jeopardized the father-child relationship, subsequently having a negative effect on the father as well. There are some common barriers identified through research that shed light on the challenges that non-custodial fathers have come against which have tested their commitment to being active and involved fathers. Two studies identified those barriers as child safety, bias of courts towards the mother, relationship with the mother, origin and influences on the father and father's own commitment to their children (Laasko, & Adams, 2006; Roy, 1999). These issues have been found to cause a man to feel defeated in regards to getting involved with his children. In the first study evaluating psychological effects, there were 25 men who participated, which fifty-six percent were of the minority. The income range of these men was \$5,000 to over \$35,000. This study also included 3 men who were homeless. The children involved in these cases age ranged from 8 months to 20 years old. The men in this study were clients of a federally funded program in Washington State called, Devoted Dads. This program assisted non-custodial fathers by way of providing services that included, legal advocacy, employment assistance and parenting classes. There were 36 mothers involved, as some men had children with multiple women. The participants were referred to the program by way of

referral sources from other agencies. In the first study, most of the men reported that they met their responsibilities as fathers when their children were born, but upon separation, their involvement in their children's lives decreased for various reasons. Seventy-eight percent of these men are paying child support, however, had very little to no involvement with their children. Of the 25 participants in this study, 12 had parenting plans which has been noted as a positive solution to increase father involvement, however, only 6 of those 12 fathers saw their children, the other 6 fathers did not have any contact with their children. In this research at the time of the study, 19 fathers had poor relationships with their children's mothers and 14 of those fathers were not seeing their children regularly. The fathers were asked to explain what they felt was the cause of the demise of the relationships, and these men identified several factors. The following are behaviors that were listed as the cause of poor relationships: (1) mother left for another partner, (2) substance abuse, (3) domestic violence, (4) personality differences, (5) immaturity, (6) one night affairs, with no further contact and (7) unsure. Additionally, some men actually married their children's mothers because they wanted to do what they felt was right, however, the marriages were unsuccessful which left them without the children as well.

Findings on Governmental Roles and Systemic Racism

The second study issue explored how governmental roles, child support laws and systemic racism played an intricate role on father absenteeism. Research supports that unemployment, welfare reform of 1996, The PRWORA and other policies around child support both specifically played a part in low income, non-custodial fathers becoming absent (Roy, 1999). In this study 40 men participated, which 99% were of the minority.

These men participated in a fatherhood program that was based at a community college located in Chicago. This program provided assistance to fathers related to employment training and placement, parenting classes, educational referrals and co-parenting counseling. The participants in this study had an average of 2.3 children. These men were referred to the program by several different community agencies, such as drug rehabilitation programs, child support programs, as well as friends and family.

African American men being unemployed or under-employed was also a contributing factor to absenteeism, which further perpetuates the challenge of paying child support. The enforcement of child support policy is another barrier that keeps men from being actively involved with their children (Laakso, & Adams, 2006), however, some studies report that child support and visitation are correlated. Many non-custodial fathers have reported that they feel as though child support laws and the system is designed to favor the woman. Some men reported feeling disenfranchised. In a study of 40 African American, low income, non-custodial fathers who were participants of a fatherhood program, one father reportedly said, “The government says, ‘We want Dad around.’ then the government turns around and says, ‘Dad pays child support or we lock him up.’ Dad gets lost just trying to survive. It’s like society is tearing itself up” (Roy, 1999). In this second research study, some men did not immediately connect with their children at birth and took some time to develop a healthy relationship due to having a volatile relationship with their child’s mother. Some men even denied paternity, however, once becoming involved in their children’s lives these men took pride in being there for their children and desired to provide for them as well. But one common theme still showed up, which was the feelings of being defeated or unfairly judged due to child support and welfare

reform policies. In this study, men described what it meant to be a father in which they identified father involvement as, “Taking care of my kids” and “Being there for my children” (Roy, 1999).

In both studies that were reviewed, interviews were conducted with the participants, either face to face interviews or audio-taped interviews. The questions in these interviews assessed how the participants met and got along with the mothers of their children if they had a parenting plan and if they were satisfied with it, as well as questions about their own familial relationships and how those relationships influenced their thoughts and ideas about parenting. The interviews also included questions about co-parenting interactions, education, employment status and the ideas of what it means to be an active father. In terms of the father’s commitment to their children, the common factor in both studies was that the men were dissatisfied either with the mothers of their children, governmental roles or both. Most of the fathers reported that they felt an intense level of hurt and loss in reference to the relationship they had with their children. However, the common factor across both studies is that the father desired to be in his children’s lives.

In regards to interventions and programs used to resolve these issues, Seagull (1977) identified the importance of fathers being emotionally healthy himself in order to be actively involved with his children. It is important for fathers to learn skills so that he does not feel inadequate or underpowered when he does have time with his children. According to Laakso & Adams (2006) there are organizations that have developed since the late 1990’s that have placed influence on the importance of fathers in the parent-child

relationship. “The National Center on Fathers and Families identifies key assumptions about fathers including: (1) Fathers care, even if that caring is not shown in conventional ways, (2) father’s presence matters-in terms of economic well-being, social support and child development; (3) existing approaches to public benefits, child support enforcement, and paternity establishment create obstacles and disincentives to father involvement; and (4) intergenerational beliefs and practices within families of origin significantly influence the behaviors of young parents (Laakso & Adams, 2006). Fatherhood programs were used in both studies that were reviewed with the effort to assist non-custodial fathers with being able to get actively involved with their children, find employment, resolve legal matters, seek legal counsel and create healthier boundaries with the mothers of their children.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Summary of the Study

Father absence in the African American community has been a social problem that has impacted the Black family structure since slavery. African American men have been torn apart from their wives and children for various reasons, from being sold and killed on slave plantations to being emasculated, incarcerated and forcibly pushed out of their homes by governmental laws and regulations. Although the causes of father absenteeism has been different across generations, it has some of the same debilitating effects on the family. Upon reviewing several peer related articles and other studies on father absenteeism within the African American community, one can conclude that there is a direct correlation between three factors and father absenteeism. Negative self-esteem, inadequate relationship boundaries with the mothers of the children and unfair systemic demands and policies all weigh heavily on the relationship between a man and his child. Although it has been found that most men desire to be a part of their children's lives, these barriers continue to get in the way of having a successful parent-child relationship where the non-custodial father plays an active role.

Low self-esteem is acknowledged as a cause of father absenteeism. This negative perception can be attributed to systemic racism. It has been discussed in past research how welfare reform in the early 1900's and in 1996 disqualified women from receiving governmental assistance if the father of their children were in the home. (Black, 2008). Subsequently, these women were trained through vocational programs to be able to obtain better jobs with higher pay. From a historical view, research supports the idea that African American men have dealt with low self-esteem issues due to the lack of education and resources. This issue led to African American men being pushed out of the home and having the feeling that he is no longer needed to provide for his family. This same systemic influence from the government is also believed to have an effect on the breakdown of the African American family presently, thus contributing to father absenteeism.

Poor relationships between the mother and father have been one major contributing factor to father absenteeism. This is an issue within divorced and non-marital relationships and is a trend within the African American community and other racial groups as well. How a man feels about himself plays a vital role in whether or not he can successfully manage a relationship with his children with or without the presence of that child's mother. Intrapersonal or emotional stress can be defined as the feelings of loss and grief of the intimate relationship (Seagull, 1977). These negative emotions are caused by conflict with the child's mother and poor self-identify, therefore leading to father absence (Black, 2008). Limited father identity is another contribution, as Seagull (1977) states that some men do not have the capacity to relate to their children without the presence of their children's mother.

One study used in this research also identified specific barriers to healthy communication between non-custodial fathers and the mothers of their children (Laasko & Adams, 2006). In this specific study of non-custodial fathers, the top three contributing factors of poor relationships with the mothers of their children were personality differences, mother left for another partner and substance abuse; which eleven percent was due to father substance abuse and eleven percent was due to mother substance abuse. Studies have consistently shown that if a father has a poor relationship with his child's mother, then he is more likely not to see his children regularly (Laasko & Adams, 2006; Black, 2008). Child support policy has also been reviewed, and it has been found that non-custodial fathers feel as though the policies regarding child support are designed to place more importance on financial contribution than that of emotional and physical contribution to the lives of his children.

Implications for Social Work

The findings of the present study presents several opportunities for social work. Social Workers are educated in this profession and equipped to play several roles in the helping process. In these studies, social workers can assume the roles of advocates, case managers, educators and mediators to help and heal the relationships between African American men and women. With the knowledge base and the ability to apply theories and relate it to practice, social workers can apply effective interventions to foster growth and provide solutions. I believe that taking action by applying evidenced based theory will help to further bridge the gap of father absenteeism. While conducting research on this topic and further discovering the actual causes and explanations for absenteeism in

this community, I saw a need for advocacy on behalf of the entire family system, mother, father and child. It appears that many parents are caught up in their own personal feelings that the necessities of the child or children often become overshadowed, therefore leaving their needs unmet. If social workers advocate on behalf of the child to shed light on his/her needs, possibly it will produce healthier communication between African American men and women and end father absenteeism. In regards to advocating for the parents, there's a separate set of needs that can be addressed. In regards to the mother, advocacy can benefit her more so in the form of education. Many women are unaware of the negative psychological and emotional effects that involving the system has on the relationship between a father and his child, as well as how it can possibly add further stress to the relationship she has with the father of her child. Strained relationships can possibly be mended if women attempt to work with the father of the children in a solution focused approach prior to placing him on child support. For the men involved, I identified a need for fathers to receive credit for their physical presence in their child's life, not just be reduced to financial measures. Positive reinforcement in this area can likely produce healthier relationships for everyone involved. For example, if a father is unemployed he can contribute to his child by taking over the responsibility of child care while the mother is working or in school. This minor adjustment can have a major impact on the entire family system, as the father would be saving the mother money in childcare expenses, spending quality time with his child and satisfying his parental responsibility as a father. This can also reduce any and all negative interactions with law enforcement as related to child support policy. This simple adjustment gives the father an opportunity to contribute to his child in a manner in which the child also sees as more valuable. Social

workers are responsible for considering the holistic needs of a person, and finances are only one part of a child's need and should not be valued over quality time in regards to the parent-child relationship.

Social workers as case managers also play a vital role in the lives of those in need because that's where the foundational work takes place. Social work implications can be applied here through connecting clients to resources and reinforcing practical tools that can be used on a daily basis. This is the first steps to concrete change. Case managers can oversee the process of healing and guide the process in a healthy direction as well. Case managers can use tools such as the problem solving process to engage, collect data, assess, intervene and evaluate problems and the solutions to building healthier relationships.

Education and mediation are two essential parts of social work practice that can be beneficial in mending relationships between fathers and their children as well as the mothers of those children. For African American families specifically, there is a strong and positive relationship history between the man and the woman that has been broken down over generations. Social workers can apply the skills of education and mediation in this area by teaching various social skills to improve relationships. Teaching individuals how to effectively communicate their needs, wants and desires can have positive outcomes. Also, learning proper anger management and impulse control methods can also positively impact the relationship between the adults, as well as model healthy relational skills for the children involved. Through these studies, it is known that the interpersonal relationship between the father and the mother has a direct effect on father absenteeism, therefore it would be a need to help parents communicate more effectively,

as well as learn other parts of communication as well, such as listening and processing what has been heard. There is a particular language that men and women speak that is most often misunderstood by the opposite sex, social workers can help mediate certain processes and create plans that would be in the best interest of the child foremost, but would also help to improve the relationship of the parents as well. Social Workers can also operate in the role of mediator in regards to working with the judicial systems to help mediate some of these issues by providing a safe environment for parents to express their concerns and create parenting plans so that each parent can have equal time with the child.

Research has also shown that parenting plans are effective when followed through by both parents. In some studies there have been fathers who felt slighted due to feeling as though the judicial system sides more with the mother of the children, therefore leaving them powerless. These fathers have felt that creating a parenting plan with a mediator gave them a voice and the opportunity to make decisions regarding their children. The findings of both studies are connected to social work practice because the participants in these studies were all involved in fatherhood programs that helped connect these fathers to resources to empower them and help end their personal challenges of absenteeism.

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