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Life histories of successful black males reared in absent father families

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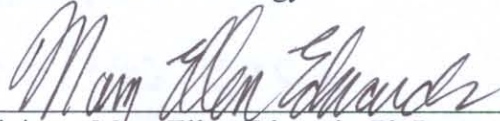
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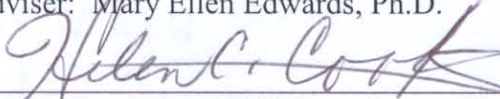
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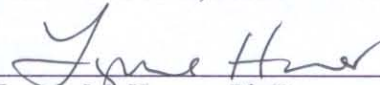
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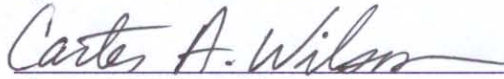
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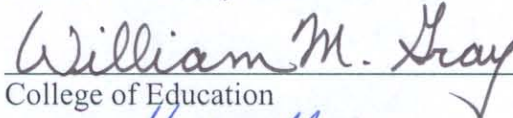
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College of Education



Graduate School

The University of Toledo
December 2004

An Abstract of
Life Histories of Successful Black Males
Reared in Absent Father Families

Janice Elizabeth Carson

Submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the
Doctor of Philosophy Degree in
Foundations of Education: Educational Sociology

The University of Toledo

December 2004

This study was a qualitative investigation of the perceptions of Black males reared in absent father families regarding the experiences which contributed to success in their lives. The purpose of the study was to discover, understand, and describe the circumstances that contributed to the successful lives of Black males living in absent father families. Also, it was to develop a deeper understanding of those experiences that have helped to offset the negative effects of fatherlessness on adolescents. Success was visualized as a process of personal growth.

Eight Black males who were all participants of the Toledo Excel Program at the University of Toledo were individually interviewed in depth on two occasions. They also met in a focus group at the conclusion of the interviews. After their verbatim transcripts

were analyzed, six themes emerged which were presented and discussed at the group meeting.

The results obtained were that the participants attributed their success to faith in God, their mothers, grandmothers, other extended family, friends, and the Toledo Excel Program. They felt God made it all possible for them to become successful men today. They characterized their mothers as hardworking, self-sacrificing, providing for their needs, and paying for them to attend private schools. They characterized their grandmothers, other extended family, and friends as providing child caring, child rearing, finances, emotional support, and advice. The TOLEDO EXCEL Program, a scholarship incentive program, provided them with tutoring, classes, and trips throughout the United States, Mexico, and Africa. As a result of the fathers' absence, there was economic deprivation, which was closely linked with difficult times. All of the participants felt that children need both the mother and father in the home to rear children. They plan to "be there" in the home for their own children.

Recommendations are given for programs focusing on the reduction of poverty, increased involvement of the father in the child's life, and increased communication between the mother and father. Implications for community and social work programs are outlined. Additional qualitative research with Black males is recommended.

Dedication

In loving tribute:

To my mother, Mrs. Aleathia Carson, who has been my confidante, supporter, mentor
and inspiration throughout my life.

And to my father, Arthur Carson, Sr. and my aunt, Minnie Lou Pickett, who are no longer
living, for their formative influence. I always knew that I had their love, encouragement
and support.

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First and foremost, I must thank God Almighty, for guiding me into the Doctoral Program, then blessing me with the health, strength and intellectual ability to complete it. I thank Him for providing the resources and the wonderful people that have helped me along the way.

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and consolation when I needed them the most.

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A great debt of gratitude is also due to my family (David and Karen, Marilyn and Emzie, Edward Brian Coleman, my other nieces and nephews, and my mother, Aleathia Carson) who fed me when I was too busy and tired to cook, and listened to me practice for my exams and presentations, and gave me suggestions all along the journey to my doctorate degree. They provided so much love and emotional support. My sister, Peggy Coleman, was so instrumental in the fruition of my doctoral program and writing on the Black family. She rooted for me and encouraged me to do it when I didn't think that I could.

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A very special kind of gratitude is extended to the wonderful Black men who consented to be the participants of my research project. I am so very grateful for my experiences with this group of men. It was very touching to hear their stories and how their families survived hardships. What greatness they are bringing to our society!

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

When [my mother] found out [my father] was a bigamist – with another wife and family – that was the last straw. . .when my father left, he took the modest financial nest egg my mother had scrimped and saved for years to put together. She was left with nothing but a crackerbox of a little house, on which she could no longer afford to pay the mortgage, and two active sons to raise completely on her own. Plus she had never held a paying job, had no marketable job skills, and possessed less than a third-grade education . . . tough and demanding with her sons, she had high expectations for Curtis and me, and she never let us forget it. We may have lived in poverty, but she convinced us that was only a temporary predicament . . . In her vision, education would provide our escape, and when other parents questioned the academic demands she placed on us, she told them: “Say what you want, but my boys are going to be something. . . . I pay tribute to my remarkable mother’s influence almost every time I speak . . .” (Carson, 1999, pp. 67- 69)

As quoted above, Dr. Ben Carson, the director of pediatric neurosurgery at the Johns Hopkins Hospital and the author of two best-selling books, indicates that he and other Black adolescent males can succeed against the odds of poverty and the lack of guidance by a father. He states, “ I would not be where I am in the world today without [my mother’s] influence and her example of overcoming hardship” (Carson, 1999, p. 67).

However, Horn and Sylvester (2002) cite research that shows father absence significantly increases the risk that children will suffer negative outcomes. While these authors and others (e.g., Blankenhorn, 1995; Davidson, 1990; Popenoe, 1996) contend that father absence directly contributes to our most pressing social ills and is the most consequential social problem we confront, this writer suggests that many children

growing up in father absent homes do escape the negative outcomes of father absence and become productive members of society.

Thus, even though there is a great amount of literature indicating negative consequences of Black absent fathers (Beaty, 1995; Carlson & Corcoran 2001; Thomas & Farrell, 1996), the successful lives of Black males, such as Dr. Ben Carson, Jim Brown, former professional football player, Al Freeman, Jr., actor in the television series, “One Life to Live,” and Stevie Wonder, singer, (Mabunda & Phelps, 1996), contest this claim. Because of these examples, this research proposed to look at those situations in the lives of males as adolescents in fatherless homes that contributed to their success. Accordingly, the writer has chosen to use the ecological systems model, which reflects the interaction of racial, cultural, and economic situations on the Black family that perhaps offset some of the negative consequences of fatherlessness. This will be accomplished through reviewing the literature and employing a life history case study research strategy in which interviews will be conducted with successful young Black men who grew up without fathers present in their homes.

In their review of the literature Marsiglio, Amato, Day, and Lamb (2000) find that over the past decade burgeoning interest in fatherhood by family scholars has produced a body of research that is impressive in size, breadth, and depth. Much of this research emphasizes the negative outcomes of the absent father. Youth growing up without fathers, suggest Horn and Sylvester (2000), tend to become gang members, are low academic achievers, have low self esteem, experience more emotional problems, and engage in more criminal behavior than those young men in families in which there are two biological parents. Yet, not all Black males reared in single parent homes acquire

these negative behaviors. There appears to be little research on those who have experienced a father-absent home and who have become productive members of society. For this investigation, interviews with eight Black males explored experiences that enabled these young men to actually succeed, to avoid negative behaviors, and to become productive members of society. By identifying crucial aspects of their environments and other situations that supported success, this study outlined strategies that professionals working with young Black males in father absent families can use to promote their stability and success.

Statement of the Problem

According to Horn and Sylvester (2002), the United States is now the world's leader in fatherless families. In the early 1970s, Sweden reported the highest percentage of single-parent families – 15 percent of all families with children. By 1986, the United States took over first place, when 24 percent of American's families were headed by a single parent, compared to less than 20 percent for Sweden (p. 24). While all races suffered from such an epidemic of an absence of fathers, and half of America's children live apart from one or both of their parents, in recent decades in the Black community, the proportion has reached stratospheric levels. There has been a parallel decrease in the number of two parent Black families and an increase in social stresses that contribute to and result from the one parent family (Horn & Sylvester, 2002).

Despite the popular view that single parent family patterns have existed for African Americans since the days of slavery, this has not been the pattern. According to Wetztein (1995), it was found that this condition of the absent father in Black America is a “relatively new phenomenon,” not present during the rigors of slavery when fifty to

sixty percent of the Black slave households consisted of two married parents caring for their own children. The U. S. Census Bureau reports that in 1960, 67 percent of Black households consisted of two parents (Horn & Sylvester, 2002). However, since that time the percentages of Black families headed by two parents have dropped dramatically from 58.5 percent in 1970 to 42.2 percent in 1980, to 37.7 percent in 1990 and 37.6 percent in 2000.

Two major demographic trends contributed to the rise in father absence: the increase in divorce and the increase in unwed childbearing. The divorce rate more than doubled between 1965 and 1980 (Horn & Sylvester, 2002) and out-of-wedlock childbearing dramatically increased since the latter part of the twentieth century and has overtaken divorce as the primary cause of father absence. Other reasons might be attributed to father absence such as unemployment, a time-demanding job, abandonment, substance abuse and addiction, and even incarceration. Wilson (1996) found that the decline in the marriage rate of intact families among African Americans is associated with the declining economic status of Black men. Cooks (1987) noted the relationship could be seen “between teenage motherhood, female-headed households, Black male youth unemployment, and Black educational achievement when examining the association between the changing Black family composition and economic demographics” (p. 45). Wilson tied the decline in the mass production system of the United States to the dramatic increase of numbers of prime-age men (between the ages of twenty-two and fifty eight) and who are “not in school, not working, and not looking for work. The growth of a nonworking class of prime-age males along with a larger number of those who are often unemployed, who work part-time, or who work in temporary jobs

is concentrated among the poorly educated, the school dropouts, and minorities” (Wilson, 1996, p. 26).

High rates of joblessness in the Black community, Wilson (1996) notes, trigger other problems from crime to drug trafficking to family disorganization and breakups. In fact, Wilson based his research on a neighborhood where only one in four adults was employed, and found that many Black men see dealing in drugs as the only way to make money, and to make it fast. Indeed, the Black father’s physical and psychic energy may be drained as he spends an inordinate amount of time and energy seeking employment and attempting to provide for the family’s basic survival needs. This is time and energy that could be better invested in his family (Fisher & Harrison, 2000). Consequently, the authors argue, pressure to provide for the family, and barriers thwarting their efforts to do so, coupled with being underemployed and unemployed puts the Black father at high risk for turning to alcohol and other drugs as a means of relieving the pain. Fisher and Harrison state that substance abuse in the African American community is linked to economic deprivation, racism, and stress.

Though joblessness is a significant factor in the Black father’s delayed entry into marriage, that is not the whole story. Wilson (1996) also discovered that the decline in marriage could be attributed to hostility, antagonism, and distrust between inner city Black males and females. Failed relationships, bad experiences, and distrust have resulted in couples who simply are afraid to commit to one another.

Incarceration of the African American father may yet be another reason for the Black males’ absence, as they are disproportionately represented in the prison system today. According to Day (2003), in 1999 African American men, though representing

12% in the general population, disproportionately made up 46% of all inmates who served a year or more in prison. Black Americans were convicted of drug felonies at the rate of 46%, whereas White defendants received prison sentences at the rate of 32%. It is understandable that today's prisons are called "new cities for Black men." Researchers have largely agreed that the absence of fathers has widespread repercussions on the social fabric of the Black community, but especially on their children.

Marsiglio et al. (2000) cite a study of the lives of 25,000 Black and White children and compared those reared by both parents with those reared by one parent. Nine times out of ten the father was absent and the mother was the only parent rearing the children. They found that regardless of the parents' race or educational background, children who grow up in a household with only one biological parent are worse off, on average, than children who grow up in a household with both of their biological parents. Those children who were reared in one-parent homes were twice as likely to drop out of high school and two and one half times as likely to be teen mothers. Other problems associated with fatherlessness included youth suicide, higher rates of mental illness in boys with absent fathers, increase in gang activity and violent crimes, and increase in drug use (Horn & Sylvester, 2002).

Zimmerman, Salem, and Maton (1995) studied African American urban adolescent boys and found that the amount of time spent with fathers and the amount of emotional support obtained from fathers were associated with higher self esteem, higher life satisfaction, less depression, and less delinquency. Additionally, Amato and Rivera (1999) found that that the "estimated positive influence of paternal involvement on children's behavior was similar for White, African American, and Latino fathers" (p. 13).

Beaty (1995) explored the extent to which White, African American, and Hispanic adolescent males experience different peer adjustment and masculine self-image as a function of father deprivation. Results of this study indicated that father-absent boys demonstrated a poorer sense of masculinity as well as poorer interpersonal relationships than do father-present boys. These results are consistent, overall, with the belief that positive father involvement is generally beneficial to children (Marsiglio et al., 2000). While many scholars support these findings, research does not explain why all Black males growing up in father absent families do not fail. In fact, according to the Marsiglio et al. review, the majority of Black young men who grew up without fathers do not use drugs, drop out of high school, join gangs, or become involved in violent crimes.

Purpose of the Study

This study is undertaken to increase knowledge about the circumstances that contributed to the successful lives of Black males living in absent father families. Adams (2000) suggests that as one views father presence and absence on a continuum, the cause, onset, duration, and degree of father absence, and availability of father substitutes can result in a wide range of outcomes for children. The author points out one of the major differences between classic and more contemporary research on father absence is that classic researchers emphasize father absence without being open to the possibility that his absence does not always have *pathological* consequences for the children. This study emphasizes the resilience and adaptability of father absent Black families.

Many children from father absent homes do become productive members of society, despite the father's absence. However, the question arises: are there some common experiences within homes of absent fathers that determine whether Black

children, particularly boys, succeed? The researcher employed the ecological model, and examined both positive and negative effects of fatherlessness, how these variables interact, and how other environmental forces are involved in this complex interactive model. By asking Black male college students and graduates who have actually lived through this situation, the researcher developed a deeper understanding of not only the effects of fatherlessness but also a greater understanding of those forces that have helped to offset its negative effects on adolescents.

Research Question

The research question and methodology of this study were designed not only to explore effects of fatherlessness but also to highlight the strengths of this particular population. This research used an ecological systems approach that reflects the reality of the lives of Black families, which are rooted in their racial, cultural, and economic situations. This approach views the lives of Black families as a product of reciprocal interactions between systems such as the immediate and extended family, neighborhood and school, religion, culture, subculture, community and nation. One of the real issues is to understand and identify the complexity of the interactions, which are not linear but complex and different for each person. Consequently, this study provides an increased awareness of the strengths of the Black family, and how they meet the challenges of the absent Black father. For this study the following three main questions were asked. To explore these three main questions in more detail, subquestions were asked.

1. *How did academically successful African American young men who grew up in fatherless homes account for their drive to become productive, educated citizens?*

- a. *Did family circumstances affect this drive?*
 - b. *Were there common attitudes, values and beliefs shared by this group?*
2. *What was their perception of the experience of growing up in a fatherless home?*
 - a. *What effect did growing up in a fatherless home have on these young men?*
 - b. *How did their peers view the family situation?*
3. *What behaviors and circumstances did they identify that enabled them to succeed?*
 - a. *Were there people who helped them succeed?*
 - b. *Were there special social or community organizaions/programs, or institutions (schools, churches) that enabled them to succeed?*

Limitations

The researcher employed the life history case study research strategy to explore the complex interactions of the positive and negative effects of fatherlessness, and how these circumstances interact with other environmental situations. This would result in a greater understanding of the factors influencing the development of these successful young Black men. It will not be generalizable to the larger population, but it will be a starting point for further development of the ecological model.

Significance of the Study

Much has been written on fatherhood, the absent father and its effects upon the children. However, much of the material has been drawn from research on White middle class families and little has been written on Black men, and those from other ethnic,

racial cultural, and economic backgrounds (Marsiglio et al., 2000). Parke (2000) points out that two separate literatures exist on White, married, middle class fathers and Black, poor, and unmarried fathers, that have led to stereotypes which cast White fathers in a positive light, and the Black fathers in a negative light. Learning about fatherlessness and its effect on Black male children through qualitative research is an important step in addressing a gap in the study of Black families in the United States. Because it provides a deeper understanding and appreciation of the circumstances relating to overcoming hardships, this study also helps to eradicate stereotypes and stigma surrounding the Black family and its structure.

Research with academically successful individuals who have actually lived through this experience may have significant and far-reaching ramifications for individual practitioners as well as educational and training programs. This research employs a life history case study approach to allow successful young Black men to explain in their own words what circumstances have been influential in their success. Their voices point to the forces and situations they see as crucial in their development. Evidence of the strengths and resilience enabling fatherless children to flourish will help educators, social workers, and mental health professionals alike to rethink their attitudes and approaches to this population. The practitioners may also use these findings to develop services and programs useful to children in fatherless homes.

Plan of this Report

The study is divided into five chapters. Chapter one is the introductory chapter, which includes the statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research question, limitations of the study, significance and plan of the study, and definitions. Chapter two

reviews the existing literature on the tradition of fatherhood within the American culture, the African American experience of fatherhood, theoretical perspectives, current research on Black families, and effects of fatherlessness on Black males. Chapter three contains the methodology of this qualitative study, subjectivity, participants and sites selection, data collection techniques, interview questions, data analysis techniques, and validity and reliability. Chapter four presents the findings and analysis of the research data. Finally, Chapter five includes the conclusions and summary of this study, as well as recommendations, regarding the applications of the findings and directions for future research.

Definition of Terms

The working definitions initially utilized were products of the professional literature. These definitions were used with the provision and expectation that they would be modified and supplemented later in the research process.

African American. An American of African descent. This term is used interchangeably with Black and because it captures the essence of their dual heritage. However, since many of the referents use Black, the choice was made to use both.

Father. Refers to the child's biological father.

Fatherlessness. Used interchangeably with absent father. The father is absent physically or emotionally.

Family. In this report, "family" and "household" are used interchangeably.

Parent. Unless specified otherwise, a parent is a child's biological, step-, adoptive, or foster mother or father.

Nuclear family. Refers to a family composed only of a child's parent(s) and siblings.

Parent-child and sibling relationships may be biological, step-, half-, adoptive, or foster.

Traditional nuclear family. This is the nuclear family in which children live with both biological parents who are currently married, and if siblings are present, only full siblings (i.e., brothers and sisters who share the same biological parents). No other persons are present in the household (Furukawa, 1994).

Extended family/extended household. An extended family/household includes at least one parent, one or more children, and one or more members (related or unrelated) other than a parent or sibling. Parent-child and sibling relationships may be biological, step, adoptive, or foster (Furukawa, 1994).

Household. A household consists of all persons who occupy a housing unit. A house, an apartment or other group of rooms, or a single room is regarded as a housing unit when it is occupied or intended for occupancy as separate living quarters; that is, when the occupants do not live and eat with any other persons in the structure. A household includes the related family members and all unrelated person, if any, such as lodgers, foster children, wards, or employees who share the housing unit. A person living alone in a housing unit or two or more unrelated persons sharing a housing unit is also counted as a household (Furukawa, 1994).

Underemployment. Work at a job for which the worker is overqualified, involuntary part-time instead of full-time employment, or intermittent employment (Schaefer, 2000).

CHAPTER TWO

Review of the Literature

This review of the literature explores fatherlessness, starting with a brief look at the history of European American fatherhood and how European American father-involvement has changed over time. We begin with European American fatherhood because it was the norm by which fatherlessness in America was first researched and studied; this norm is being critiqued in this dissertation. Marsiglio et al. (2000) caution regarding the “flexibility of fatherhood, the fundamental linkages between cultural images of mothering and fathers, the futility of searching for prototypical traditional families and fathers, and the diversity of men’s family roles in previous eras” (p.1173). We look at the rise of European American fatherlessness, fatherlessness in African American communities, and its causes and effects on children.

A Brief History of White Fatherhood Over the last Two Centuries

Lamb (2000) and Blankenhorn (1995) used similar frameworks that describe four phases of fatherhood for European Americans over the last two centuries of American social history where fathers have gradually moved from the center to the periphery of family life. Blankenhorn (1995) argues that today’s fragmentation of fatherhood represents the end point of a long historical process where fatherhood has steadily diminished as a social role for men . . . “that our cultural story of fatherhood has almost

completely ceased to portray fathers as essential guarantors of child and societal well-being” (p. 12, 13).

Marsiglio et al. (2000) remind us, however, of the limitations of our historical understanding of fatherhood since materials “are typically drawn from White middle-class sources and are seldom representative of their contemporaries from different ethnic, racial, cultural and economic backgrounds”(p. 1173). They note that while researchers have been encouraged to study the historical events and unique combinations of experiences of men from different ethnic and racial backgrounds, few have actually done so.

The Moral Teacher or Guide

Lamb (2000) and Blankenhorn (1995) find that for European Americans the earliest phase extended from Puritan times through the Colonial period into early Republican times. Throughout this period fathers played the major role of the caretaker in the lives of their young especially the older children and were primarily responsible for their physical and moral well-being. Blankenhorn notes that fathers, throughout the 18th century, bore the ultimate responsibility for religious and moral education of their young. He states that it was through instruction in the Bible that the father taught the children values that would enable them to become educated and maintain Christian ways. Thus a good father was defined as a man who provided a good model of Christian living and whose children were well versed in the Scriptures.

The Breadwinner

Industrialization and the modern economy brought about a shift in the father’s role, which was largely redefined as the breadwinner. Since industrialization and the

modern economy led to the physical separation of home and work, the fathers could not be in both places at once. Blankenhorn (1995) describes the change:

The nineteenth century's "progressive fragmentation of labor, combined with mass production and complicated administration, the separation of home from the place of work, [and] the transition from independent producer to paid employee who uses consumer goods" led to a "progressive loss of substance of the father's authority and a diminution of his power in the family and over the family. . . The major change in family life in the nineteenth century was the steady feminization of the domestic sphere (p. 13).

Breadwinning was now the defining characteristic of a good father (Lamb, 2000).

Lamb explains that prior to industrialization both mothers and fathers shared the responsibility of provisioning. After industrialization from 1830 to 1900, the distant breadwinner was the defining characteristic of a good father (Lamb, 2000; Doherty, Kouneski, & Erickson, 1998). Along with the change were the accompanying new ideas about identity and family life. Consequently, Blankenhorn states, these new ideas led to a decline in patriarchy (1995).

The Sex-Role Model

Lamb (2000) states that even though breadwinning and moral guardianship remained important, focus shifted in the 1930s and early 1940s to the father's function as a sex-role model especially for his sons. This shift brought about a feminization of the domestic sphere and a whole rash of new ideas about gender identity and family life. Blankenhorn (1995) observes that this new philosophy and the new economy of nineteenth century contributed to narrowing of fatherhood as a social role.

The New Nurturant Father

Lamb (2000) finds that around the mid-1970s a fourth stage emerged, which he called active parenting, emphasizing the fathers as nurturing parents who were actively involved in the day-to-day care of their children. Even though fathers had since the

beginning of the century been encouraged to be more involved in child care it was only until the 1970s that this change began to take place.

Most of the research done on White middle class males has assumed they were the normative model, comparing them to Black fathers. Such assumptions and comparisons result in making Black fathers and families appear dysfunctional. The denial of African cultural heritage that uniquely characterizes Black families is inherent in these assumptions (Roschelle, 1997). As a result, the author notes, positive Black family traits such as the extended family are viewed as deviant from the norms of the dominant culture, and disorganized. This writer will discuss the historical roles of the African American father, which were quite different from the fatherhood roles and experiences of White middle class males, and adversely effected by the institution of slavery.

African American Fathers

In order to understand the role of the African American fathers in the United States today, the African family and historical forces that have acted to separate or exclude African American men from family life must be reviewed. Two of the most powerful influences exerted upon the African American family at that time and reaching into modern times were the forced immigration and the institution of slavery during the colonial period in the Americas.

Billingsley (1968) explains that family life in West Africa involved several dimensions which included descent or kinship, type of marriage, type of family (nuclear, extended) residential pattern, patterns of child care, and protection. The author continues that the three basic patterns of descent or kinship were 1) patrilineal descent, the most

common in which kinship ties are ascribed only through the father's side of the family; 2) matrilineal, the next most common in which kinship was ascribed through the mother's side of the family; 3) double descent, in which kinship was reckoned through both the male and female. However, this third pattern was in only a small part of Africa, mostly in the southern portion of the continent and basically unknown in the part of West Africa, the part from which the majority of American Blacks came. The patrilineal was the only pattern of kinship recognized in America.

Billingsley (1968) describes African family life as strong and viable, at the center of the African civilization and being both an economic and a religious unit. It was also a political unit because of its ties with wider kinship circles. The foundation of economic and political life was the family unit, which greatly influenced its individual members. Martin and Martin (1985) find that in the traditional African societies life was organized around the family and that kinship bonds were so strong in traditional Africa that sometimes small family units would become part of a larger extended family network, and "the larger extended family network would often make up a clan, and several clans would make up the entire tribe or community. The traditional African kinship system was like a vast network stretching in every direction, to embrace everybody in any given local group, linking each person to everyone else" (p. 12). Billingsley (1968) found that in the life of the African family and community, the strong, and dominant place in the family and society was assigned to the men. Providing strong, masculine leadership at the center of traditional African family life, the men enjoyed the position of the unquestioned heads of the family in addition to being the leaders, authority figures, and decision makers in the African community (Billingsley, 1968; Martin & Martin, 1985).

The older men are described as playing such dominant roles as chiefs, priests, healers, rainmakers, prophets, teachers, sages, warriors, counselors, and power wielders.

According to Martin and Martin (1985), the men resolved disputes, handed down laws, meted out punishment, handled land transactions, performed civil and religious rituals and ceremonies, and otherwise determined practically all the affairs of family and community life. They continue describing the African family as follows:

The polygamous nature of African family life basically served the interest of men. It brought them as many wives as they could afford. It gave them status and prestige in the community, provided them with enough children to ensure the continuance of the family lineage and a sufficient number of workers to tend the animals and crops, and extended their kinship ties, which increased their influence, wealth, authority, and power throughout the community. (p. 13)

Despite this strong emphasis on men as leaders, Hill (1999) and Billingsley (1968) point out that African families display much flexibility of roles and egalitarian patterns between men and women and that the men were involved in economic activities such as farming, hunting, fishing, while also performing such domestic tasks as the care, protection, socialization and disciplining of children, and meal preparation. In African societies much flexibility as well as overlap was exhibited in the sex role expectations of males and females. Billingsley (1968) states that

In terms of personal behavior and attitudes, there is often no apparent difference between the relations of mother and children and those father and children. The warmth, trust and affection frequently found uniting parents and offspring go harmoniously with the respect shown to both. . . however, in all of West African society, whether patrilineal or matrilineal, the relationship between mother and child was primary and paramount. (p.44)

Hill (1999) further finds that African societies tended to be child-centered with high value being placed on children since they represent “the continuity of life.” The father, Billingsley (1968) observes played a major role in the care and protection of the

children in many of the West African societies. The Ashanti (in central Ghana) provide one example where the bond between mother and child is regarded as the keystone of all social relations. The Dahomeans (of West Central Africa on the Gulf of Guinea) are still another example where even though patrilineal descent is practiced, the relationship between mother and child was very strong.

The Impact of Slavery on Negro Family Life

Unique historical forces such as forced immigration and the institution of slavery have acted to separate or exclude African American men from family life (Allen & Connor, 1997). Anderson and Boyd-Franklin (1985) argue that the era of slavery during which families were abruptly torn apart brought about profound changes in the African American family structure and care taking that have influenced current parenting and more specifically fathering roles. However, it has been shown that Africans forcibly brought to the United States were the descendants of an ancient and honorable tradition of African family life. Billingsley (1968) observes that scholars have little doubt that the breaking up of that tradition by the slave trade has shaped and has had an enormous impact on the Black family. Billingsley continues that the first Blacks, from whom the first Black family was formed, were brought to America and were treated as indentured servants since they actually landed at Jamestown in 1624, one year before the Mayflower.

The bulk of the Blacks, however, were brought into the country and sold as slaves since they came after 1690. The European countries found slavery to be a great economic enterprise with African slavery extending over a period of four centuries and involving the capture of more than 40 million Africans. For the African Blacks, however, it was a great social and psychological disruption. Billingsley (1968) reports that the

transportation of slaves from Africa to the New World disrupted the cultural life of the Africans. Because the family is the primary unit of social organization, these disruptions, social, psychological, cultural, and historical, had a profound impact on the Black family. According to Billingsley, there were several factors differentiating African Blacks from other immigrants who came to this country. First, African Blacks were moving into an alien society different from their historical roots. This was not the case with later immigrants coming from Germany, Ireland, and Italy whose norms and values and ways of life were familiar and acceptable to them. Second, African Blacks were from different tribes with different languages, cultures, and traditions. Third, they came without their families and many without females. Fourth, and finally, they came in chains.

They were not permitted to adapt whatever their ability to do so may have been. Since they were often sold to plantations and scattered without regard for their former tribal or family connections, it was most difficult to reestablish and maintain their cultural systems. Further, the author notes, that the small number of slaves on each plantation made it practically impossible to for them to develop a reliable set of new cultural forms. Absent were any institutions powerful enough to protect the slaves and their humanity; this resulted in the destruction of previous cultural forms and prevented the emergence of new ones. All of these factors affected the slaves' ability to acculturate and assimilate into the new culture in ways similar to the opportunities available to other groups of immigrants.

Billingsley (1968) describes that the African slaves in America became chattel, converted from the free and independent human beings they had been in Africa to property. The slave system was driven by brutal commercialism and dominated every

phase of the process. Dehumanization of the slaves started at the beginning of the slave-gathering process and intensified with each stage of the journey along the way. This process of dehumanization provided superior opportunities, privileges, and status to the White majority at the expense of the Black minority, and deeply ingrained within White people a sense of superiority that was crippling. The Blacks, at every stage of this process of dehumanization, became progressively more disengaged from their cultures, their families, and their humanity.

Slavery and Family Life in the United States

Whereas the African men enjoyed both high status and position in their families in their native land of Africa, slavery stripped them of their patriarchal authority in America. There was a wholesale disregard for the integrity of the family; it had no rights that the slave owner was bound to respect or observe. The Black man was not the head of his household; the White slave master was the chief patriarch - the father, the authority figure, and the decision maker. Both the wife and the children of the Black man were forced to obey the slave master above all. Thus, the head of the White family was the White man and the head of the Black slave family was, also, the White master. Often his authority was delegated to a White overseer and enforced by the violence of the slave system. The slave system rendered the Black male powerless within his own family, reducing him to less than and on the same level of his wife and children. The slave system required that the mother rather than the father serve as the central focus of the family, which was of course contrary to the pattern in White families. The presence of males, females, and marriage did not follow the same power relationships that were followed in White families

For Billingsley (1992), the families made by the slaves were much different from the African families of origin and from the free White families. These families were both moral and honorable and beyond patriarchy, matriarchy, and egalitarianism. Their central feature was matrifocality because they were centered around women, mothers, and grandmothers who, though they had neither the power, authority nor resources, nevertheless held their families together. This author feels that these families were quite functional for the slaves under their life's circumstances, fulfilling the deep yearnings common to all people for the sense of belonging and kinship.

The common and widespread practice of breeding the slaves among themselves for sale as if they were cattle appears to be perhaps the cruelest of all forms of emasculation of the African American family. It is suggested that slave breeding was practiced deliberately to maximize the number of offspring and ensure the master a steady supply of workers, while in the process totally ignoring the emotional needs of the slaves themselves (Bennett, 1982; Schaefer, 2000; Martin & Martin, 1985). Schaefer (2000) points out that the slave family could not offer its children shelter or security, rewards, or punishments. Also, widespread was the practice where the slave owner had sexual relations with his female slaves and then sold his offspring in the open market. Thus, the slave owner enjoyed the brutal exercise of physical power over the females slaves, in addition to gaining economic advantage.

Marriage and the family among the slaves were not recognized and the legal system made no provision for such recognition. Daily and in every situation on the plantation, the male slave experienced serious assaults on his manhood. The most serious

assault, Martin and Martin (1985) reveal, was his inability to protect his wife from the sexual advances of White men and the physical abuse of his master.

Because a man who could not protect his woman from being raped and abused by another was not a man in traditional African society, many male slaves preferred to marry women from other plantations. They did not want to marry a woman from their own plantation and watch as she was beaten, insulted, overworked, or starved without being able to protect her. They would rather suffer the pain of separation than experience such an extreme sense of helplessness. (p.19)

Apparently, the only recognized role of the slave man was that of siring offspring, since he was the sex partner of a woman (Schaefer, 2000). In fact, Schaefer describes, slave men were often identified as though they were the woman's possession. For example, he was called "Nancy's Tom" and that the Southern law consistently ruled that the "father of a slave is unknown to our law" (p. 209). Billingsley (1968) laments, "The powerlessness of the Negro man to protect his family for two and a half centuries under slavery has had crippling consequences for the relations of Negro men and women to this very day" (p. 61).

Allen and Connor (1997) in their discussion of generative fathering report that African American husbands, fathers, brothers, and sons frequently risked severe punishment in their attempts to maintain family ties. To ensure that their children would inherit the mother's free status, the slave fathers were known to have bought their wives' freedom before their own. The authors point out that such actions were profoundly generative when one is "caring for the life and freedom of future generations" (p. 55). Generative fathers were men who contributed to the ongoing life cycle of the generations through the care of that they provide as birth fathers, childrearing fathers, and cultural fathers (Marsiglio et al 2000).

Equalization of the Roles of the Slave Men and Women

Somehow the dehumanization and cruelty of slavery brought about an equalization that made it necessary for the Black man and Black woman to cooperate with each other, thus, enhancing their ability to survive. This equalization also led as Martin and Martin (1985) explain to the first democratic family . . . where men and women shared authority and responsibility. In the important world of work on the plantation, slavery equalized the Black man and woman; there was no work that the Black man did that the Black woman did not do also. This equalization came about because of a conscious effort on the part of the slave master to defeminize Black women. The slave master accomplished this by working the Black women as hard as the Black men, subjecting them equally to punishment and brutality and treating them in a very crude and coarse manner.

Care of children

Usually the children were taken care of by the slave parents and the old slaves when the parents were in the fields working. If the parents became sick or were sold the children need not worry about someone to care for them, for they would be absorbed into an existing household and reared by other relatives or nonkin. According to Martin and Martin (1985), it was quite a difficult task to teach the young children how to be good slaves and to survive in a dangerous world. Parents used a process called “breaking” their children whereby the parents would beat out or drive out the all the aggressive, hostile, rebellious, and insubordinate behaviors that might get the children, the parents, and even other slaves into serious trouble with the slave master. The children had to be taught strict obedience, not to verbally confront the master, and to keep silent about the family

and slave community affairs. It was necessary for the children to keep silent since the master often questioned the children about the attitudes of the parents and other adults. Also, the children had to be taught not to make the mistake of looking the master in the eye, failing to lower his or her head when addressing the master, or failing to address the master with the appropriate “yes, sir” or “no, sir.” Failing to observe the proper slavery etiquette could mean very severe punishment, even death from the slave master. This is the reason it was so important for the children to be broken at a very early age, to know their place, and especially to realize that they were not equal to white children. Yes, they may play with them and even call them their friends, but to the Whites, all of the slaves were just “niggers” which is what the Whites called them.

With the absence of protection and societal support for the African American family as a physical, psychological, social, and economic entity, the slave system crippled its establishment, maintenance and growth patterns. As a result the individual slaves, their families, and ultimately the whole society of Black people were crippled as well. Billingsley (1968) feels that the consequences of these conditions had far reaching effects for succeeding and modern generations. However, Bennett (1982) leaves us with some important aspects of the Black family and slave community.

1. Slave fathers and mothers headed it, and most slaves lived in family units with large numbers living in long marriages of thirty or more years.
2. Fathers were respected, strong members of the family with male children often named after their fathers.
3. Though premarital sex was fairly common, the slave expected a premarital pregnancy to result in marriage.

4. During and following slavery the Black marriage was supported by the extended family.

Thus the slaves created a community with its own values and orientation that sustained them as they struggled daily to maintain a sense of humanity in an oppressive and violent environment. Though this struggle “continued behind the lines of slavery until the end of slavery. . . men and women were nourished and sustained by the slave community” (Bennett, 1984, p.107) and pressed the struggle on various levels. Revolts and conspiracies were organized and led by some slaves; while other slaves, with the help of the community who provided food and medicine and kept silent, escaped to Canada or to the Indian reservation via the Underground Railroad. According to Bennett (1984), it was during the antebellum period that approximately 100,000 slaves escaped from the South.

The African American After Slavery

The Civil War had a devastating impact on the slave family and the free family as well, since Black life was greatly disrupted (Martin & Martin, 1985). It is recorded that there was a higher level of female-headed families among free Black families at that time in the southern cities due to the disproportionate number of mulatto children fathered by White men (Hill, 1999). Allen and Connor (1997) note that during the years after the Civil War most African American couples of long standing sought to legalize their informal marriages and “two-parent households represented the norm”(p. 55). Of the antebellum free Blacks in the North and South, Gutman (1976) reports that most lived in two-parent households, as did most poor rural and urban freemen and women. Roschelle (1997) also reveals that attempts to reconstruct the Black family of the 19th century

following the Civil War indicate that household structure in terms of marriage, divorce, fertility, and two-parent household rates was similar between Blacks and Whites. She continues that such research, indeed, provides compelling evidence that slavery did not destroy the Black family and that the structure of the Black family was a unique, cultural form evolving from familial and kinship patterns, which emanated from the conditions of slavery as well as from African cultural attributes.

During the hundred years from 1860 to 1960, African Americans migrated to the North driven by two major forces: oppression and blatant racism (Billingsley, 1968). These forces were reflected in the Jim Crow laws. Jim Crow laws legalized segregation between Blacks and Whites when the Supreme Court ruled in the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision the doctrine of “separate but equal.” However, the stark reality between 1896 and 1954 was that public institutions that were designated for Blacks were “separate and unequal”(Woodward, 1966; Franklin & Anderson, 1978). These places included railways and streetcars, restaurants, boarding buses, theaters, public waiting rooms and public parks and places of employment, schools, and hospitals. Jim Crow laws were a way of maintaining White supremacy, and dictated Black passivity in the presence of Whites. Designed to remind Blacks that they were inferior, Jim Crow also advocated racial segregation and denied the Blacks political and legal rights (Zastrow, 2000). Those Blacks who defied Jim Crow were lynched, burned, beaten, and mutilated. It is recorded that between 1882 and 1968, 3446 Black men and women were lynched; 1217 persons were reported lynched between 1890 and 1900 alone (Zangrando, 1991; Bennett, 1984). Many other instances of lynching went unrecorded beyond the community involved. These times of lynching Blacks were considered a recreational

pastime for the Whites, with announcements of the festive event advertised in the newspaper and trains chartered for those coming from afar. Mobs obtained souvenirs by cutting off the fingers, toes, ears or genitalia of the Black victims.

Despite the lynching and the oppressive climate, Black massive migration out of the South did not occur until about 1915, fifty years after Emancipation and continued at a high rate for the next ten years. Billingsley (1968) considers this the result of devastating and depressing failures in the agricultural crops caused by the enemy of the cotton plant, the boll weevil. As African Americans migrated from the agrarian South to the urban, industrialized North, more and more Black men were temporarily separated from their families and kin networks. He cites the major forces pulling the African Americans to the North as World War I, which included new demands on Northern manufacturing industries; sources of immigrant from Europe being cut off; and the recruitment of hundreds of thousands of Black men to the North for jobs.

These population movements from the South to the North took its toll on family life as many young men left their families to go in search of employment. Since it was an expensive and uncertain move, the men were encouraged to go ahead of their families, settle down, and send for them later. Such a situation greatly disrupted and strained family solidarity and organization both in the South where they left, and in the North where they migrated. Many families did not join their husbands and fathers until years later, while some never did join them at all (Billingsley, 1968). This migration represents the impact of another separation upon the Black family.

In the North life was better than in the rural South, even though the Black migrants entered the job market at the bottom and lived in substandard housing. Schaefer

(2000) reports that the pattern of violence against Blacks that began during Reconstruction continued into the twentieth century and then spread northward. Much of the violence resulted from the White veterans returning from World War I who feared Black competition over jobs. However, this competition between Blacks and Whites over jobs was eliminated as the industrial plants unionized and expelled all of the Blacks. Many Blacks that had served in the segregated military providing a safe world for democracy returned home to find that they had difficulty providing for their own families.

The Great Depression hit the United States in the 1930s. During the depression there was widespread male unemployment (Black unemployment was double that of Whites), and homelessness, and suicide were commonplace. Black unemployment was twice that of Whites yet their family relationships did not appear to be worse than any other ethnic group (Allen & Connor, 1997). In fact, the authors continue, higher rates of marriage and two parent households among Blacks did not decline until the post World War II period. After World War II Black veterans returned to the North to find a number of depressing situations: shortage of housing, discrimination in housing, inadequate education, lack of employment opportunities, and lack of political clout. These factors all combined resulted in Blacks men being disenfranchised and unable to establish and support their families (Allen & Connor, 1997). However, they report, Black families adapted quite well: many family members were flexible in role sharing, incorporating extended family members, while both Black men and women shared child rearing and work outside the home. These factors fostered family cohesion and enhanced stability.

When America made shifts from industrial to service economy, African Americans also made the transition but at a slower rate than Whites because of the lack of education and special skills, discriminatory hiring, and promotion practices. Pressures increased on the Black family as females were increasingly employed in the service section and the males were decreasingly employed in blue-collar industries. While it was good for some, the transition to a technology-based society proved detrimental to others as unemployment expanded, single-parent families increased, and divorce disrupted households. Allen and Connor (1997) observe that, for Black young urban men, there was generally hopelessness as they found that they were caught between the expectations of society to establish and provide for families with few opportunities to do so. The authors also find that the older men who were more highly educated fared somewhat better since they possessed the skills needed to enter White-collar and professional careers and thus were able to move their families into the Black middle-class.

The civil rights movement of the 1960s, coupled with an expanding national economy, brought educational and employment opportunities for Blacks. Allen and Connor (1997) contend that both the flight of the Black middle class and the simultaneous decline of blue-collar employment have been critical in the erosion of both the Black community and its quality of family life as well. If the Black female had been able to work perhaps that would have eased some of the strain in families where men were chronically unemployed or underemployed. At any rate financial distress and conflicted relationships caused increased marital disruption in the Black family from the middle 1960s through the end of the 1980s. Billingsley (1992) laments: "It is perhaps

ironic that the traditional family system that slavery could not destroy during 200 years may be dismantled in a few short years by the modern industrial transition”(p.135).

Despite the harrowing experiences of slavery and subsequent terrors of lynching, discrimination, and exclusion from many areas of American life, Hill (1999) insists that contemporary Black families continue to utilize effective coping strategies that are, indeed, legacies from their African heritage, and that enable them to function effectively in a racist society. Schaefer (2000) describes these five strengths as:

1. Strong kinship bonds. Blacks are more likely than Whites to care for children and the elderly in an extended family network.
2. A strong work orientation. Poor Blacks are more likely to be working (than the poor white), and poor Black families often include more than one wage earner.
3. Adaptability of family roles. In two-parent families, the egalitarian pattern of decision making is the most common. The self-reliance of Black women who are the primary wage earners best illustrates this adaptability.
4. A high achievement orientation. Working-class Blacks indicate a greater desire for their children to attend college than do working-class Whites. Even a majority of low-income African Americans desire to attend college.
5. A strong religious orientation. Since the time of slavery, Black churches have been the impetus behind many significant grass-roots organizations. (p. 253)

Billingsley (1968) in his research on African American families examined the strengths and weaknesses and its configuration patterns, identified three categories of African American families: primary families (e.g., two-parent), extended families (e.g., other relatives, in-laws), and augmented families (e.g., nonrelated individuals). In 1990 females headed 46% of the families compared to 1970 when only 28% of the families were female-headed. Williams, Auslander, Houston, Krebill and Haire-Joshu (2000) find that such data clearly indicate that there has been a dramatic change in the African American family over the past 50 years.

Theoretical Perspectives on Black Families

There has been much discussion and evaluation of the weaknesses and strengths on Black families and much of the literature can be assigned to one or two schools of research (Karenga, 1993). The first school of research is called pathological or pathogenic (also called the deficit model), and blames the victim for his own plight. It is based on the assumption that the Black family is a sick and dysfunctional social unit, producing members after its own kind. Frazier's (1939) research on the Black family laid the groundwork for the pathology perspective. He believed that as a consequence of the Black family being severed from its African heritage, disabled by enslavement, urbanization, and racism was rendered ineffective in its functioning, and developed into its present dysfunctional matriarchal character. Matriarchal families are characterized by strong women, ineffective marginal men, unstable marriages, casual sex, and loss of folk culture cohesiveness as a result of urbanization (Karenga, 1993). Frazier (1939) argued that the female-headed household had become a legitimized family form by women who eschewed the traditional nuclear family. This out-of-wedlock motherhood, which was common among ex-slaves and nonskilled laborers, then was accepted by large numbers of Black women who passed on similar values to their offspring. Today, termed the "culture of poverty," Frazier asserted that this disorganization was transmitted via family values; it resulted in a self-perpetuating tradition, and into a cycle of pathological interaction of destitution and hopelessness within lower class Black urban communities (Roschelle, 1997).

Moynihan (1965) linked many social problems on the Black family and argued that the Black community was plagued by the following pathology: matriarchy,

ineffective, and economically dependent males; and children who tended toward delinquency, poor academic performance, and unwed motherhood. Roschelle (1997) emphasizes that the main thesis of this pathological approach or culture of poverty perspective is that poor people have aspirations, psychological characteristics, and values that hinder their achievement, producing behavioral deficiencies that keep them impoverished. These deficiencies then are passed on to their children through socialization. Consequently, all of the social problems experienced in the Black ghettos were blamed totally on the breakdown in the family. Moynihan (1965) rejected racism as playing a role in the perpetuation of poverty, and recommended that Black women, who wielded too much control of their families, relinquish it and restructure the family according to a patriarchal model that is White, and middle-class.

Roschelle (1997) argues that, though a majority of Black Americans are currently living in non-nuclear families, Blacks have very traditional attitudes toward marriage. However, the author continues, economic conditions have limited women's choices in finding men since there is a limited pool of potential partners able to fulfill the role of provider. The effect of Black males' high unemployment rates is not Black female dominance, but greater economic deprivation for families deprived of their fathers' income.

The second perspective is called the adaptive vitality approach and holds that adaptation by Blacks to socio-economic pressures and limitations should be viewed as strength and not as pathology. The adaptive vitality model, as Karenga (1993) defines it, is the "ability to adjust structurally and ideologically in confrontation with society without losing one's distinct character . . . [it's] the ability to absorb stress and bounce

back with vigor” (p. 283). The author places this approach in the context of the strengths of Black families and describes family strengths as “those traits which facilitate the ability of the family to meet the needs of its members and the demands made upon it by systems outside the family unit”(p.284). Some of the strengths listed are 1) strong kinship bonds which are expressed by absorption of relatives, especially minors and the elderly into various families; 2) strong work orientation; 3) the adaptability of family roles, i.e., male/female can assume each other’s household roles in the event of absence, illness, etc.

In some of the literature on Black families (Moynihan, 1965) a dismal picture has been painted of Black fathers and the care of their families. However, when one reviews the historical account of how African men were kidnapped from their native land, brutally brought to America and enslaved, humiliated, and emasculated by not being able to provide for or protect their own wives and children from the horrors and exploitation of slavery; and when one surveys the racism that has spanned the years, and persisted since the abolishment of slavery, and that continues to exist in job opportunities, housing, health care, and education; it is a wonder that Black families and fathers have survived at all.

Karenga (1993) reports the arguments for the adaptive vitality approach by pointing out the uniqueness of the Black family that will not fit into the White formula for analysis. Further, he reports the adaptive vitality school maintains that slavery did not totally destroy the Black family; and even in the face of severe oppression, it has proved to be a strong, functional social unit that is durable and vitally adaptive. He notes that a major problem with the traditional approaches in studying the Black family has been the tendency to try to make it fit into the White-middle class formula. The result of this

approach has been that the Black family continues to be defined as a pathological unit whereas in reality the problems of Black families are attributable to social conditions of oppression in which they find themselves. Billingsley (1968, 1992) also is critical of White social science for focusing almost exclusively on lower income families, and blaming them for their victimization by society while at the same time ignoring the majority of stable Black families. Billingsley (1968, 1992) particularly stressed that many misunderstood features of the Black family are actually sources of strength.

Others such as Hare (1976) contend that there is a serious dilemma of Black scholarship in regards to strengths of the family perspective versus the pathological approach. Hare declares that the strengths-of-the family approach prohibits any recognition of the pathological consequences of oppression, and therefore hinders any much-needed corrective action. Last, Hare contends that the strengths-of-the family approach makes it that much easier for an oppressive and racist society to ignore the deplorable conditions it imposes on the Black family.

Taking these points into consideration, Karenga (1993) raises the following difficult questions: If one proves strengths in the face of oppression then is one not absolving the oppressor of responsibility? In criticizing the system, is one not also adding to the victimology and the long list of hurts and ills? Schaefer (2000) suggests that social scientists are attempting to answer this challenge by developing a critical and balanced analysis of both the weaknesses and strengths of African American family life. However, Karenga (1993) recognizes the need for a prescription for action, liberation, and a shaping of reality into the image and interest of Blacks. This, the author claims is the task of emancipatory social science.

Current Research on Black Families

Historically, Black families have been studied within a descriptive framework that recognized the pressures, demands, and severe restraints of the environments in which they lived (Peters, 1988). DuBois (1908) published the first sociological study of Afro-American families in 1908 that provided facts describing aspects of Black family life. However, it was after World War II that there was a shift from descriptive approaches to “more sophisticated research methodologies patterned after the physical sciences” (Peters, 1988). She finds that while shifting from descriptive research to comparative deficit approaches, sociologists reported findings about Black families within a Black/White comparative framework. A classic example of the comparative deficit approach was Frazier’s (1939) study, *The Negro Family in the United States*.

It is possible that in reaction to the criticisms and the negativism of the comparative deficit approach that many social scientists have shifted to the use of the ecological approach when researching Black families in the past several decades (Peters, 1988). Observing the Black family within the environment in which it occurs, ecological research findings have dramatically destroyed myths and have changed the picture of parenting and child behavior of Blacks.

A review by Marsiglio et al. (2000) concluded that though theorists studied fatherhood as a cultural representation that is expressed through different sociocultural processes and embedded in a larger ecological context, their historical understanding of fatherhood is very limited because materials were typically drawn from White middle-class sources and were seldom representative of different ethnic, racial, cultural, and economic backgrounds.

The following section of the review of literature focuses on the more current social science research evidence. Though emphasis is on the Black male in this section White male evidence is also cited.

Effects of Fatherlessness on Black Males

Drug usage.

Thomas and Farrell (1996) examined the impact of single-mother families and nonresident father's involvement in single-mother families on delinquency, heavy drinking, and illicit drug use in Black and White adolescents by gender. Their study was based on a representative household sample of over 600 adolescents and their parents. Adolescent reports of adolescents were used as indicators of nonresident father involvement. The findings indicated that for White male adolescents nonresident father involvement buffers the negative effects of living in single-mother families on delinquency, heavy drinking, and illicit drug use. The highest rates of problem behavior were found among White male adolescents in single-mother families without the support of a nonresident father. For Black male adolescents, however, it was found that, compared with those living with two biological parents and those living with isolated single mothers, adolescents who live in single-mother families with nonresident fathers involved in their socialization reported higher levels of delinquency, heavy drinking, and illicit drug use. The authors quickly assert, however, that before it is concluded that Black nonresident fathers have negative effects on their sons, it should be remembered that the Black adolescents in this condition do no worse than White adolescents who are involved with their nonresident fathers, and the Black males in this situation do better than the White adolescents in isolated single-mother families.

In another study, Jenkins and Zunguze (1998) examined the relationship of family structure to adolescent gateway drug use and peer-related factors. The sample consisted of 2,121 randomly selected students in grades eight, ten, and twelve from seventeen school districts in northeastern Ohio. The majority of students described themselves as white or Caucasian; 10% as Black or African American; approximately 10% as American Indian, Oriental or Asian American, Mexican American or Chicano; and less than 1% as Puerto Rican or other Latin American. Students were administered a self-report instrument containing the items measuring drug use and psychosocial variables. This study sought to contribute to a greater understanding of adolescent drug involvement and to improve upon previous designs by using several drug indicators and a large sample representative of different family types. Five gateway drugs (cigarettes, marijuana, beer, wine coolers, and liquor) were studied in relation to family structure, in addition to total drug involvement, affiliation with drug-using peers, and perceptions of peer attitudes toward drug use. Family composition included single-parent (mother-headed and father-headed) families, stepfamilies (comprising a natural parent and a stepparent), and intact families (consisting of both natural parents).

Overall, Jenkins and Zunguze's (1998) findings indicated that the greatest differences between adolescents from intact, single-parent, and reconstituted families occurred in the eighth and tenth grades. However, the greatest number of statistically significant differences with regard to the peer variables occurred for eighth graders. The authors notes that these findings might indicate the importance of helping younger adolescents living in single-parent and stepparent families to obtain appropriate emotional support while developing more prosocial copying behaviors. In virtually all

comparisons, the adolescents from single-parent and reconstituted families reported having more drug-using friends and perceiving less peer disapproval of their drug use. In comparison with the other grade levels, more significant differences were found at the tenth grade level between adolescents residing solely with their fathers and those in other family groups on the drug-use and peer-affiliation variables. Adolescents from father-only families reported having more friends who drank liquor. Differences at the eighth grade level between the father-only and intact-family groups primarily involved use of cigarettes and affiliation with peers who used marijuana. Comparisons involving the intact-family and mother-only groups yielded similar results.

Behavioral and Cognitive Investigations.

In their study on race differences in cohabitation, single parenthood, and child development, Dunifon and Kowaleski-Jones (2002) found single parenthood to be associated with reduced well-being among European American children, but not African American children. They examined the following questions: Does family structure (specifically, single parenthood, married parent, and cohabitating parent) affect children's delinquency and math test scores? Do these effects differ by race? Do parenting practices mediate the links between family structure and children's outcomes? Does this mediation differ by race? The findings indicated that single parenthood was associated with reduced well-being on both measures of delinquency, drug use, and math scores among European American children, but not African American children. Cohabitation was associated with greater delinquency among African American children, and lower math scores among European American children. There was no evidence indicating that parenting mediated the links between family structure and children's outcomes. It was

also found that for African American children measures of maternal warmth and the provision of rules had direct positive on children's delinquency.

Carlson and Corcoran (2001) used data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth to examine the effect of various family structures on behavioral and cognitive outcomes for children ages seven to ten. They extended previous research by using a longitudinal definition of family structure and by exploring four possible mechanisms through which family structure might influence children's outcomes: economic recourses, parental socializations, childhood stress, and maternal psychological functioning. They also examined how family structure affects behavioral as well as cognitive outcomes.

Family Income.

Carlson and Corcoran (2001) found that income is strongly and negatively associated with behavior problems and has a significant positive effect on math and reading scores. These findings demonstrate that children who live apart from their fathers do less well than children who live with both parents because they have lower financial resources. Thus, family income is strongly and negatively associated with behavior problems; the average family income is much lower for nonintact family configurations than for two-parent families; and income is lowest for children raised in continuous single parent families. The quality of the home with respect to emotional support and cognitive stimulation is linked to fewer behavioral problems.

Gender.

This study by Carlson and Corcoran (2001) is the only one in this review of literature that reported on differences between boys and girls. Though they did find that while girls from single parent families have fewer overall behavior problems, teen girls tend to engage in early sexual activity or become pregnant. However, boys may skip school or involve themselves in delinquent activity.

School Issues.

For the European American child, time spent in single parent families is associated with reduced child well being in school performance and behavior (Carlson & Corcoran, 2001). In this study race matters only for the Peabody Individual Achievement Test (PIAT) math scores – Black children score lower than White children. Overall, girls and first-born children perform significantly better on the reading test. For math scores there is no difference on the two variables. Also found is that income has a significantly positive effect on math and reading scores.

Maternal Psychological Well-being.

Maternal psychological well-being is shown to be an important mechanism by which family structure affects behavioral outcomes, but not cognitive ones (Carlson & Corcoran, 2001). They describe results supporting the argument that maternal psychological functioning is lower in single-parent families and that poor maternal mental health is one of the reasons children reared in single-parent families regardless of race have more behavior problems than children who are reared in two-parent homes. The authors continue by finding that children whose mothers had higher risks of depression and lower levels of mastery exhibited more behavioral problems, and when

mothers' mental health is controlled, the sizes of the effects of family structure on children's problem behaviors decline.

Masculine Self-image.

Beatty (1995) in his study explores the extent to which adolescent males experience different peer adjustment and masculine self-image as a function of father deprivation. A sample of forty middle school boys (twenty father-present and twenty father-absent) rated each other on peer adjustment and masculine self-image. Father absent subjects were defined as those who had lived with their mothers or nonpaternal relatives at least two thirds of the time. The mean age for the total sample was 13.4 years. The sample consisted of 59% Caucasian, 30% African American, and 11% Hispanic subjects. It also employed a rating scale version of a sociometric measure. The data does indeed support the hypotheses that statistically significant differences in mean scores of perceived masculine self-image and perceived peer adjustment would be observed between father-present and father-absent adolescent males. Thus results indicate that father-absent boys in all groups evidence a poorer sense of masculinity as well as poorer interpersonal relationships than do father-present boys.

Conclusions

As Carlson and Corcoran (2001) indicate the link between family structure and young adult outcomes is no longer questioned because research has well demonstrated that, regardless of race, education or parental remarriage, children reared in single-parent families do not fare as well as those reared in two parent families. Previous studies have compared Black and White adolescent males living in single parent families with nonresident fathers and those living with two biological parents. These studies reported

that among those from single parent families there were higher levels of delinquency, heavier drinking and illicit drug use (Thomas & Ferrell, 1996), more drug-using friends, and less perceived peer disapproval of their drug use (Jenkins & Zunguze, 1998). Since most father-absent families have significantly lower income, the findings demonstrate the children do less well than children who live with both parents (Carlson & Corcoran, 2001). These authors also found family income to be strongly and negatively associated with behavior problems. Father absent adolescent boys, both Black and White, were also found to evidence a poorer sense of masculinity as well as poorer interpersonal relationships than do father present boys (Beatty, 1995). These results suggest that for African American children time spent in single-parent families compared with time spent in married couple families is not associated with delinquency or lower PIAT math scores (Dunifon & Kowaleski-Jones (2002). Single parenthood was associated with reduced well-being, delinquency, drug use, and math scores only for European American child.

The literature has well demonstrated the negative effects of fatherlessness on Black children as well as White children. However, there appears to be no research exploring the circumstances that have enabled the father absent Black males to survive this experience.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

There has been much research conducted on the effects of the absent father on children. However, there remains little research on successful Black males from fatherless families who are doing well in high school and college. The purpose of this case study was to discover, understand, and describe the circumstances that contributed to the successful lives of Black males living in absent father families. Also it helped to identify the environments that support the success of these Black men.

Qualitative research methodology was used since it is especially appropriate for investigating events, situations and circumstances that are new areas of study (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000). In addition to helping identify or discover important situations, qualitative research can also identify plausible causal networks shaping an event, situation, or circumstance. Creswell (1998) defines a case study in qualitative research as “an exploration of a “bounded system” or a case (or multiple cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context” (p. 61). He explains that the system is bounded by time and place and is the case (program, event, activity, or individuals) being studied. The research strategy employed was the life history case study approach, which examined in detail a single subject on a particular time period in the person’s life (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). In this

multicase study multiple participants were selected and semi-structured, face-to-face interviews were conducted. The collective or multicase studies strategy is especially appropriate because close examination of several cases should yield valuable insights into and understanding of what aspects of life experience contribute to the success of fatherless Black males. This study of multiple cases was limited to eight Black males ranging from eighteen to twenty five years of age, and examined the time period from birth through adolescence.

According to Peters (1988), researchers are learning more about how young Black children are socialized and exploring how they grow and develop into self-sufficient, competent adults in the “face of the real constraints American society places on Black Americans” (p. 238). The author stresses that research on parenting in Black families must reflect the reality that the lives of Black families are rooted in the racial, cultural, and economic situations of Blacks in America. The design of this study, therefore, took this into account and was informed by the ecological systems approach (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Hill et al., 1993). This approach sees human beings as existing in a social web in which behavior and development are both influenced by and have an influence on, the behavior and development of others with whom they interact in the web (Ecological Systems Approaches, September 6, 2003). Human behavior is, thus, the product of an ongoing interaction between internal values and beliefs and social environmental systems that include the immediate and extended family, neighborhood and friends, school, workplace, religion, culture, sub-culture, community, and nation. In this study, the interview questions are designed to gather data that includes environmental influences

that have had an impact on the socialization and outcomes on the participants of this study.

Subjectivity

Researcher subjectivity has had a negative connotation and has been something to avoid and “keep out of one’s research” (Glesne, 1999, p. 105). However, as Glesne declares, subjectivity is the very basis for the story the researcher is able to tell, driving the selection of the topic, feeling certain emotions as the subject is contemplated and even equipping the researcher with perspectives and insights. In order for reviewers to know the lens through which research has been conducted, researchers need to deal with their own subjectivity by clarifying their personal and professional backgrounds. Glesne also indicates that it is considered an asset for the researcher to have a common experiential base with the informants, which allows the researcher to comprehend the respondents’ cultural experience. Additionally, it is important for the researcher to know which subjectivities make up one’s autobiography and how one’s research intersects with life. For this research it is also important to be aware of emotional investment in the issues of the Black family, father presence, and absence. The researcher must ask, “Why is the research question that is being asked of interest in my life?”

As the researcher I use a ‘personal lens,’ (Glesne, 1999) in this study because I grew up in a Black family with a father who was physically present but emotionally absent. Therefore, I believe that a common experiential base exists with the interviewees. My father provided well for his family; however, he was so preoccupied with providing for six children that he did not take much time for love and affection, nor in spending time in activities with us. My interest in the Black family and the absent father dates back

to my junior year in high school as I was preparing to submit applications to prospective colleges that I was to attend. When my counselor asked me what profession I wanted to pursue, I said that I wanted to be a social worker. I had already decided that I wanted to help my family deal with some issues. More specifically, I wanted to understand my father's behavior and the stresses he faced as he labored to provide for six children, worked a factory job (where he endured much racism), and operated a radio and television business out of our home. Not having a term for it in my growing up years, I became interested in his emotional absence from our family. This interest surfaced as I began lecturing in my social work classes on the formation of the self-concept and the agents of socialization. It was then, in the early 1990s, that I first began to explore the phenomena of the absent father and its effects on the family. Though both girls and boys are affected by the father's absence, my focus has shifted to the effects on boys because the fathers' absence appears to have a greater impact on boys in the formation of their self-image (Beaty, 1995). Also, at this point in time there is more literature on the effects of fatherlessness on boys since more children reside with the biological mother than the biological father in the single parent family and after divorce.

From the perspective of the researcher lens (Glesne, 1999), I can attest to my growth as I have observed and studied many different family structures, and the societal and socioeconomic conditions affecting them. This research has resulted in a greater appreciation of the Black extended family. Consequently, my understanding of fatherless homes has shifted from the deficit model, so commonly used, to the adaptive vitality model. And, if only one area of strength is experienced from the point of reference of the vitality model, one can certainly appreciate that strong area. The adaptive vitality model

has helped me to see that, though father absence can indeed have negative effects on children (Beaty, 1995; Carlson & Corcoran, 2001; Popenoe, 1996), these effects are not always present. Perhaps other conditions are more salient in the lives of the children than the absent father situation that enables them to grow up and become healthy, productive adults. My shift from using the deficit model of “blaming the victim,” or the Black father, to the adaptive vitality perspective encompasses the many environmental influences supporting and challenging Black families and youths.

In looking at this research through what Glesne (1999) calls the ‘caring lens,’ (in which category my professions of social worker and clergy would also fall), I have a strong interest in young African American males growing up in father absent homes and their families being provided with all the support and resources possible. I, also, see my personal lens linked to the caring lens since my own family experiences and observations provide me with sensitivity for young Black males.

Still, another lens would be the justice lens, which is connected to both the personal lens and the caring lens. I now have a greater desire to work to heighten public awareness about some of the positive aspects and attributes associated with fatherlessness in Black family life. Then, I will be able to provide a definitive analysis of the circumstances and situations that can offset and lessen the far-reaching consequences of fatherless families, including the lack of masculine role models as well as the lack of discipline from males, along with poverty. While I believe in the resilient nature of Black family life, I do acknowledge the negative role that racism in the American society has played in the lives of Black absentee fathers; this important fact cannot be overlooked. Thus, it is essential to recognize and state that the deficit is not in the Black families,

fathers, or children; rather the deficit is in the American system and its institutional form of racism which discriminates against people of color at every level in life's experience. Black family life is, then, a product of the interaction of the various ecological systems, reflecting the social web that influences human behavior and development.

I was influenced in the conceptualization of this study by a previous smaller study I conducted in a qualitative research course several years ago. In that research project, I observed and interviewed seven gang members and former gang members involved in an after school program at a local church. In those audio tape recorded interviews with the members and the director of that program, I asked questions that explored their relationship with their fathers and the conditions that led to their membership in gangs. From this study, I learned that all of these Black male youth had little or no contact with their fathers, some of whom were actually living in the home and some who were not. One of the youth felt rejected by his father who had recently divorced his mother; he said that in his anger he joined a gang and got involved in "gangbanging" and criminal activity. One reported that his stepfather ignored him at home, while several of the other boys reported their fathers were either in jail or their whereabouts were unknown. Many of these boys spent hours after school in the program at the church hanging around the director, who was a father figure to them. The director often went to the homes of the boys to make sure that they were getting up in the morning, making it to school on time, intervening on their behalf with the school authorities, and accompanying them to court when necessary. This earlier study confirmed that the interview method was an appropriate approach to use in assessing the experiences of youths in their families. It

enlightened me as well as to the possible interventions that could be used in advocacy and programming on behalf of the students.

Participants and Sites

The researcher worked with the TOLEDO EXCEL Program of the University Toledo to identify potential participants. TOLEDO EXCEL is a program that strives to prepare students for college who are members of underrepresented groups. These groups include students of African, Asian, Hispanic, Native and poverty stricken European Americans who attend the metropolitan area's junior high and senior high schools. Twenty names of Black males were taken from the student record database of the TOLEDO EXCEL Program in the office of EXCELlence at the University of Toledo. The ages ranged from eighteen to twenty eight years. They were selected based on the following criteria:

- Were members of the TOLEDO EXCEL Program
- Were African American
- Were reared in a father absent family where the father was not physically present for significant periods during the years of three to sixteen years of age
- Received above average grades in high school
- Avoided delinquency charges
- Graduated from or are presently attending college
- Were between eighteen to thirty years of age

In various stages of their education and careers, some were graduating from high school. Others were attending the University of Toledo, while still others were employed in the profession of choice.

Each was mailed a contact letter requesting his participation in this research project. The director of the TOLEDO EXCEL Program, Dr. Helen Cooks, also a member of the dissertation committee, and the researcher signed this letter (See Appendix A). Included in the letter were participant response and consent forms for research (See Appendices B and C), and a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Four of the letters were returned because the addressee no longer resided at that address; a number of them had moved and lived in other states. The letter was followed by telephone calls to the remaining names on the list. Several calls were necessary in order to establish contact with the potential participants. Most had received the letter but either had not opened it or had opened it and read it, and had not responded. It was, therefore, necessary to review the information about the research being conducted and the importance of their participation. In one instance, it was necessary for the researcher, after many calls to discover the correct address, to visit one of the potential participants in order to establish contact with him and to enlist his participation. Because of their work and school schedules it was very difficult to catch up with them.

Though twenty letters were sent, a number were returned because the addressee could not be located. Eleven were personally contacted by telephone; and eight were finally identified. One potential participant declined the invitation to participate, while the two others were not eligible because they had dropped out of college and had not finished. In every instance, potential participants were pleasant, responsive, and friendly. They returned phone calls to the researcher's home phone number. Since most of them still lived at home, many times the researcher talked at length with mothers or grandmothers who were very helpful with information on the best time to speak with

their sons or grandsons. Some of the mothers and grandmothers took messages to have their sons or grandsons contact the researcher. Some potential participants were married or lived in another city; they were either contacted at their place of employment, or on their cellular phone. Each of the remaining eight verbally agreed over the telephone to participate in this research project. After agreeing to participate, all signed the participant response and consent forms. All of the participants live in the Toledo Metropolitan area, except one who resides in the Eastern part of the United States.

The reason for the research project was reviewed and it was explained that there would be two individual interviews, followed by a focus group meeting. Their overall reaction was very positive. Each readily agreed to participate when it was explained that the director of the TOLEDO EXCEL program had recommended him. Each was eager to please the director and give back to the TOLEDO EXCEL program and the community in any way possible. Despite scheduling conflicts with work and school, the individual interviews were arranged at the TOLEDO EXCEL Office. The one participant residing in another city scheduled his interview on a holiday weekend, when he would be in town visiting his family. Both the participant and the researcher decided that, because of his residency, it would be best to complete the two interviews at that time. Another participant was quite involved in end of the year track meets. Thus, because of his out-of-town track meets, it was also decided it would be best to complete two interviews in one sitting.

Data Collection

The Interviews

The researcher conducted two interviews lasting approximately sixty minutes per interview with each participant. Additionally, there was a final focus group meeting with all of the eight participants. This group meeting lasted two hours. In this study the interviews were used to collect data on both verbal and nonverbal communication, which was documented in the form of transcripts and interview notes. Supporting information included audio tape recordings of the two interviews and the focus group meeting. Other supporting information was diaries, yearbooks, news articles, and any memorabilia from childhood, which described and reported achievements in their lives.

Creswell (1998) describes gaining access to the individuals as involving several steps. One of these steps includes obtaining permission from the human subjects review board at the university, a process designed to review studies for any potential harmful effects on participants. I submitted a proposal to the board that details the procedures of this study. This proposal included a consent form that participants completed, stating that they had the right to voluntarily withdraw from the study at any time. Any interviewee who withdrew from the study was replaced with a subject from the population pool who had like characteristics. I included a separate line for a signature, which provided consent to audio taping of the interviews and the focus group. Also included was the purpose of the study, the procedures used in data collection, comments about protecting the confidentiality of the respondents, benefits to participants, a statement about known risks related to participation in the study, and finally, a place where both the participant and the researcher signed and dated the form.

Another important step in the process was to gain access through a “gatekeeper” and establish rapport. The “gatekeeper” in any qualitative study is very important since she has insider status with the participants. In this study, that person was the director of the TOLEDO EXCEL program of which the participants are members. The director is also a committee member for this dissertation who provided understanding about the participants and their journey through the TOLEDO EXCEL program. A letter signed by both the director of the program and the researcher explained the project and requested the participation of twenty Black males who grew up in homes with an absent father. These participants have completed the TOLEDO EXCEL program, graduated from college or are still in college. Their participation was confirmed by the return of the self-addressed stamped envelope which was included. The director of the program and the researcher signed the letter. The researcher then contacted all those that responded and scheduled the first interview. The interviews were scheduled May 17, 2004 to June 17, 2004 at the office of the director of the program.

First Interview

The purpose of the first interview was to establish rapport, gain trust, and obtain information about what helped the participant succeed through all of his school years. This interview was held in one of the offices of the TOLEDO EXCEL director. I allowed the participants to see the questions and I also asked permission to tape-record the session. In this first hour-long interview, I asked all the subjects the same questions, and I also took notes using protocols, “a predetermined sheet on which one logs information learned during the interview” (Creswell, 1998, p. 126). This protocol included the questions that were asked each of the participants and also helped to organize thoughts

regarding beginning and ending the interview and even thanking the interviewee (See Appendix G). I also recorded any nonverbal behavior evidenced by the participant as he responded to the interview questions.

The interview was set up as informally as possible in order to make the interviewee comfortable while discussing what could have been sensitive issues for him. The session started as follows:

I want to talk to you about your success in school thus far. About your understanding of what helped you succeed through your school years even though your father was not present in the home while you were growing up. I am interested in your perceptions and understanding of what things helped you succeed. I will divide the interview into two parts beginning with your description of what your family was like growing up. Then, I would like you to talk about your experiences at school and with your peer group. Last, I would like you to talk about the circumstances and various people that helped you get through all of the rough times.

In order to compare data among respondents, the following questions and probes were asked of everyone in the first interview:

Questions for Interview # 1 = The Life History.

1. I'm trying to understand what your view of family life is like to you. Tell me about your life – thinking back to your earliest experiences, what was life like at home and in your neighborhood, and when you started school - through elementary school, through junior and senior high school and into college?

Probes:

- How would you describe your home?

- How would you describe your family members – mother, father, grandparents, and siblings?
- How would you describe your neighborhood - people, places, and church?
- How would you describe your relationship with your father?
- How did your father's life relate to your life?

2. Is there anything else you want me to know or think I should have asked?

Second Interview

During the second interview I reviewed the responses, interpretation, and conclusions from the first interview with the subject. This is called conducting a member check and is a feedback technique, which helps to avoid misinterpretations by taking data analyses, interpretations, and conclusions back to the participants so that they can judge the accuracy and credibility of the account (Creswell, 1998). In this second interview, I also asked all of subjects nine questions thus completing the questioning process of individual participants.

Questions for Interview # 2 = Participants' Analysis.

1. How would you define success?
2. What were the important times or milestones in your life leading toward success?
3. Who or what was the key to your success? Explain what they did or provided for you. How did they help to shape you?
4. Tell me about some of the pleasant times in your life. Tell about difficult times.
5. The research literature has often described Black absent father families as deficient or "pathological." What is your opinion of this description?

6. Other literature talks about the resiliency of the Black family, its ability to bounce back in spite of hardship and adversity. What is your opinion of this description?
7. If you are or choose to become a father, how do you or would you interact with your children?
8. What kind of family life would you want for your child(ren)?
9. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about or think that I should know?

These questions provided answers to the over arching questions regarding the subjective perceptions of those African American young men who were successful academically, and what they perceived as factors that helped compensate for their absent father. These questions also provided insight into internal (attitudes, values, beliefs) and external circumstances (involvement in school programs, church, athletics) that have proved important in their success.

Focus Group

A focus group of all the participants was held at which time the themes of what they had shared were presented and discussed. Rhoda (1999) found focus groups appropriate for their synergistic effect and because the “snowballing ... [led] to interesting examples as memories were stimulated and excitement over the topic. . . generated momentum among the participants” (p. 45). As a social worker that specialized in working with groups, the researcher, too, saw the great advantage of employing focus groups that provide group interaction, a feeling of shared experiences and greater insight into the topic being discussed. This was a two-hour meeting held one evening in the office of the director of the TOLEDO EXCEL Program. Originally, this meeting had been scheduled for a Saturday morning (See Appendix D). However, several of the

participants had to work and the meeting was rescheduled for one evening. Five participants were present with the sixth subject participating via speakerphone from the East coast. The participants were introduced to one another and a light meal of pizza, cookies, fruit, and soft drinks were served. During this time, the participants also reviewed their transcripts from the second interview. One participant was thirty minutes late because he was working; another had an upset stomach after he arrived, and was absent during the first part of the meeting. He was able to join the focus group after he felt better.

The themes that resulted from the interview questions were presented on an overhead projector for discussion. As each theme was presented, the participants agreed with it and vigorously discussed what it meant to them. The researcher was careful to make sure the participant on the conference call was apprised of all what was being discussed, and that his comments were heard and discussed also. Two tape recorders were used in addition to another person who took notes on the discussion (See Appendix E). This meeting was scheduled to last two hours. However, because of the passion and deep involvement in discussion, the participants did not seem too eager to leave; and the meeting concluded fifteen or twenty minutes after the scheduled time of eight pm. This was only after the researcher reminded them several times that she had to let them go. All said they wanted to review the dissertation and made suggestions about being called on again to further discuss this topic about two years from now.

Transcripts

The transcript for the participant living on the East coast was faxed to him for any corrections or additional comments; he made a few comments and corrections (also called member checks) and then returned it to the researcher prior to the focus group meeting. The transcript for the athlete participant was reviewed before the focus group meeting was held and returned with several comments. The transcripts of the six other participants were reviewed before the second interview and before the focus group meeting. A few corrections and comments were made and the transcripts were returned to the researcher. Two of the participants were unable to attend the focus group meeting; one of them because of job responsibilities, and the other was away on a family vacation. Since they were not at the focus group meeting to review their transcripts, the transcripts were mailed to them for their comments and any corrections. A letter signed by the director of the TOLEDO EXCEL Program and the researcher was mailed to all of the participants after the focus group meeting thanking them for their participation in the project (See Appendix F).

In summary, the first interview concentrated on establishing rapport, gaining trust, and obtaining information regarding the subject's family life and elementary, junior, and senior high school years. The second interview concentrated on the member checks of the first interview, on those experiences, which enabled the subject to succeed, and the difficult times experienced in his life. Finally, the focus group concentrated on a review of themes gathered from all information that the participants shared. Additional member checks in the focus group were made to judge the accuracy of accounts from the two previous interviews. During this process, the only risk to the participants was some

psychological discomfort while discussing family relationships in the years growing up. As a social worker with a background in counseling, the researcher would be sensitive to any signs of discomfort, and periodically inquired about how they are feeling at a particular point, and if they wished to continue.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is an on going process throughout qualitative research that involves organizing and storing what has been “seen, heard, and read so that [one] can make sense” of what is learned (Glesne, 1999). When conducted simultaneously with data collection, data analysis enables the researcher to focus and shape the study as it proceeds. Preliminary analysis is often made between the two interviews as the researcher seeks to clarify questions, which could lead to a follow up conversation. It was helpful to transcribe each interview immediately, thus, providing opportunities in subsequent interviews to explore unexpected issues that had surfaced in the earlier one.

As the data was read, it was simultaneously described, classified, and interpreted (Creswell, 1998), looking for categories or themes. The cases were then compared for common themes. Member checks also were conducted that yielded further analysis. The interview and focus group transcripts were read and reread to ensure familiarity of the data. During this process of reading and becoming familiar with the data, the researcher performed any minor editing that was necessary to make the interviews and focus group notes retrievable. The identification of any patterns expressed by the participants, enabled the researcher to generate categories. These categories and themes resulted from the research questions asked. They included but were not limited to the following:

- Family life while growing up
- Mother's role in the family
- Father's role in the family
- Memories of pleasant and difficult times
- Mentors/people sought for advice
- Experiences contributing to success in grade school, junior, and senior high school
- Attitudes, values contributing to academic achievement
- Things you would change if you could about your life

For coding these categories and themes abbreviations of key words were used. As this process was underway, the researcher evaluated the data for its usefulness in answering the questions that were explored.

Validity and Reliability

In qualitative research, interviews are commonly the primary source of information. Creswell (1998) summarizes the multiple perspectives of verification in qualitative research, and offers his approach. Instead of validity he uses the term *verification* because verification explains qualitative research as a legitimate approach and mode of inquiry in its own right. He suggests one verification procedure such as *member checks*, previously explained as taking data, analyses, interpretations, and conclusions back to the participants so that they can judge the accuracy and credibility of the account. Creswell (1998) further explains that participants should play a major role in the case study and be asked to examine rough drafts of the researcher's work, even providing their observations and interpretations. Accordingly, the researcher used

member checks in both the first and second interviews. Also, member checks were conducted with the focus group in which participants were shown the themes regarding factors that contributed or inhibited success. Participants focused on these issues as raised by analysis, and through discussion verified or challenged the researcher's analysis and interpretation. Those who were not able to participate in the focus group had an opportunity to review the analysis and to offer their feedback via email, phone, or in an individual interview. J. A. Maxwell (1992) terms this "the participants' perspective," where the qualitative researcher is concerned with what objects, events, and behaviors mean to the people engaged in and with them. There is, he continues, *interpretive validity* in this strategy since "accounts of meaning must be based initially on the conceptual framework of the people whose meaning is in question" (p. 289).

Another means of verification was rich, thick description, which explained the Black male participants in this study in detail, therefore, allowing the reader to make "decisions regarding transferability" (J. A. Maxwell, 1992). After obtaining the participants' consent, the interviews were tape-recorded and then transcribed. Still, another means of verification used was triangulation where different and multiple sources provided corroborating evidence. Triangulation, defined as "cross-checking of data using multiple data sources or multiple data collection procedures" (Fraenkel & Wallen, p. 673) occurred when the focus group was used to both collect any further data and check gaps in information, while also validating conclusions drawn from the two previous interviews. For further triangulation, the researcher also reviewed the participants' news articles, awards, certificates, and medals from athletic events describing and reporting achievements in their lives.

Limitations of the Study

The results of the data analysis in this study are intended to be utilized as a resource to increase the understanding of those behaviors and experiences which enable Black men from father absent families to become successful, productive members of society. This data can benefit educators, social workers, mental health practitioners, and community leaders by broadening their perspective regarding the Black family and father absence. However, these findings are not intended to be generalizable to all populations of Black males due to the small number of participants and to is being fundamentally about the TOLEDO EXCEL Program. Due to the constraints of time and dollars, the population for this study is narrowed to eight Black male students at the University of Toledo who are graduates of the TOLEDO EXCEL program. A larger population may have been chosen; however, this researcher recognizes that for research to be manageable, priorities and boundaries must be set. Also, the case study strategy is more valuable in helping to set the direction for exploring factors that could be used in further research.

Practitioners and other professionals who review this research may come to think about the Black family, Black males, and absent fathers in new ways. They may, thus, be enabled as social service, mental health providers, and educators to become better facilitators in the process of helping those in Black families negotiate the difficulties of families with absent fathers.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

This chapter presents the results of two interviews with each of the eight individuals and the focus group meeting conducted to answer the research questions of this study. In the chapter, the research questions are addressed by examining the participants perspectives of the experiences that contributed to their success. First, there is a profile of the participants followed by the definition of “successful” from their perspective. The participants’ appraisal of the circumstances that contributed to success will then be presented.

The data are organized by the six major themes that emerged, according to their prominence in the data, and ordered, therefore, by their implied impact on the participants. A discussion of the positive themes, one through four, is followed by the negative themes, numbers five and six. The first theme concerned the role that a strong faith in God played in contributing to the success of the participants. The second theme was that of the mothers’ role in their families and their attitudes and values that contributed to the participants’ academic achievement. The third theme concerned the role of the extended family and how it filled in the gaps left by the fathers’ being absent. The fourth theme concerned the role of TOLEDO EXCEL in the success of the participants. The fifth theme concerned the fathers’ role in their families and the amount

of contact the sons had with them. The sixth theme concerned the difficult times, which mostly centered on the financial hardship.

Profile of Participants

The following is a brief profile of each of the eight participants in this study. To protect their anonymity, no names are used.

1. Mr. A. is eighteen years old, was president of the National Honor Society in high school, and featured in the Toledo Blade newspaper for his academic achievements. He is now attending a university in the Southern part of Ohio and is majoring in and plans to get a Master's degree in education. He is an only child and has always resided with his mother. His parents divorced after his father returned from the armed services. The participant hardly recalls his father who has spent very little time in the home with his family. The father resides in this city.

2. Mr. B. is eighteen years old, and is currently attending a university in the Southern part of Ohio. His plans are to become either a pediatrician or a surgeon. The youngest of three, he has two older sisters. His parents were never married, and he has always lived with his mother. His father resides in another city. His accomplishments include winning a medal in the 4x4 relay at the state track meet, being student council president, and being a delegate to the state convention for his church, to name a few. He credits the attitude of always striving to be the best as contributing to his success.

3. Mr. C. is nineteen years old, and is attending the University of Toledo. He is a pharmacy intern and plans to become a doctor of pharmacy. He resides with his grandmother and has one younger brother, who resides with his mother. His parents divorced when he was five years old. There has been little contact with his father over the

years, though he lives in the city. His achievements include being selected for Toledo Youth Orchestra for two consecutive years; being crowned the king of TOLEDO EXCEL; being selected for the Bowling Green music summer camp, which included a full scholarship to the camp, and being selected for the University of Toledo pharmacy camp. Attitudes and values that contributed to his academic success were his always wanting “to be the best, to be better than what [his] dad was. That has always been [my] motivation.”

4. Mr. D. is twenty years old, is working fulltime while attending the University of Toledo as a junior, and is majoring in business management and finance. He is starting a small business, and plans to be self-employed in five years. Presently, he owns several houses that he has renovated. Though he has plans to purchase other real estate, he also plans to further his education by getting a law degree or a Master’s degree in education. He is also considering entering the ministry. He resides with his mother and younger sister. The attitudes and values that contributed to his academic success were family, the positive reinforcement that he received from his mother and father, as they told him that the sky was the limit, that if he worked hard he could get it. Other attitudes and values that also contributed were his belief in God, and of always wanting to “be the best.”

5. Mr. E. is twenty-two years old, and is currently attending the University of Toledo; he plans to graduate in December 2004. Though he is working part-time, he will continue his education to obtain a Master’s in business administration. He presently resides with his mother, her boyfriend, and his younger brother. He graduated from a local catholic high school with a 4.12 grade point average. He presently makes music,

produces and writes hip hop, rhythm, and blues. The attitudes and values that contributed to his academic success are, “basically God and family. I have had a strong family, close knit, that was there to support me the whole way.”

6. Mr. F. is a twenty-five year old graduate of the University of Toledo, who majored in business administration. He is presently employed at one of the local corporations. He plans to further his education by pursuing his Master’s degree in business. His achievements include being listed in *Who’s Who of American High School Students*, earning all city track and field awards, becoming valedictorian of his class, playing first chair clarinet, and receiving number one ratings when playing in the Ohio Music contest several years. The attitudes and values that contributed to his academic success were prayer, commitment to his mother, and positive role models.

7. Mr. G. is twenty-six years old, and graduated magna cum laude from the University of Toledo. Though he has a Bachelor of Arts degree in communications and broadcasting, he is currently a financial analyst with customs and border protection in an Eastern city. Within several years, he plans to further his education with a Master’s degree in public administration. He is single and resides with his only sister. He credits his academic success to his attitudes and values of doing the best that he could as well as “being a go-getter,” taking on challenges, and pursuing all types of opportunities no matter where they were.

8. Mr. E. is a twenty-eight year old graduate of the University of Toledo with a Master’s degree in business administration from Bowling Green State University. He is presently employed at one of the local financial institutions assisting small businesses in securing loans. He is married and has a 4-month-old son. He has one

younger sister who resides with his mother. His accomplishments include winning the citywide spelling bee in the 8th grade, being named all city academic basketball in high school, valedictorian of his class, and being featured in the newspaper, *The Toledo Journal*, for his accomplishments. Within five years from now, he wants to be at the vice presidential level of the bank where he is employed. He also wants to have another child by then, and to be ready to start a small business to build wealth for his children and grandchildren. Since he just received his MBA in 2003, he is not ready to resume his education to work on a doctorate. The attitudes and values that contributed to his success are: “study[ing] hard before you play,” and “[not being] afraid to ask for help if you need it.”

The eight participants were asked their definition of success. Also, they were asked to explain who or what was the key to their success and what they did or provided for them.

Defining Success

Webster’s dictionary defines success as “. . .a favorable or satisfactory outcome or result; the gaining of wealth, fame, rank, etc.”(p. 1455). Most of the participants in this study view success from a broader perspective than that of Webster’s: the gaining of wealth, fame and rank.

Success as Process

Success as process was perhaps the more significant since it contrasts most with the success as product or outcome of Webster’s definition. Success from the perspective of the young Black males having just graduated from high school or college and getting

settled in their new positions at the firm and/or in marriage with a new born child can best be understood as a process, rather than an end-state. One of the Black men declared:

Success is not always making a lot of money or having material goods. Success is defined as what you are good at and finding what you are good at and turning that into a career or service in helping others.

The words “finding what you are good at” suggest a process. The concept of success not just being in terms of “material goods” but “service in helping others” clearly suggests an attitude. J. C. Maxwell (2000) describes success as “a continuing thing. It is growth and development. It is achieving one thing and using that as a stepping stone to achieve something else” (p. 92). In keeping with this definition and viewing success as process another participant stated:

Success to me is setting targets, setting goals, whatever those goals may be. You know if your goal is to go to college and graduate, if your goal is to work 40 hours a week, make enough money to pay your rent and support a car note and you achieve those goals that you have set, you’re successful. So whatever goals you set and achieve, to me that is success.

Process here is seen in the words “setting targets, setting goals . . . so whatever goals you set and achieve.”

Success as Character

A successful person is not merely wealthy or famous but is someone of character and integrity that cares about others. Many references were made throughout the interviews regarding being ‘the best’ and being ‘good.’ Such terms describe what Webster defines as character or a “moral constitution and good reputation”(p. 245). All

of the participants were concerned about being the best, a good, kind person and providing for their families. One participant stated:

Being able to go to bed with a clear conscious, knowing that you are a good father, a good husband, a good friend. Success isn't always tied to how much money you make in life. 'Cause there is a lot of people who may be monetarily wealthy, but spiritually somewhat deficient. I think I'm trying to peg most of my success on, 'Can I be a good person over all?' and my thinking is if you try to be a good person, all the other things will fall into place. Whether it's being a good provider for your family or to help out your friends. That's how I would define success.

Another said:

Another point would be knowing that I made a lot of friends and touched a lot of people in my lifetime. If you have a lot of people that look up to you or respect what you have done and at least can say something positive about you as a person, whether it be through your actions or through things that you have said or what they have heard about you from other people.

Added another participant:

Not having a father at home is a bad part but I realize that I don't want to be like him and I want to be a good person.

Another participant provided:

Success for me, I think, is if you strive to be your best, if you do your best, if you see the world in a positive light, you sort of find your role in the world, in your family. I think that can be success in and of itself. Success doesn't have to be

financial. I don't think it has to do with how many things you have; how big a house you have, all those things. I think being a success is just being a kind person. So, success for me is just doing my best and knowing that I tried my best.

Success as Serving Others and Community Involvement

Six of the eight participants stressed the importance of “giving back to the community” as a part of the definition of success. “Giving back to the community” is a concept that is heavily stressed in the TOLEDO EXCEL Program in which these participants were involved throughout their senior high school year and college. The TOLEDO EXCEL Program also awarded them scholarships to attend the University of Toledo. The desire to give back to the community was discussed both in the individual interviews and also at length in the focus group at the conclusion of the meeting. At that time the participants were lamenting the decline of the family and how mothers, many of whom were teenagers, are not as committed to their children as the participants' mothers were. Here, they were discussing how they could impact the community and have a “career [and be] of service in helping others.” In response to whether or not he was successful, one twenty year old participant said, “I do consider myself somewhat successful. I'm trying to do a lot to help out in the community.”

One participant thoughtfully explained:

I think being a success is trying to help people, trying to give back to the community, to friends and family, uplifting words to other people can be a great thing.

Success as knowing God

Faith in God (synonymously used for knowing God) was also very important and a key factor that they all strongly stated contributed to their success. One said success was “having faith in God.” (this finding will be discussed later in this paper). Yet another participant expressed as follows,

Obviously for me it’s [success] going to be religious, just knowing that you know God, finally finding your purpose in life and what you’re supposed to do, or at least what you think you’re supposed to do. That gives you some kind of fulfillment.

This participant did consider himself to be somewhat successful, as he explained, because he had united himself with Christ, had “become involved in the church a lot,” and seriously considering going into the ministry. He is similar to all of the other participants who profess faith in God and attend church regularly, when they are not working or relocating [to another city]. Several of them have recently gone away to college and/or relocated to another city.

Success as using talents to help others

One participant stated:

Success is not having a big business, having a Ferrari; I don’t think it’s that. Ultimately, just being a person for other people, being able to help somebody else out, and to bring someone else along with me. To be able to use the brain that God has given me. That would be success.

Still, another participant, in his freshman year in college explained success is . . . bringing people up that need help, and doing all that you can for your family, being there for your family.

Success as motivating the participants

It was after the two interviews with each of the participants, and during the focus group that the discussion on their motivations for wanting to succeed surfaced. It seems as though there was a need to clarify their motivation; therefore, without any questioning or prompting from the researcher, they discussed and pointed these things out. As one participant described:

I mean, it's really been up to me to have a motivation to go to school. My situation at home, with my dad not being home, I just want to be better than he was. So, to be opposite of that is to get my education, 'cause he didn't even finish high school. So, I have always pushed myself; my mom only expected me to get Cs. She's like, 'as long as you get Cs and whatever, is good.' And I wanted to be the best. So, I've always tried to do the best and . . . to be better than what my dad is. So, that has always been my motivation, even though he wasn't there doing anything, not doing nothing now.

One participant went on to say:

I think . . . the thing that really made me want to be what I am is just the fact to want to be better than my father is and has been. He has a good job and all, but just to the point where I can . . . have a relationships with people and be more personable and not blocked off to my own little world like he is. And just be more, more with people and be more open to people.

Another piped up in the focus group, adding:

I think that's important. It's probably something to add. All of us probably had some inner motivation along with God and family, friends, things like that. Probably all a bit different, but for sure all of us probably had our own inner motivation. Mine's, I'm a money person. You know, I was out of the group one of the people that didn't have any [money] growing up so that made me want it. So in my head that's my ultimate goal; I want to be wealthy. I want to not have to worry about finance; I want to not have my kids to have to worry about it at all. So that was my inner motivation.

Still another reason for being successful was provided:

Money was still really big, most definitely. Part of my inner motivation was respect, cause once you have it [money] you're gonna get some respect.

One participant reflected:

People don't owe you anything in life. The world doesn't owe you anything, the country, the city. Your family doesn't really owe you anything. Everyone is an individual, even though you are blood relatives, you really have to have your own drive and determination in life. What you do effects you. How you approach things and your determination is really going to lead to your success. Nobody else can do it for you.

Apparently success for these young Black men was a process that began when they were growing up and something that they had contemplated all along while they were living with their single mothers and their grandparents. Their definitions of success included setting goals and achieving them. They were quick, however, to clarify that

success is not merely the attainment of material goods, money and positions, but more importantly possessing character qualities such as being a good, kind person, and helping others and giving back to the community. They also were able to identify their motivations for success. These motivations ranged from the desire to have money, and wealth in order for them and their children to not have to worry about it. The acquisition of wealth one felt would lead to gaining the respect of others. Several participants were motivated to succeed because they simply wanted to be better than their fathers.

Keys to Success

The participants were very adamant about their feelings as to whom and to what they attributed their success. They seemed to thoroughly understand the persons and experiences that contributed to success in their lives; these were readily identified and discussed. The following describes the six themes that emerged, which captured the persons and experiences that impacted the lives of the participants.

God

All of the eight participants were quick to say that God was “foremost” in contributing to their success, without exception each numbered God first on their list. Perhaps the reason for this is because their mothers and grandmothers at an early age took them or “always made [them] go to church. As one stated:

It goes without saying, God was my spiritual protection . . . I’m just not so naïve as to think I did all this on my own or I did this of my own accord; that’s just not how it works.

As one participant reviewed those who contributed toward his success, he mentioned:

Family and friends have brought me to where I am today. . .and God. I thank God cause He has blessed me with a lot of stuff and gave me a lot of opportunities.

After a pause he quickly added, “He [God] should have been first.”

One participant when asked who or what was the key to his success frankly admitted:

Well, foremost is God again. We could talk all day on that. As far as just basically allowing me to do what I did; and helping me find out that situation on my credit and getting it fixed, helping me find somebody that was willing to finance me. Just basically helping me day by day, keeping me alive, waking me up the next day.

Another participant stated:

You have to keep God first, definitely. . .just with the beliefs without Him none of this is possible. I think if you consider yourself Christian you gotta believe that; that’s what I believe. . . [and] you give thanks to God because He gives it to you; He can take it away.

One participant expressed himself in the following fashion:

I really consider myself blessed for that because I don’t think I would have been able without. . .God. God putting those people in places for me. I don’t go to church but I realize that God has really blessed me and watched out for me, some of the stuff I did and all the stuff I’m doing now its just amazing to me and I just have to say ‘thank you.’

Their faith in Him

As previously stated, all eight of the participants pronounced that God played the uppermost role in their success. One participant was noted smiling as he described his experience:

Big change came over my life. . .still had a little trouble in junior high but going into the 8th grade and freshman year it was like, ‘it’s a big change in [participant], he’s not acting up anymore. He’s as different as day and night. It was God that got into my life. Made the difference – I accepted God into my life. . .Big change in attitude, teachers noticed it. I wasn’t getting in as much trouble. I wasn’t in permanent detention like I was in junior high. (laughing) It was time; I wasn’t happy with who I was. . . I’m very spiritual now and understand that it was God coming into my life.

Another participant who said that he is considering entering the ministry, laughingly confessed:

I have repented of my sins and been baptized at the church over three times. . . I figured I need to be baptized again cause I was out of church a very long time and during that time I figured I had sinned; we all have sinned. I wanted everyone to know that I was cleansed of my sins and really did accept the Lord Jesus Christ as my Savior.

One participant succinctly stated, “I have a good faith in God.”

He, then, recounted how he came to have such a ‘good faith’ through involvement in the youth group at his church, and attendance at youth camp where “they made us participate

in reading the scriptures. And we had to explain what the Word [of God] meant to each other; so that really brought my faith, put faith in me and believing in God.”

Another added:

Have repented of my sins. Every day, I pray every night before I go to bed, and ask for forgiveness when I’m at church through communion.”

Clearly, their faith in God and their experiences with Him are viewed as having played a central and major role in their success and their lives thus far. Perhaps the reason is that their mothers and grandmothers introduced them to a life of faith early on, and taught them the importance of giving God thanks for His goodness and blessing to them. Further, they not only attended church but also apparently experienced a definite change in their lives for the better after their profession of faith in God and Jesus Christ.

Mother

The mothers of the Black males in this study were an overwhelming influence in the participants’ success. In both the individual interviews and in the focus group all of the seven participants discussed their mothers with great emotion and at length, extolling their wonderful qualities. One Black male participant indicated that his mother had mistreated him; she was “ill and needed help.” In this case, his grandmother was a great influence in his success. Another participant stated, “My mom was the key to my success, but I still look on it was me personally as driving my [self] cause if I didn’t want it, it still would not happened. I believe that I am the key person in my success.”

Hard working

The predominate theme, whenever childhood experiences, were discussed was that the mother was “very committed to us [children] . . . she worked hard” to provide for

them. Stories from their childhood years poured forth with great feeling, passion, and sometimes tears, as the participants recounted how their mothers struggled and persevered because they were the one parent and provider in the family. One participant exclaimed:

I know at times it was hard for her, and I could tell she would be stressed, and at times I felt that she wanted to give up, she should have given up but she didn't. She worked. She worked like crazy, 'cause she is a police officer at her regular job; and then she would do jobs on the side – working security at games, at restaurants, at grocery stores. She did whatever she could to bring money in, and keep the roof over our heads, and keep us looking pretty decent.

Another participant described his mother:

[She was] definitely hard working. Up until recently never had any extra schooling. She graduated high school but of course in this world today that's not going to get you too many good jobs at all. So ever since she had us she never really had what I would call a stereotypical good job, but she's always worked hard at the jobs she's had. I mean, she's worked in grocery stores while growing up, and when I [was] younger I [was] embarrassed my mom work[ed] at a grocery store. Now, looking back at it. Now, and what that meant, and what she did, and working 40 hours there, then working at night, she's definitely hard working. She's worked two jobs a lot of the time.

Other Black males in this study described this same situation with their mothers working long hours into the night, “working nights for probably about 20 years now,” working two jobs, working “while she went to school and was raising me, so I admire her

a lot for that.” This was at a time when the father was not living in the home, because of divorce or because they had never married.

Sacrificing

Apparently, most of the mothers “sacrificed a lot, went without for her children to have opportunities, and to make sure they are better people.” These sacrifices included refusing to pursue relationships, buy clothes, and even new cars for themselves. Several described the embarrassment of being “seen riding in an old car.” One participant said tearfully and with great emotion:

We didn’t have the best car in the world. We never had the best cars, my mom had great cars before she had us .And, I always thought, ‘Why can’t we get a new car? Or can we get a nicer car? Nicer clothes or anything like that?’ I never said it to her . . .now I see that for her it was a sacrifice to not invest in a car, not to invest in a home. Another one of the biggest sacrifices she made was not to invest in the smaller more frivolous things. . . she sacrificed both financially and emotionally. She never went on to form another relationship, though she could have.

Valuing education

Seven of the participants strongly emphasized the value that their mother placed upon getting a good education. The one exception, as explained previously, indicated was that his mother was somewhat abusive as a result of illness. At any rate she was not supportive of him in his educational endeavors. However, all of the seven other participants emphatically attested to their mothers’ desire for them to get good grades and

“ . . . stayed on [them] about . . . homework,” and a good education; this was foremost and uppermost in the minds of their mothers. As stated by one of the participants:

Always a strong strict proponent on grades, do the homework . . . I'd come home from school, [sit at the] kitchen table, do the homework before I could go outside or do anything else. So, I think that was lesson number one. Consequently, that carried over from elementary, junior high, high school, college, even graduate school, in terms of buckling down. She has always instilled that in me.

As one participant exclaimed:

She just wanted the best for her kids. She had some odds stacked in front of her. Didn't go to college; had a high school degree but didn't go to college. . . she had some good ideas in terms of habits and good habits, some good morals and good values that she wanted me to grow up with. Education was always key, always key.

Continued another:

My mother has taught me the importance of education, the importance of doing well in everything that you do. And, has taught me how to be strong even though it seems that you are out there alone.

Valuing private schools

Seven of the participants attended private schools, from elementary through senior high school. The eighth participant, though attending a public school, excelled in his senior year so that he was president of the national honor society, and graduated with many awards. He is now attending college in the Southern part of Ohio. The participants revealed that their mothers worked very hard because they wanted to send their children

to private schools. They wanted their children to get the best education possible no matter what the cost. In some instances the mother scrimped and scrapped to send two children to private school simultaneously. The mothers also saw attending private school as being a way to help the children avoid the debilitating influence of the neighborhood in which they lived. One participant volunteered:

I think my mother was the first [key to success], starting us off at Christian schools, and I don't think we would have had the attention we needed in the public schools. Since, you know, now the public schools are not concentrating on education. I think going to the Christian school you have the better education, more attention from the teachers. I had some teachers pulling for me in school to do well and stay on.

Another participant indicated:

[My mother was] very committed to us. We lived sheltered lives. We didn't do a lot in the neighborhood; we were not out playing with the kids a lot. Very little. Depending on the kids and their parents, she didn't just let us run loose in the streets with kids. Going to a Christian school and coming back playing with hellions.

One participant further described:

One thing that I got to give so much credit to my mom for, we never had much money at all. I grew up on the Southside of Toledo, by far not one of the better neighborhoods of the city. She always made it work, though. And the rough neighborhood I was in. . .while I was in school trying to get my education, she always tried to keep me and my brother separate from that. Every since I have

been in school I have been in private school. . .though she always was without money, she always seemed to make it work, to pay the tuition for my brother and I to try to keep us out of the peer pressures of the neighborhood. . .

Helping to shape her son

When asked how the mothers shaped them, the participants provided varying responses:

She kept me out of trouble by keeping me busy, kept me involved in everything – from sports to karate, everything. So long as I was involved she was keeping me out of the streets and out of trouble.

She loved me and always stood by me, she was supportive, and she encouraged me and reminded me of what's important in life.

Mom stayed on me for homework; she did not let us slack off. She was very committed to us getting our homework done on time. We could be on punishment if we got bad grades.

She instilled hard work and dedication in me, definitely.

My mom was my backbone.

She keeps reminding me of what's important and when I feel like giving up [she] is there to keep reminding me that even though I may not want to do, I still have

to do it and in the end I will thank [her] for telling me. My mom . . . [has] always been there to give me advice . . .

My mother . . . Huge asset cause once again she was always behind me no matter what I, she was always in my corner.

Intent to repay and take care of her

As a result of the mothers' commitment, hard work, and sacrifice for them, seven of the eight participants, strongly expressed the desire and the intent to repay her and take care of her. The eighth participant expressed a desire to care for his grandmother. One participant captured for all the others this desire and intent to repay the mother in the following words:

Through seeing her slave basically through jobs to just pay bills, to pay my tuition, to send me to a high school that cost \$4000 a year, when I know that she was probably only making \$10 or \$11, 000 a year. And a tuition that's gonna take almost half of that, but yet she is paying it, which I think also shows her loyalty to her children which will always make me be loyal to her. When whatever I may have, she will have.

The mother was greatly admired, seen as the bulwark of the family, and the key to success in the lives of the participants. Vividly described as committed to her children, she valued education, "It was key," and doing well in school to the point where she was determined that her children would get the best education possible. She sacrificed, suffered, and worked hard, sometimes working two jobs plus overtime, in order to

provide for her children the private schooling she so highly esteemed. In several families the mother worked to send two children simultaneously to private schools. Because of her great labor of love, the participants vowed their loyalty to her, to repay her, and always take care of her.

Extended Family

Grandmother

After the mother, six of the eight participants ranked their mother's mother, or grandmother as the next most influential in their lives, contributing to their success. Two participants also included their grandfathers when they spoke of the grandmother. (In both instances they were the mothers' parents). The six participants spoke of their grandmother's love for them as they reminisced back over the years when she was right there when they needed her. They also spoke very highly of her, recalling her as being "very loving, caring and [the] sweetest woman I know." Others either lived with their grandmothers for a period of time while growing up or spent much time over her house while their mothers were working. Also, they spoke of her very fondly and at length when recalling memories of her taking them to church as children and instructing them about God. The Black men participants took their time describing their grandmothers and could not heap enough accolades upon them for being there and loving them so much. They also spoke well of others, some extended family members and some who were not, that had made a deep impression upon their lives. These included uncles, aunts, sisters, parents of friends and even a pastor.

Supportive

One participant said:

I think my grandmother is the greatest person in the world. She's just, anything you need she will give, anything at all. And she always tells all her grandchildren and her children to be the best. Another thing about her: any event that I had, any sports activity, piano, any award I won, she would always be there. She would always be there with my mom to support me. No matter what it was, she was always there; and I really admire her for that.

Another offered:

My grandmother. . .helped me with everything. She took me to [cello] lessons, she paid for my lessons, and my \$2000 cello. . . she said you can do this. There is a time I wanted to quit and she took me to the symphony and she said you can do this. When I wanted to go to Central she took me there; she took me everywhere. She was always supportive of anything that I did, anything that I do. . .My mother did not take me anywhere. As a matter of fact we lived down the street and she [mother] wouldn't even come and pick me up.

Hospitable and Open-hearted

On participant proclaimed:

My grandmother is my second mom. Like, I'm most comfortable at her house; I'm at her house more than my house now because it's where I grew up. . . she is the most caring and sweetest woman I know. . . she's done so many great things for people. I love her so much.

Still another talked of his grandmother:

That's her and I guess it started right when we came from New Jersey and . . . [she] took three more people into [her] house, and that's after already having both

of my sisters. Then to accept me, my brother, and my mom into one household; it started then.

Exclaimed another:

With my grandmother, it was so wonderful!! You know, most of our holidays the entire family our aunts, uncles, their children would all get together, the meeting place would be my grandmother's. So, we all come together, prepare to eat wonderful dinners, Thanksgiving and Easter, all the major holidays, we would get together have a great time. . .

Matriarch of Family

Two of the participants spoke of their grandmother as the head of their families.

My grandmother is kind of at the top of our hierarchy. I think she is basically my family. She's my family orientation, helped me to develop the importance of family, and realize the importance of family.

The other said:

Just a wonderful experience, home life wonderful, a strong mom, having a strong grandmother . . .my grandmother was the matriarch of the family; she raised fourteen on her own. . .after her husband passed. . .but she raised them to be strong. She always focused on education. She served as sort of the ultimate father in my life.

Good to talk with

One described:

Usually, I go over there [grandmother's house] at least three times a week, and usually after track practice I go over there just to talk to her, and see how she is

doing. I usually call her every other day, and I just talk to her, and listen to her because she has a lot of interesting things to say, and it just makes me feel special to listen to her talk. When I am with her, its like being in the presence of a queen.

Still another said:

My grandmother would then be the next one; she was just like my mom. When my mom wasn't there, she was always talking to me, telling me how much she loved me and how much she was proud of me for doing what I was doing in school, keeping me going. . . her and my mother were the two big ones [in my life].

Teacher and encourager

One participant indicated:

My grandmother has taught me how to give and how to be humble about what you have.

Still another said:

We knew the great influence that my grandmother had on her children, that whatever she said her children would mind. And it seemed to us that she always knew best; what she said turned out to be the way it was, the way it should have been.

Took to church and taught about God

One said, "She put God and the family in me."

Another said:

Grandmother's name was . . . and to this day the [family] name is well known throughout the city, probably cause she had fourteen children . . . Just a strong

woman. She [grandmother] took us to church; always had us mind our manners in church. If we got out of line she would reach across my mom and swipe at us (both participant and researcher laughing). It was really fun. . . she would tell us, ‘you need to take something up [to the offering plate], just to thank God. . . you give back to thank God for what you have.

One participant reminisced:

Grandmother always made me go to church. Sunday school was fun cause we met a lot of kids. . . started going with grandmother about six or seven years old.

Two participants described both his grandmother and grandfather. One stated:

There is not one thing bad I could say about my grandparents at all. [They] are great. . . they were always there; when my mom didn’t have it, they gave it to us. When my mom was working late at night they watched us, they fed us. So I mean, they have been there neck and neck. The only people to actually help my mom out on some type of financial basis, so they have always been there. Today if I need anything, I know I can always ask them. Both of them.

All but one of the references to grandparents and good times seemed to have been related to the mother’s parents on her side of the family. Perhaps this is because the father was not present in their lives and there was no significant link to his side of the family and his relatives. This fact seemed to irritate one participant. He remembers he mentioned this to his father a letter:

I wrote in the letter I don’t know anyone from [your] side of the family, I don’t even know my grandmother. . . I have never met anyone from [your] side of the family, I never met [your] brother, my uncle; I never and I have a half brother. I

never met him. I think in my letter I wrote that I would like to meet them I told my mom I wanted to meet them but I never have.

At any rate, the good relationship that the participants experienced with their mothers they also seemed to experience with their mother's mother. Most likely, this is because the mother relied on her own mother for much needed child care and support with her children as she struggled and worked long, hard hours to provide for her family. The one exception was a participant who mentioned his father's dad:

. . . [He would take] us out a lot; we would cut grass and he would just take me around a lot on different errands he would run. I loved to spend the day with him cause he would ride all round Toledo taking the scenic route. . . He was always fixing stuff. I liked to be with him; he was a jack of all trades.

Other Extended Family and Friends

Uncles – Mother's brothers.

Apparently the mothers' brothers served as a great source of encouragement to the participants. One carefully explained:

They'd always speak to me and give – at least all of those that didn't have a father at home – they would always give us words of wisdom, advice and always try to show us things. If they were outside, and if someone got a flat tire then they would bring us out. 'You guys come out here and watch uncle . . . fix this flat tire. . . something like that – learned a lot about cars. . . Always learned from them to take care of your family; be a strong man, be a good man. Don't be running around, don't be doing this and that. Stay away from drugs, stay away from bad influences. A couple in particular would always take me on trips. . . one is my

uncle . . . he took me to the Disney Studios; just all over the place. So they would take me place and show me all types of things. So they served their purpose as a part in being a part of a father. . . I'm living with my uncle [right now on the East coast].

Still another said:

The uncle in Detroit, he visits a lot; every holiday basically, that's where that comes in cause he's always stayed in Detroit since I have been around and so every holiday he's here. That's about three or four times a year I would see him. So I mean, my family was big and I guess that's part of the reason why, you know, family is so important to me. Some playing a bigger role than others, but all definitely played a role.

Aunts – Mother's sisters.

One participant explained:

My mom's sisters helped a lot, my mom has taken out a lot of loans in her time, no credit. She didn't do them through any bank or any institution. It was from her sisters and her brothers. . . . she has taken out a lot of loans in her time and I know a lot of which she hasn't paid back, so without them I wouldn't be here where I am today.

Sisters of participants.

Two of the participants declared that their sisters played a significant role in their success. One proudly related that his sister along with several others were a big help to him at school:

My sister and I were close. She helped me out with school and I helped her out and she stuck by me. My older sister and older cousin, who is two years older

like my sister, my pastor's son, he and his older brother, we kind of clustered together and we had a network with Black students. . . we had to stick together. . . My sister was there if I was having trouble with the harder subjects like algebra, geometry or chemistry. She would help me out. [She] helped shape me in self pride knowing that I could succeed in getting good grades, knowing that it was important to be academically sound.

Another one said:

My older sister graduated from the University of Toledo. . .she's always seemed to do well for herself. . . I went to her graduation when I was in school, [saw] how proud everyone else was, [saw] how happy she was to have been the first person to have graduated in along time in our family. So she was always in my ear, when I was younger. I had her proofread my homework. If I had question, math questions, she majored in accounting, I would go to her. She helped me cause I was kind of not sure if I wanted to go to Central. . .she was kind of right there. 'No, you're going to Central.' She kind of made up my mind there; and it turned out perfect. So she was always that role model that was always there that I could kind of look up to.

Parents of friends.

Though not extended family, one participant mentioned the parents of one of his friends that were very supportive of [the participant] and included him in their family. He said:

I have a friend. . .one of my best friends, we grew up together. We both kind of grew up in the Old West End area. . . . his parents were kind of like a second

mother and father so to speak. It was kind of cool to see that the stuff that [my friend] did they always included me and they were very supportive as well.

Teachers, Counselors and Pastor.

The six of the eight participants readily recalled teachers and counselors that stepped in and helped them along the way. One participant gratefully explained:

My teachers, they took extra steps in some cases, you know, like helping me if I had problems with anything or allowing me to help others, you know, as far as tutoring goes. If I could do something they would let me do it . . . as far as getting me some extra work, things I could take home. So they were pretty cooperative, pretty nice where they could have been mean about it, saying they didn't want to do it cause they had thirty other students. But they didn't; they kind of worked with me.

Another participant specifically mentioned his pastor as being one of the key persons in his success.

The Pastor pray[ed] for me. . .[He] encouraged me that God would help me on my academics and on tests. [He said] pray and always look to God for assistance and recollection on exams and put your effort forth to study. He told us that God was concerned with physical and spiritual life, too. He [God] is concerned with the whole man. So we could look to Him for help with the academics.

All of the participants viewed the extended family, especially the grandmother and occasionally the grandfather, as playing a tremendous part in their success. They spoke of their maternal grandmothers with great affection and admiration for how they had been there for them when their mothers worked or were not available. Additionally,

credited for their financial and moral support were the aunts, uncles, and sisters of the participants. The lives of those in the extended family were closely knit and interwoven with the lives of the nuclear family of the participants, sometimes all living in the same household during different periods of their lives. Sisters were mentioned as quite helpful in completing homework assignments and decisions about attending private school. Counselors, teachers, friends, a neighbor and pastor also played very caring and supportive roles and filled the gap left by the absent father. Some indicated that they really did not notice there was a gap except for the financial strain experienced in a lack of food in some instances, few new clothes, and difficulty providing tuition for school.

The TOLEDO EXCEL Program

The TOLEDO EXCEL Program is a scholarship incentive program, which assists students throughout high school, and awards scholarships which amount to the difference between state and federal grants and the cost of tuition, fees, and books at the University of Toledo. These scholarships will be awarded if students have met TOLEDO EXCEL eligibility requirements, including participation in at least 85% of required program activities, earning a cumulative “B” average in high school, and attaining a score of at 19 on the ACT. Program activities encourage high academic performance through Saturday School, tutoring, academic retreat weekends; responsible citizenship through volunteer community service; and cultural sensitivity through ethnographic field studies in the United States and abroad. Fifty talented, high-achieving, eighth grade students are recruited annually from groups underrepresented in institutions of higher education, including African-, Asian-, Native-American, as well as low income European-American

and Appalachian students. To date, more than 750 students have been enrolled in TOLEDO EXCEL, with at least 50 new scholars being inducted yearly.

According to the program literature (TOLEDO EXCEL Program Literature, 2003), TOLEDO EXCEL offers two-week yearly Summer Institutes with classes in composition, sociology, geography, political science, oral history techniques, math, the sciences, and computer applications. Students develop good study skills, positive learning attitudes, analytical and critical thinking skills, and engage in career exploration through class and fieldwork. Each of the five Summer Institutes focuses on a different theme and a different set of academic skills. The first Summer Institute, “Ethnic America,” encourages students to appreciate the contributions made by different ethnic groups in American society. The second Summer Institute, “Global Cities,” teaches the students about population changes, infrastructures, and problems associated with living in urban areas. During this time, they travel to urban areas to observe characteristics of urban life, visiting museums, government offices, and other places related to life in a metropolitan area. The third Summer Institute, “On Civil Rights: Struggles and Progress,” introduces the students to an in-depth study of the Civil Rights Movement. The fourth Summer Institute, “Human Rights in the Global Community,” teaches students about struggles for human dignity in a world of expanding technology and shrinking natural resources. TOLEDO EXCEL students visit Western and Southern Africa and China and are linked with students from these countries, allowing them to become immersed in different cultures through daily-lived experiences. The fifth Summer Institute, “Bridging the Gap: Transitioning from High School to University

Life,” helps smooth student transition from high school to college at the University of Toledo.

Other annual activities include an annual conference, and a formal ball, and graduation. The “Annual Conference for Aspiring Minority Youth” is now in its twenty-first year, is planned by the TOLEDO EXCEL Joint Committee, and is sponsored by the University of Toledo, Toledo Public Schools, and local corporations. The annual conference brings together students, parents, educators, and community to discuss issues of concern pertaining to the education of youth. The formal ball, “An Evening of Enchantment,” showcases and highlights the academic excellence, congeniality, and talent of the students. Graduation provides an opportunity to look back on past accomplishments and to look forward as new students are inducted into the TOLEDO EXCEL Program. Older EXCEL students who have not graduated from college serve as mentors, team leaders, and role models to students in the program, which in turn provides the students with the skill and ability to serve in as mentors, team leaders and role models themselves.

All of the eight participants in this study and matriculated into the TOLEDO EXCEL Program. All eight of the participants emphatically extolled the praises of the TOLEDO EXCEL Program and spoke at length about how it had greatly contributed to their success.

Their view of TOLEDO EXCEL

Provided opportunities to develop identity as successful Black men

All of the eight Black men remarked how much fun they had in the TOLEDO EXCEL Program and that they liked “being together with other African American children as well as other ethnicities.” One participant revealed:

[The] TOLEDO EXCEL program opened the door to learn how to interact with other Blacks my age. Cause I was going to a private school and didn’t have chance to do this.

Another participant grinned and started laughing as he reminisced:

And, then, that summer we had to come to the summer institute; and that was one of the best experiences I have had in TOLEDO EXCEL because I met a whole bunch of different people. And we just had a lot of fun!! A lot of people got in trouble . . . it was just a fun experience. I think TOLEDO EXCEL helped me open up to people more and helped me get out of my little shell.

After first agreeing, “EXCEL was fun [and that] it was a learning experience [and] great interaction,” one went on to confess:

Met a lot of my girlfriends in TOLEDO EXCEL. Sad to say, everybody liked it cause the guys and the girls could get together. Under supervision, of course.

Provided opportunities to expand the mind

One participant frankly said:

I considered TOLEDO EXCEL [as just] another activity that I liked doing. I liked the classes; they helped me with school. In the eighth grade, the classes helped me to think outside the box and offered a variety [of classes]. That was new for me cause in the seventh and eighth grades you didn’t have to work very hard. [It] definitely [played a part in my success] . . . by preparing my mind. . .not

just educationally but the thought process. I remember meeting those professors right out of the eighth grade and just expanding your mind, expanding the way to think, not only whatever you're thinking about math, science, what you're doing but how to get the wheels turning.

Another explained:

[In] the summer programs, ...[the] first ...week we went back and forth to Rocket Hall all day from 8 to 5, and that was teaching us things, having speakers come in, having us watch videos, things like that, preparing us for the future. The next week we would actually stay on campus, in dorms for a week. And that was like, one of the best experiences I ever had. You had a chance to experience college life as a freshman in high school; it was fun. The learning was always made interesting, and it was a nice mixture of learning with fun.

Finally, another participant succinctly stated:

It just . . . served as just another one of the great milestones my life. Went through that program; had a great time learning about science and math.

Provided opportunities to expand horizons

Explained one participant:

We never took a vacation growing up. Never traveled far away places, whether it was outside the state or in state. And, being involved with the TOLEDO EXCEL program gave me an opportunity to have vacations, do vacations, and at the same time learn. So, whether it was going to Toronto, the science museums in Toronto, the civil rights trip my junior year, – we covered eight states . . .[and] checking out Mexico City to learn about the Mexican culture.

Another participant added:

My second best experience in TOLEDO EXCEL was going to Africa and . . . just being there for three weeks . . . and just seeing the land, and seeing the different people there . . . besides here, just really opened my eyes to what else is out there in the world.

Provided opportunities for recognition of achievements

Several mentioned the fun times in TOLEDO EXCEL, which were centered around “graduation [ceremonies] and the formal ball.” Both of these events are designed to highlight, and showcase the achievements and talents of the students.

All in all, the comments of each and every one of the eight participants indicate that the TOLEDO EXCEL Program was a huge success with them. It provided them with volunteer experiences to “give back” to the community; provided them with tutoring in such areas as math and science during the school year; five two-week Summer Institutes where they both lived in dorms on the campus of the University of Toledo and traveled abroad. They were, thus, exposed to other African Americans, and cultures and ethnicities in such places as Ghana, West Africa, South Africa, Mexico and China. Additionally, they traveled to historic places related to the civil rights struggle in the Southern part of the United States. Exposure to these cultural experiences is very important to the development of self-identity explored in adolescent years.

Father

Of the negative themes, the topic of father seemed to be somewhat unpleasant with most of the participants. Many of them talked about everything else, only speaking of the father when he was called to their attention. When asked to describe him six of the

eight participants began by stating that they seldom saw their father, that they had little or no contact with him at all while growing up. One participant seemed uncomfortable and squirmed around in his seat during the entire interview. He smiled when asked to describe his father:

I don't have any adjectives to describe him. Like when he came from service, he went to life with drugs and stuff. But he's coming through it, and now he's going to school, and just got his associate's degree. *Long silence.* Me and him, we get along. We don't talk a lot or communicate a lot, but when I need something I can call on him and he will get it. And, he calls and checks on me, and I'll call him every now and then just to say "hi." But, I don't really communicate that often.

Two of them described their fathers in a positive manner. One said, "My dad is great. I love my dad." He continued by describing his father's relationship with his mother, and how they happened to separate. The other said, "He was a good dad, you know. Hands down. He was a good father. He has always been a good dad. He couldn't be there all the time and that's understandable." Another ventured to describe his father, but overtaken with disappointment, described him in a negative light:

My dad; I call him a loser (laughing). I just don't think that a guy that makes all those kids and don't take care of any one of them – I just think that's sad. I see him as a bum, a loser, worthless, all that.

Relationship with participants

The six participants responded sadly or with little or no emotion when discussing their fathers. One coolly said:

I never really cared to know him cause he wasn't there. He's still alive in Toledo. Out of sight, out of mind. . . I don't see him today and he does not try to see me. His life relates to mine very little.

Another said:

He is in the city; I have seen him a few times. I could probably count them on my two hands the [number] of times that I have seen him. . . I guess right now [there's no need] for me to go see him or try to build something that isn't there or hasn't been there.

Another explained:

My relationship in the sense that he is my dad. He is my father but as far as relationship as being my dad, I just don't see that. I just see him as the man that helped to birth me; I don't see him as a dad. I have not talked to him in maybe a year and a half to this day. He doesn't call me.

Still another said:

I think we are as close as any son and father could be that live that far apart, with me being in Ohio and [his] being in Tennessee. I think we are as close as you could be living in two different states. Of course I would have loved it if it could have been better. I would love it if I could have seen him more than every few years.

Another lamented:

My dad was never around from when I was born. From what my mom told me he was around when she was pregnant. But as soon as I was born he kind of just disappeared. And he was never around. But the first time I ever remember

meeting him was when I was six or seven [years old] and I had a soccer game and he came up to that.

The last participant said bluntly:

We don't do too much together and barely talk. So we have a distant relationship. It is just that he was gone in the army for half of my life and then when he came back, he wasn't really around cause he was in California for a while. So, he really hasn't been around and now that he is back I just didn't have a desire to be around him. 'Cause I'm so used to not being around him.. . that it really doesn't even cross my mind to call him.

Thus, two of the participants describe their fathers positively while one was quite negative in his description. With several of the fathers residing in other states, most of them had little or no contact with their sons while growing up. At the conclusion of this study, their relationship was basically the same as in their childhood years: distant or nonexistent with the fathers making an occasional phone call now and then to check on the participants. Consequently, the unemotional, lackluster responses in describing the fathers are not surprising. These responses varied little along the line of not caring to know the father, not needing to see him, and barely talking to him since it doesn't cross [the] mind.

Child support payments

All of the fathers of seven participants were absent from the home as a result of divorce or separation. The father of the eighth participant never married his mother. Yet, seven of them reported in the interviews and in the focus group that the father paid little or no child support payments on any consistent basis throughout their childhood. The one

who was the exception indicated that his father did provide child support payments every two weeks throughout most of his childhood.

Mother didn't 'bad mouth' him

Despite the absence of the fathers from the home, their distant relationship with their sons, and very little child support payments provided, the mothers of the participants are reported to have said nothing negative about the fathers to their sons. Said one son and participant, "My mom never spoke bad about him; we never even really talked about it up until maybe the last two or three years as me and my sister have gotten older and sort of grown into adulthood. She never speaks bad about him."

During the focus group the participants contended that they held no resentment towards their fathers' failure to provide child support for them as they were growing up. This is, perhaps, a result of the mothers' not 'bad mouthing' the fathers. One confided, "I don't hold any anger at him, you know. I guess had I known more about him, had I known, had he been around more . . . then, I'd probably have more feelings." However, some animosity towards several fathers did erupt when recalling their fathers and their not being there during childhood years. This was noted especially when one participant attempted to answer the question how his father's life related to his [the participant's]:

His life really does not relate to my life. My life is different than his. His life doesn't relate to mine to be honest. I don't want to be nothing like him.

Another one was openly hostile:

And, I wrote him a letter telling him about how I was mad that he wasn't there for me; he wasn't there as a father or anything like that. . . he was never around.

Still another confessed that during his childhood “some of that anger built up about him [father] not being there even though I understood the reason. . . even like the times he wasn’t there, I still knew that he loved me.”

Difficult times and lack of finances

The negative themes of difficult times and lack of finances that emerged from the interviews and the focus group were strongly associated with each other in the experiences related by the participants. Seven of the eight participants discussed these difficult times in their families in relation to the lack of money. Said one of the participants, “I can relate to bill collectors calling the house. . .the repossessions.” Another one of the participants revealed that his senior year of high school was difficult because of the “discussions [with my dad] about child support. My mom offered [my dad] a deal to settle the back child support [that would pay for my tuition].” His dad who was never around since his birth, decided that he wanted to meet with him [the participant] at a hotel and talk with him. Apparently, the meeting was traumatic for the participant who described “the end of 2003 and this year [as being] the hardest year ever.”

One participant explained:

We just didn’t have enough [money]. My mom never had much money.

Another said:

There was just a little [hardship] at times when my mom was by herself, especially after the divorce when she was trying to make ends meet. I mean, I had a job at McDonald’s but I wasn’t bringing home enough money to compensate for what she lost. So again there was definitely [financial] hardship.

A third participant stated:

It's always been difficult for me. In elementary, like I said, bad neighborhood, not having the income you would like. . .not being able to get all the wants that a kid wants. Early on, finance was a big disappointment and problem with me. . [I] think finance was the biggest problem as a child and teenager.

The lack of finances resulted in and contributed to problems in other areas for these Black men. The problems ranged from lack of food to eat, inability to buy the kind of clothes they wanted, to worry about being able to pay tuition for their schooling in a timely fashion, and their mothers having to work two jobs or work overtime. One participant disclosed:

A lot [of times we didn't have enough to eat] . . . she never had cash to spend on it. When we were younger she was on welfare, food stamps, whatever food stamps covered for the month, that's what we basically had to eat for the month. . . I mean my mom made sure we ate; we ate probably like two times a day.

Another one candidly admitted:

By that time of high school nothing [was] coming in from my dad. It was when we were younger, past sixth, seventh grade. It was no child support coming in. You could always tell then things were getting tight; we started packing egg or tuna fish sandwiches or peanut butter sandwiches. We didn't go hungry, we just didn't have extravagant sandwiches.

In the families of the participants there was not "a lot of money to go around, everybody had new stuff and you didn't have new stuff;" as a result the mothers had to economize on clothing. One participant laughingly related:

One particular time when things were really bad was when we had to go to a thrift type store and get some thing for me for school. And I just wanted to die, but mom wouldn't let me help out or get a job til I was a junior in high school, 'cause she didn't want me not focusing on grades.

Another said:

As far as economic times, trips that I wanted to go on, sometimes school trips, I wouldn't be able to make them just because of the cost. Sometimes kids want new fad in clothes and shoes and things like that, we couldn't always have them. And I always thought, 'Why can't we get a new car?' or 'Can we get a nicer car, nicer clothes, or anything like that?' I never said it to her. It was just always that I thought about it but I didn't know the implications of not having another parent, and another income, and all the things that go along with that in raising two children, and all the costs that go along with that.

Revealed another participant:

[My] dad has nine children by many different people and he has never paid child support for me. . . I can remember telling my dad that I wanted to go to Central and he didn't say he would help me or do anything about it. . . My senior year I was still finding ways to pay [tuition at] Central. You know, I was working. I was on scholarship and it was getting to be less and less and tuition was going up and up and I had to find ways [to pay it]. . . I started playing [my cello] for weddings. I still do that today.

As previously stated regarding the mothers being hardworking, seven of the mothers suffered and endured great hardship themselves, while attempting to provide for their

children. Said one participant, “[It was hard at] times like Christmas, my mom had to work, not having your mother there.”

Another participant spoke up:

She didn’t tell me, but I mean, I grew up poor; I knew it. I mean she didn’t have to tell me that. I knew that not having the money, not having like food all the time. It mean, my mom worked like two jobs all though my childhood, sometimes three.

Observed another:

She took up the mantle and tried to make the financial difficulties through her working overtime like crazy. And providing for her two children . . . my mom really worked hard. We never really knew that, me and my sister, never knew why these financial difficulties were occurring cause we were younger and we didn’t fully understand the cost of a child which is enormously expensive, as I know now. But yeah, I mean there’s a financial toll. . . [and] physical burden of working. My mom has worked over twenty something years on nights and the rest of the years on days for over thirty years of work, of sacrificing, hard work of trying to get the best for her children, and trying to take care of her family as best she [could]. It takes a toll on you physically. Hopefully, her life won’t be shortened at all.

When asked who helped the mother bear the financial burden four of the eight participants indicated that it was the extended family – the grandmothers, the aunts and the uncles that had stepped in and helped in the financially difficult times. One of the other four participants explained how his mother coped with financial problems,

indicating, “she [had] always set enough money aside just in case something didn’t go right.” However, in his senior year she had to ask his dad for back child support in order to pay his tuition to a private school. One participant indicated that his mother simply would not allow anyone in the family to help financially. Three participants’ mothers simply worked extra jobs and longer hours to make ends meet. It is quite clear, however, that the extended family – grandmothers and grandfathers, aunts, uncles, and sisters – was indeed very close, often living together, with their lives intricately intertwined, readily providing emotional support, child care, recreational opportunities, and advice to all the participants and their mothers. It was noted that during the focus group, seven of the eight participants stated that their mothers never informed them that there were financial problems.

Difficult Times and the Father’s Absence

Six of the participants also associated difficult times with the father being absent from the home. Quite thoughtfully, and without any apparent anger, these six participants returned over and over again to the effects of their fathers’ absence upon them and the issues involved.

One participant recalled:

Difficult times – I start with my dad again. Like I said that being young, you know, sometime he would make promises that we would go fishing, but it would be ironic cause he would tell me that we would go a week ahead of time and that whole week, you know, building up. I would be like, we’re going, we’re going. Then, he would have to work and that whole week of planning was down the drain. That was one of the difficult times.

Another confided:

Yeah, some of the smaller things were just in school, every year it comes around, mother's day and father's day and some of the different things. You bring your parents to school day, and parent teacher conferences, and all those type things, my father wasn't there. You know, when you're young, its like, man, everybody else is bringing their mother and their father and everybody is making some kind of project or card or something for their parents. One month it'll be mother's day; next month, it'll be father's day. You know, whom do I write my card to? Its like I don't have anyone to write that to or to make that project for or to be proud of on take-your-kids-to-work day. Kids will come in and say, "I went with my dad here and he does this and he does that. What did you do?" How do you address that? It's kind of awkward; you don't know how to deal with it when you're young. So, I would always try to sort of play it off . . .to avoid the awkward moments afterwards of saying, 'well, my father isn't in the home.' [And] functions where . . . people would be there with their mothers and their fathers, Black tie functions and my mom would be going by herself. So those type things had an effect. I do know that it's changed the way that I look at life, at interactions, at families.

It appears that the fathers' absence in the participants' eyes resulted in difficult times, especially the lack of money to do those things that were important like buying food and clothes and paying their tuition to private schools.

Effect of father's absence upon mother

The fathers' absence placed heavy emotional and physical burdens upon the single mothers. One confided it left the mother to attend the school meetings and other social events alone. Apparently, the mothers discussed the financial situation very little, if at all, with their sons. As a result, the sons did not seem to feel hardly any animosity towards their fathers. Moreover, several of the mothers received no monetary help from their families; rather, they somehow held it together and 'tuffed it out' by working an extra job or overtime. It should be noted that the lives of the participants and their mothers were intricately intertwined with the lives of the extended family, who provided an abundance of financial and emotional support, advice, and child care.

One participant observed:

The effects of [my father's] not being there. I think the greatest thing is the emotional burden that the other parent has to carry – the emotional burden, the physical burden, and the financial burden. I'll name three. The physical burden of working. My mom has worked over twenty something years on nights and the rest of the years on days for over thirty years of work. . . Emotionally she talks about the nightmares that she had, the worries, the nights of crying. To this day, she says, 'I just don't want you to hate me or wonder if it was something I did to push him away to keep him from coming to talk to you or anything like that.' You know, what do you say to your children when its father's day and you don't hear from your father. . .So there's an emotional burden, a physical burden, and economic burden.

Another added:

Not having the traditional two-parent household, sometimes there're some issues from that. . . whether its [not] having two incomes or just [not] having the male aspect . . . you know, my mom had to play two roles. Maybe if my dad [had been] involved a little bit more, that would have help[ed] out.

The participants seemed divided in their opinions on whether the Black absent father family was deficient, as described by research. Several of them readily recognized this statement as being true in their experiences and agreed with it. Several others, however, appeared reluctant to make a general statement in which the absence of the father always meant there was a deficiency. It appeared that in the process of explaining and reflecting over their own lives and experiences, they came to the point where they recognized deficiencies resulting from their fathers' absence. They strongly believed that both parents are needed to rear a child, though a single parent family can survive without the father as long as there is the extended family and others for support. With their fathers not present, several found they didn't really know how to interact with a lot of boys growing up, they needed more assurance with dating, and going through high school. Also, they haven't learned how to treat a woman or how to be there for her. As one said, "But as far as deficiency, there is a deficiency there: financial was definitely a deficiency. [And then] there are things that you learn from men and [things] you learn from women. That's the nature of the two sexes."

After a pause the participant continued:

Women don't really focus on fixing cars, and nailing up boards, and fixing sinks and stuff like that. There's nothing wrong with that cause I think women teach you more about your interactions with other people, and how to be a wonderful

person, how to be a kind person. Sort of the soft skills in life. Whereas the man sort of teaches you the harder skills.

All of the participants strongly expressed the same desire “to be there” for their children. This seemed to be of the utmost importance to them. There was no hesitation whatsoever as they recalled their own experiences which they used as a basis for deciding how they would establish their own families. Without hesitation and with passion, they verbalized their plans for their families. And, though some were not yet prepared to establish a family at this time, nevertheless, they expressed the ideal family situation as being a father residing in the home with the mother, providing for her, and their children.

All eight of the participants wholeheartedly and unanimously agreed that the Black family is resilient and bounces back despite hardship and difficulty. They all seemed comfortable relating to this question. Apparently, it was obvious from their own experiences that Black families were, indeed, resilient and possessed the ability to bounce back under the most trying circumstances.

Summary

Over the course of two interviews and one focus group, eight individuals provided a wealth of information about their experiences in an absent father family that contributed to their success. They discussed the people and programs that played key roles in and contributed to their success. First, they generously praised God, who made it all possible; then, their mothers, grandmothers and grandfathers, aunts, uncles, sisters, teachers, friends and pastors for their love, financial, and emotional support through the years with no father present. Also, they praised the TOLEDO EXCEL program as being very important and significant in their educational and professional advancement. They

discussed, with candor, their worries, frustrations, and difficult times as they related to their fathers and finances. It was with great conviction that they spoke of the importance of the father's 'being there' in the home for his children and having two parents, a father and a mother, in that home. Initially, there was some difference of opinions as to whether or not the Black family with no father present was deficient. However, by the end of the interviews and the focus group meeting all except one had admitted that there was some type of deficiency involved. All hailed the Black family as resilient and victorious.

CHAPTER FIVE

Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Though there has been much research conducted on the effects of the absent father on children, there remains little research on successful Black males from absent father families who performed well in high school and college and are doing well in their chosen profession. This study was undertaken to learn from individuals themselves the circumstances and environments that contribute to and support the successful lives of Black males reared in absent father families. It was anticipated that their experiences would provide knowledge that could benefit educators, social workers, mental health practitioners, and community leaders by broadening their perspectives regarding the Black family and father absence. Community activities and programs such as TOLEDO EXCEL could then be provided to this population with their needs and priorities in mind.

Summary

The Research Question

The central questions of this investigation were, “How did academically successful African American men who grew up in father absent homes account for their drive to become productive, educated citizens? What was their perception of the experience of growing up in a fatherless home? What behaviors and circumstances did they identify that enabled them to succeed?” The theoretical framework employed in this study was an ecological systems approach, which sees human beings as existing in a social web. In this social web, behavior and development are both influenced by and

have an influence on, the behavior and development of others with whom they interact. Thus the research sought to provide insight into internal (attitudes, values, beliefs) and external circumstances (involvement in school programs, church, athletics) that have proved important in the success of these young Black men.

The Methodology

The research data for this investigation was gathered through two in-depth interviews that were held individually with each of the eight participants. The researcher met with each respondent privately for approximately one to one and half hours for each interview. One focus group of approximately two hours was also held. The participants were Black males who grew up in homes with an absent father. They all had completed the TOLEDO EXCEL program and were either in college or had graduated from college. A copy of the transcription of the first interview was provided to each respondent prior to the second interview. Also, prior to the focus group transcripts of the second interview were reviewed by the participants to ensure that their perceptions were accurately recorded.

The analysis of the data was based on the qualitative research method explicated by Bogdan and Biklen, (1992). In this method, the life history case study approach is employed, examining in detail a single subject at a particular time period in the person's life. Each subject was interviewed two times and a focus group was held to discuss the themes that emerged. All of the interviews and the focus group were tape recorded and the statements transcribed verbatim. These statements were then coded according to the perceived meanings of the passages and were analyzed for common themes. The investigation was not intended to yield results, which would be generalizable to all Black

males from absent father families. Rather, it was intended to discover, understand, and describe the circumstances that contribute to patterns of successful behaviors of Black males reared in absent father families. Also, it was intended to use this information to increase the sensitivity of educators, social workers, mental health practitioners, and community leaders.

Conclusions

The results of this study support and substantiate other work that has been done. The participants stated that God, the mothers and maternal grandmothers, other extended family members, teachers, counselors, friends, and the TOLEDO EXCEL Program played key roles contributing to their success. The mothers were characterized as hardworking and bearing the heavy burden of providing finances for the family and tuition for private schools. Much of the time while the mothers worked, the grandmothers cared for and helped to rear the participants. Other members of the extended family, teachers, counselors, and friends also provided much-needed financial and emotional support, childcare and child rearing. Mothers and grandmothers made sure that the participants attended church and thanked God for His goodness. All professed a strong faith in God. The TOLEDO EXCEL Program also played a key role in contributing to the success of the participants by providing a much needed peer group of Black non-traditional teenagers focused on academic success. Dominant themes that also emerged were difficult times and the suffering experienced by the families as a result of the fathers' absence and consequent economic deprivation.

It was both pleasantly surprising and helpful to have the participants so openly sharing their analyses of the importance of fatherlessness in their lives. Their reflections

underscore the magnitude of this issue for them. As they discussed the people and the experiences that they credited for their success, some seemed grateful for an opportunity to be able to voice their analyses of their experiences. This seemed especially true by the time of the focus group, when there was much synergism and many ideas generated as they animatedly discussed the future of the Black family and the problem of teen pregnancy.

The circumstances that contributed to the success of these young men reflect the strength-resiliency perspective (S. A. Hill, 1999), the adaptive vitality, and the much-discussed strengths of Black families (Karenga, 1993; R. B.Hill, 1971). The families in this study fit the Karenga's definition of the adaptive vitality approach as they adjusted to socioeconomic pressures, absorbed stresses and strains, and bounced back with vigor (1993). They did, indeed, push past simple survival, providing their sons with a good education from elementary through senior high school. The students' families partnered with TOLEDO EXCEL beginning in the ninth grade. This partnership is one of the keys to getting the participants through high school successfully. This partnership continued throughout high school and college for those attending the University of Toledo; these students were awarded scholarships towards their college education. The reported strengths of Black families as described in the literature review – strong kinship bonds, strong work orientation, the adaptability of family roles, high achievement orientation, and religious orientation – were functional for their survival, advancement, and stability. These strengths were reflected in the themes of this study, and identified as the keys to the participants' success thus far in life; and as such warrant a closer look.

Strengths of Black Families.

The participants have weathered the storms of growing up in absent father families and are strong, responsible, successful, and productive men today. Some are in college, some are finishing college, others are employed in their chosen professions, and one is married and has a young child. Yet they bear witness to those who helped them. Their mothers, though somewhat worn out now that their sons are in college and employed in their chosen professions, were strong women whom their sons portrayed as committed, hardworking, and self-sacrificing. These mothers had to become the primary wage earners if their families were going to survive (Martin & Martin, 1985); they had a strong work orientation, one of the strengths of Black families (R. B. Hill, 1971; Schaefer, 2000). These strengths were demonstrated by some of the mothers working two jobs and others working overtime and long hours into the night for many, many years. The overwhelming majority of the participants related the hardships they experienced resulting from the lack of finances. One participant mentioned that his mother used food stamps, while another mother is reported to have simply refused to accept any financial aid from anyone in her family. She is reported to have just worked harder and suffered without receiving money from her family. Others also report this strong work ethic, the great sense of self-reliance, and antipathy towards welfare which accounts for the large numbers of poor people who do not receive any aid and even refuse to apply for it (R. B. Hill, 1999).

Another strength of Black families, family role flexibility, is exemplified in this study by the self-reliance of these single mothers who courageously headed their families

as the primary wage earners (Schaefer, 2000). This important strength of role adaptability or egalitarian pattern of decision making where male and female can assume each other's household roles in the event of absence or illness, is derived from the African culture and has greatly contributed to the stability and advancement of many Black families (R. B. Hill, 1999).

The participants of this study credited the involvement of the extended family as one of the keys to their success. This resourceful support network is a third and important strength of Black families. Billingsley (1992) has written about the importance of grandmothers in extended families. The extended family rallied around the single parent unit providing them with shelter, much needed finances, emotional support, advice, child rearing, childcare, and recreational activities (Gadsden, 1999). Similar to information from R. B. Hill (1999), these supports have also been found by Gadsden (1999): strong kinship bonds, and legacies from their African heritage, which have provided these families and many others over the generations, with effective coping strategies in times of hardship.

A fourth strength of Black families, a high achievement orientation for the children to attend college was reflected in the educational attainment and aspirations of the mothers themselves. This is a finding that mirrored earlier work by Billingsley (1992). At the conclusion of this study, all eight of the participants were attending college or had already completed college. Additionally, seven of them had plans to pursue further education beyond their four-year degree, with one having already completed his master's degree in business administration. This achievement should not be surprising since most Black single parents strongly emphasize socializing their children for higher educational

and occupational attainment (Billingsley, 1992; R. B. Hill, 1999). Another interesting finding is that at least five of the participants' mothers have received training and/or advanced degrees in their chosen professions; three of them obtained their professional education while their sons were yet in junior and senior high school. R. B. Hill (1999) acknowledges this link, which is supported in this study, between the high educational attainment and aspirations of female heads of family as it is translated into high educational achievement of their children. Thus, the resilience of Black families headed by single women can be attributed to their strong work ethic and strong achievement orientation.

All eight of the participants of this study credited God for their success, and unashamedly thanked and acknowledged Him. This strong religious orientation is named as the fifth strength of Black families in which Blacks, since slavery times, have been adept at using religion as a mechanism for survival and advancement throughout their history in America (Billingsley, 1992; S. A. Hill, 1999; Lum, 2004). This was an important finding since the researcher did not want to impose her own values in this area upon the participants. However, all eight of the participants freely discussed their faith and their early life experiences as to how their mothers and grandmothers encouraged their faith in God by "making" them attend church, and teaching them that God was the source of all of their blessings.

The TOLEDO EXCEL Program is outstanding in its contributing role to the success of the participants of this study. The GEAR UP Toledo Students (GUTS) Program, another support program in the Office of EXCELlence of the University of Toledo, recognizes that academic intervention must be provided during the middle and

high school years. Early intervention is crucial during these years in order to develop and support high academic achievement orientation in the youth from groups and backgrounds underrepresented in the colleges of this nation.

The participants positively felt that the Black family is resilient, whatever challenges it faces. They felt that their success was proof of that fact. The deficit or pathological approach, also called the culture of poverty perspective, did not appear to be evident, at least not according to Frazier's theory (1939). This deficit approach argues that poor people possess aspirations, psychological characteristics, and values that hinder their achievement, which then produce behavior deficiencies that serve to keep them impoverished (Roschelle, 1997). It also maintains that these deficiencies are then passed on to the children through the socialization process. This deficit argument did not hold true in this study. These young Black men possessed high aspirations and the kind of psychological characteristics and values that promoted their great academic achievement; and at the conclusion of this study they certainly were not impoverished.

Though ambivalent and somewhat hesitant about describing the Black absent father family as deficient, seven of the eight participants did eventually admit there was some deficiency – especially financial - in the Black absent father family. They felt that the extended family sufficiently filled in the gaps such as role modeling that the father left.

In regards to the effects of fatherlessness on Black males, the participants in this study reported no illicit drug use, and no drug-using friends. Though Carlson and Corcoran (2001) found that income is strongly and negatively linked to behavior problems and had a significant positive effect on math and reading scores, their findings

did not hold true for this study. While income was the major cause of the families' difficult times, causing for some, lack of food, clothing, and anxiety about the payment of bills and tuition for private schools, it was found that all of the eight participants were high academic achievers throughout the elementary, junior, and senior high school years. The one exception was a participant who reported that he had had some behavior problems in elementary school, which was limited to discipline problems (talking back to teachers, talking too much in class, verbal fights, but very few physical fights). However, he reported that as he went into the eighth grade he "accepted God in [his] life," and didn't act up any more."

As stated previously, the participants credited their academic success to mothers who placed a high value on good education and attendance at private schools. The mothers' strong stand on studying, getting good grades, and the involvement of the extended family is seen as offsetting any negative effects of single-parenthood upon academic achievement. Perhaps the mothers were stronger because of the fathers' absence and the necessity of their having to occupy the wage earner role.

Other research reports that single mothers often have poorer mental health than those in two-parent homes. Again this finding did not hold true for this study. Perhaps this could be explained because of the close intimate presence of the extended family, which served to offset any negative effects of poor maternal mental health (Lum, 2004). The ready accessibility of grandmothers, Schaffer (1996) contends, provides support to mothers who are harassed, depressed, and demoralized when there is a sharp reduction in income. This could be the explanation for one participant whose mother was abusive towards him throughout his junior and senior high school years. He, however, found

solace and refuge in his maternal grandmother who was present and basically filled the mother's role, nurturing, caring for him, and providing much emotional support. Though he continued to reside with his mother, the grandmother's presence in his life seemed to offset the negative effects of the mother's poor psychological functioning.

Beatty's (1995) study, exploring masculine self-image and father deprivation, found that father-absent boys evidence a poorer sense of masculinity as well as poorer interpersonal relationships than do father-present boys. Evidence of this nature was not readily apparent in this study. The participants in this study, however, indicated that they drew their sense of masculinity from uncles, teachers, counselors, neighbors, and in one case from the mother's longstanding boyfriend of twenty years. One participant reported he had difficulties getting along with other males his age, indicating that he did not have a lot of male friends but spent most of his time around his mother, sister and the family.

Participants: Looking Towards the Future.

Because of their own experiences in an absent father family, the participants felt quite strongly about the need for fathers to reside in the homes with their children, if but for no other reason than to provide financial support. The participants were strongly committed to the two-parent family, consisting of a father, a mother, and the children. Recognizing the importance of having both parents in the home, all eight of the participants stressed that fatherhood is very important and each wants to "be there" in the home with the mother of his children and be very much involved in their lives as they are growing up. They definitely want to give their children, especially their sons, what they themselves did not have: a two-parent family that is financially stable. They want to spare their children the hardships, especially the economic deprivation that they

themselves experienced. The mothers realized, as well as the participants eventually did, that the way out of their poverty-stricken condition was to obtain a good education. This, then, would position them for secure, well paying jobs, leading to a better way of life.

Finally, the last note on which the focus group ended was that of what the participants could do, how could they ‘give back’ or make it better for other young men in the same situation in which they were reared. The concept of ‘giving back’ refers to the Black helping tradition (Martin & Martin, 1985) which emphasizes mutual aid and cooperation among members of different social classes or status groups, and has aided in the survival and advancement of Blacks from generation to generation. This concept has been instilled in the students of the TOLEDO EXCEL Program and interwoven throughout its curricula. The students are taught that part of their obligation is to give back to others and to the community because others have given to them. The importance of compassion for those growing old, getting a college education, and providing leadership in the community is stressed. Taught, also, is the responsibility of ‘being your brother’s keeper,’ caring enough about other people in the community so much that one helps them, as they themselves have been helped. It is taught that money is not everything. However, they should care enough to help others, ‘give back,’ and become leaders in their community. They excitedly discussed ways that they could do this.

Research Recommendations

Though this study strongly points up the strengths of Black families, this researcher is not advocating single parent families. Children need both parents in the home, other extended family, and friends readily available to provide for their developmental and emotional well-being. As found in this study, the mothers, risking

their own physical and emotional health, exerted “super woman” efforts to provide for their children and to send them to private schools. Their strong faith in God to provide strength and resources, along with the support of their extended families, and others sustained these mothers and brought them through long years of hardships.

More research on normative family structures and adult support for children is needed. Though there appears to be some research on the masculine self-image, role models, and the roles of fathers in father present families, these could be areas of further research. The young men’s sense of masculinity in father absent homes needs further study to determine whether there is a link between behavior and difficulty in getting along with other men. Young Black males being reared by single mothers in father absent families certainly have need of healthy role models in order to learn ‘how to treat a woman,’ as one participant so frankly stated. In healthy families there are male role models within the home, where young Black males can readily observe male-female interaction and gain a sense of belonging to a family.

Also, similarly structured studies could be conducted with students who have lower grades than those usually selected by the TOLEDO EXCEL Program. These studies would determine whether or not the findings would be consistent among other studies. Additionally, participants could be young men and women who are valedictorians, selected from honor rolls, those not in private schools, nor affiliated with a scholarship incentive program assisting them through high school to determine if they have had similar experiences as those in the TOLEDO EXCEL Program. Still another area of research could be a longitudinal study of the participants ten years from now to

determine if they are continuing to be successful, contributing members of their community and society.

Policy and Programmatic Recommendations

The strengths of Black families are admirable and respectfully acknowledged in this study; yet, it must be stressed that the female headed absent father household is not the ideal situation for young Black males, or for that matter any other families, attempting to survive in crime-infested neighborhoods and schools today. The single parent family is a survival mechanism that requires extraordinary super human effort and outside support that not all women have. Consequently, policies and programs must promote, as Gadsden (1995) states, a culture of survival or quality of life for children within their already existing families. This would include developing a more supportive environment in order to help female-headed households succeed. Programs need to be fashioned upon the strengths/adaptive perspective. The strengths and adaptive mechanisms (problem - solving abilities and natural support systems within the extended family and community) identified by Lum (2004) need to be utilized by both practitioners and community programs. Using such a strengths perspective has widespread implications for practice and policy. Tending to stress the deficits of single parent absent father families, practitioners may overlook existing strengths and adaptive mechanisms upon which they could build.

Clinicians and policymakers should not become so much involved in discussions about family forms and structures, but concentrate on providing a full range of supportive, caring adults in the daily lives of children in all types of families, and in

particular father absent families. The following are recommendations for practitioners and programs:

1. Programs and services should promote increased involvement on the part of the nonresident father in the child's life, rather than estrangement that will push him away. Focusing on the dynamics of the father/son relationship, these programs would work with fathers teaching the importance father presence and role modeling; fathering skills; and the nature of masculinity and manhood.
2. Programs that focus on the mother/father relationship should be implemented. These programs would facilitate increased contact and communication between mothers and fathers to aid in meeting the economic and emotional needs of the child. Addressing difficulties between them, these programs would provide counseling and ways to resolve conflict resulting from misunderstandings, anger, or jealousy that has led to dissolving their relationship.
3. Programs should, also, focus on reducing poverty within these families by providing young mothers and fathers with jobs, helping them to increase their abilities and earning capacities, and preparing them for employment in the new economy and technologically changing world. These programs would focus "their transition from school to work or from school to postsecondary training" (Wilson, 1996, p. 234). In addition to the creation of a large public works program with universal health insurance, a child care program, and earned income tax credits, Wilson suggests subsidized carpools in the inner city to the suburbs where many of the jobs are now located. He also suggests job information and placement centers.

4. Family reunification programs with the children could be offered in conjunction with incentive based programs. Thus, the fathers would be able to demonstrate their commitment to contribute economically to their children's well being and emotional development.
5. Programs could be offered that support grandmothers and other extended family members as they provide childcare and child rearing. Practice and the implementation of policy would be built upon, as Gadsden (1995) suggests, the concept that "kin" is comprehensive consisting of biological and non-biological supports; and the African proverb, "It takes a village to raise a child." It must be acknowledged that some programs already exist that contribute to the grandmothers as they care for their grandchildren. While these programs provide grants and counseling services to grandparents, there are other family members that also provide much needed childcare and other support, which they should somehow be encouraged to continue. Such programs could include support groups, respite care, and training programs to suggest a few that would strengthen the 'serve' of the grandmothers and other extended family members.
6. Programs provided by the churches within the community are vital for the survival of absent father families. Religion and faith in God has always played a vital role in the lives of Black families, with spirituality taking the form of church attendance (S. A. Hill, 1999). The faith-based community continues to provide many programs and services to the single parent families including much needed day care services, tutoring, and mentoring programs. It is crucial that more Black men, including those who are retired within churches and the community at large, reach out to mentor

- young Black males, providing guidance and role modeling. Other programs would include forums, boy scouts, camps, youth retreats, father/son activities, and other church and community agency functions.
7. Programs, conferences and forums by TOLEDO EXCEL, could be held to communicate with adult men the hardships of Black youth growing up in absent father families. This would serve to heighten the awareness of the adult males of the importance of fathers remaining involved in their children's lives, and even in the lives of those in the extended family, and neighborhood. Programs such as the exemplary TOLEDO EXCEL Program at the University of Toledo should be honored and highlighted at the national level so that other institutions could also implement such programs. Such supplemental education programs like TOLEDO EXCEL support and shape emerging adult identity development, while focusing on educational achievement as a key value and goal.
 8. Programs within the public school system should invite community leaders, retired fathers, and grandfathers into the classrooms and cafeterias to interact with youth by reading to them, tutoring, and mentoring them.
 9. Schools of social work could teach skills based courses incorporating the strengths/adaptive perspective as it utilizes the natural support systems of the extended family and community.
 10. Programs providing internships and service learning through churches and schools of social work partnering together would assist single parent families at the micro, meso, and macro level of functioning.

11. To raise the level of awareness, studies such as this should be circulated and presented throughout the communities of people of color, especially in the churches where many mothers and fathers attend. Articles should be written and published in journals, and newspapers; and presentations of this study should be made at all conferences of people of color.

The significance of this study

Though much has been written on the absent father family and its effects, little has been written on Black absent father families. This study is an important step towards addressing this gap in the study of Black families in the United State. It helps to provide a deeper understanding and appreciation of the experiences overcoming hardships faced by the single-parent, and to eradicate stereotypes and stigma surrounding Black families and their different structures. This study conducted on the lives of young Black men reared in absent father families explains in the words of the participants the experiences that contributed to their success. The strengths and resilience of Black families found in this study should help educators, human service professionals, and community leaders alike to rethink their attitudes and approaches to this population, and help to develop services and programs useful to Black families and children in fatherless homes.

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APPENDIX A

LETTER TO TOLEDO EXCEL PARTICIPANTS

Date

Name
Street Address
City, State Zip

Dear Name,

We are conducting research on the experiences that enable Black males from father absent families to become successful, productive members of society. As a University of TOLEDO EXCELL student we very much hope that you are able to meet with us to discuss your experiences in a family where the father was absent a significant portion of the time you were growing up. Your participation is very important in conducting a successful research project.

Two interviews and one focus group meeting will be scheduled beginning Monday, May 17, 2004 to discuss the experiences that enabled you to become successful. Since the sessions will be audio taped, you will be asked to sign a consent form that permits us to use your responses in this important research. We will be the only persons utilizing the tape. When writing about the session, we will protect your confidentiality by not using the your name or any other characteristics that reveal your identity. When the research results have been compiled, the tapes will be destroyed.

This research will increase knowledge about the circumstances that contribute to the successful lives of Black males living in absent father families. It will help develop a deeper understanding of not only the effects of fatherlessness but also a greater understanding of those situations that have helped to offset its negative effects.

There is no obligation for you to participate in this research. However, if you decide that you are able to meet with us, please confirm your acceptance of this important invitation by mailing the response form in the self-addressed, stamped envelope provided for you. If you have any questions, please call Janice Carson at 000-000-0000.

Cordially,

Janice Carson
Assistant Professor
Social Work Department
The University of Toledo

Helen Cooks, Ph. D.
Assistant Vice President
Office of EXCELlence Programs
The University of Toledo

APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

**Consent Form for Research
Life Histories of Successful Black Males
Reared in Absent Father Families**

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research project. Your participation is very important to gathering important data on your experiences that enabled you as a Black male from a father absent family to become a successful, productive member of society. Please read carefully the next paragraph. If you feel that you do not wish to participate in this research, you may leave. If you wish to be a research participant, then please sign your name as indicated below.

By signing my name below, I agree to participate in this research project. I am fully aware that my participation in the two interviews and the focus group will be audio taped and that the researcher will be compiling my responses in written format. I have been informed that in order to protect my confidentiality, my name will not be used, and that no other identifying characteristics will be revealed. I have been informed that only the researcher will review the audio tapes for the purposes of compiling research results, and then, all the tapes will be destroyed.

I hereby agree to participate in this research project and to be audio taped as specified above:

Signature of Research Participant

Date

Signature of Researcher

Date

APPENDIX C
PARTICIPANT RESPONSE FORM

Response Form**Please return this form**

In the self-addressed, stamped envelope provided for you by May 12th.

Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in this important research project! Your participation is very important to gathering important data on the experiences that enabled you as a Black male from a father absent family to become a successful, productive member of society.

Please fill out the form below as indicated. We are looking forward to your reply.

Please print this information

Name _____ **Phone Number** _____

Phone number at work (if we may call you there) _____ *Street* _____

Apartment Number _____

Email address (if you have one) _____

City _____ **State** _____ **Zip Code** _____

APPENDIX D

LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS REGARDING FOCUS GROUP MEETING

June 16, 2004

Dear

Thank you for your participation in this important research project, Life History of Successful Black Males Raised in Absent Father Families. As mentioned in our interviews, our final meeting will be a focus group meeting of all eight participants. During this time we will review some of the information and themes gathered from what has been shared in the interviews. This meeting will be held **Saturday, June 26, 2004 at 11:00 am** at the same location where our interviews were held, the TOLEDO EXCEL Office on the campus of the University of Toledo. We will have a light lunch, which will begin at 10:30am. The session will follow the meal and conclude at 1:00 pm.

Since there are only eight participants, the success and quality of our discussion depends on the cooperation of all who attend. We anticipate your attendance and we appreciate your helping to make this research project a success. Please bring any news articles, pictures, and awards that you have received.

Your attendance is very important and we thank you for your participation. We look forward to seeing you on Saturday, June 26, 2004 at 10:30am in the TOLEDO EXCEL Office of the University of Toledo.

Sincerely yours,

Janice Carson
Assistant Professor
Department of Social Work
The University of Toledo

Helen C. Cooks, Ph. D.
Assistant Vice President
Office of EXCELlence Programs
The University of Toledo

APPENDIX E
LETTER TO NOTE TAKER

June 16, 2004

Dear

Thank you very much for agreeing to take notes at the focus group meeting for my dissertation. The following is information regarding your involvement.

The focus group meeting of eight Black males and I will be meeting on Saturday, June 26, 2004 at 10:30 am in the office of the TOLEDO EXCEL.

Your responsibilities are as follows:

1. Be present to take notes on the discussion being held. I will provide you with the names of the participants along with pen and paper.
2. You are not considered a participant in the discussion. I will act as the forum moderator asking the participants to respond to my questions and to focus on themes that have resulted from two previous interviews with each of them. The intent of this kind of group is to provide an informal forum in which the participants feel comfortable to discuss their perceptions. You may hear them talk about sensitive issues and concerns. They have been assured that everything they say is confidential and that their names and other identifying characteristics will not be used in writing my research. Also, they have been assured that only I will review the audiotapes and notes for the purpose of compiling the research data. Thus, I will expect you not to mention anything you hear the participants discuss during the time you are at this meeting, even if you are asked about it.
3. Prior to the discussion, a light supper (pizza) will be served. Please help yourself and feel free to talk with the participants, making them feel comfortable, until we begin our discussion.
4. You may park in the parking lot near the TOLEDO EXCEL office. You will receive a check for \$40 at the end of this session. Again, I appreciate your assistance very much. Please contact me if you have any questions at 000-000-0000.

Sincerely yours,

Janice Carson
Assistant Professor
Social Work Department
The University of Toledo

APPENDIX F
PARTICIPANT THANK YOU LETTER

July 29, 2004

Dear

Thank you very much for your participation in the research project, Life Histories of Successful Black Males Reared in Absent Father Families. Your participation in the individual interviews and the focus discussion group is greatly appreciated. Your story was very interesting and quite touching. Thank you for giving me a better understanding of the experiences that contributed to your success.

A copy of the study will be made available to you in January 2005. You will be contacted at that time. Again, thank very much for your participation in and your invaluable contribution to this research project.

With much appreciation,

Janice Carson
Assistant Professor
Department of Social Work
The University of Toledo

Helen C. Cooks, Ph. D.
Assistant Vice President
Office of EXCELlence Programs
The University of Toledo

APPENDIX G
INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

- How would you describe your neighborhood – people, places, and church?

- How would you describe your relationship with your father?

- How did your father's life relate to your life?

2. Is there anything else you want me to know or think I should have asked?

Interview Protocol: Second Interview

Research Project: Life Histories of Successful Black Males Reared in Absent Father Families

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

(Briefly review with the interviewee the responses, interpretations and conclusions from our first interview)

1. How would you define success?

2. What were the important times or milestones in your life leading toward success?

3. Who/what was the key to your success. Explain what they did or provided for you.

How did they help to shape you?

4. Tell me about some of the pleasant times in your life.

8. What kind of family life would you want for your child(ren)?

9. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about or think that I should know?