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African American Sons' Perceptions of Their Fathers' Influence on Their Decision Whether to Pursue Higher Education

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African American Sons' Perceptions of Their Fathers' Influence on Their Decision Whether to
Pursue Higher Education

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
the University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
in
The Counselor Education Program

by

Tameka Bob

B.S. Northwestern State University, 1998
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May 2007

c 2006, Tameka Canesha Bob

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to evaluate African American sons' perceptions of their fathers' influence on their decision whether to pursue higher education. This research has qualitatively explored the connection between fathers' influence and sons' decision whether to pursue higher education. Data collection consisted of a preliminary focus group discussion, two rounds of individual interviews, and a post focus group discussion. Themes that emerged from participants' stories were: (a) similar definitions of the term "father", (b) perceptions of fathers' educational level vs. being a role model, (c) thoughts regarding fathers' emotions and masculinity, (d) beliefs that fathers have an influence on sons' decisions whether to pursue higher education, (e) similar beliefs toward higher education, (f) justification for their level of education, (g) feelings of college being an inconceivable thought for some males, and (h) similar spiritual beliefs. Data obtained from interviews and focus group discussions resulted in *The Black Father-Son Median Theory*.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

A limited number of studies have been conducted on potential influences on college planning of African Americans (Noeth & Wimberly, 2002), factors that influence the academic and vocational development of African American youth (Griggs, 1992), and factors that contribute to African American males' education (The Commonwealth Fund Pilot Survey of African American Men, 1994). Researchers have investigated the impact of fathers' behavior on their children's performance on the College Entrance Examinations (Furr, 1998) and whether there are significant differences in academic achievement between father-present and father-absent adolescents (Mboya, 1999). Related to, but different from the extant studies, the purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of African American sons of their fathers' influence on their decision whether to pursue higher education.

In order to fulfill the purpose of this study, I acquired data qualitatively. Qualitative data is rich and holistic with strong potential for revealing complexity (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Qualitative data are fundamentally well suited for locating the meanings people place on the events, processes, and structures of their lives. Because of the richness of qualitative data and the stories told of actual experiences of participants, I believe gaining information qualitatively has opened the door to generating a theory regarding African American male fathers and their sons' education.

I chose to utilize a grounded theory approach. Grounded theory emerged from the need to develop theory from the exploration of human interaction and behavior in social contexts (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Grounded theory was relevant for this study because there is no

existing theory regarding African American fathers' influence on their sons' education. This chapter provided background information, a rationale for the study, the significance of the study, assumptions of the researcher, limitations and delimitations of the research, and definitions of terms.

Background

“We have breaking news from Fox 8. Five African American males were killed in a drive-by shooting in the Uptown area of New Orleans, Louisiana. Three were in an automobile and two were walking at the time of the incident. All were between the ages of 13 and 19. Police are looking for two African American male suspects. If you have any information regarding the murders, please call Crimestoppers at 504-821-1111.” Just that quickly, more than five African American male lives were lost. Headline news reports such as this illustrate one of the reasons I have chosen to study this population.

Though the national death rate from homicide faced by young African-American males has fallen dramatically since 1991, it remains alarmingly high in absolute terms (Davis & Muhlhausen, 2005). In eight of the largest urban African-American communities, teenagers face probabilities of being murdered before they reach age 45 that range from one in 53 in Brooklyn to one in 12 in Washington, D.C. The crushing burden of these high murder rates not only is a human tragedy for America's urban communities, but also hinders economic and social development by frightening businesses out of these areas and disrupting social and family life.

The reality of this research brought a specific incident to mind. One beautiful morning about two years ago, I stopped at the local corner store to pick up the New Orleans *Times Picayune* newspaper. To my surprise, the front page article was titled *The Disappearing Black Man*. The author focused on violence in the community and lack of education among African

American males. Over the years I have worked in higher education settings with predominantly African American programs. In each program, women greatly outnumbered men. Though the programs were considered small, I learned that this ratio of women to men was also representative of large universities (Spero, 2006). As an African American, these numbers continue to disturb me.

African-American males often are categorized as at-risk in educational systems, and frequently they lag behind African-American females and their White male counterparts (Spero, 2006). They are more likely than any other group to be suspended from schools, and are underrepresented in gifted educational programs and advanced placement courses. They often experience the most challenges in higher education settings as both students and teachers. Noguera (2002) proposed that all of the most important quality of life indicators suggest that African American males are in deep trouble. In the labor market they are the least likely to be hired, and in many cities, the most likely to be unemployed. Beset with such an ominous array of social and economic hardships, it is hardly surprising that the experiences of Black males in education, with respect to degree attainment and most indicators of academic performance, also show signs of trouble and distress.

According to Noguera (2002), from 1973 to 1977, there was a steady increase in African-American enrollment in college. However, since 1977 there has been a sharp and continuous decline, especially among males. Black males are more likely to be classified as mentally retarded or as suffering from a learning disability and placed in special education. They are also more likely to be absent from advanced placement and honors courses. Whereas males commonly perform at higher levels in math and science related courses, the reverse is true for Black males. When compared to their White peers, middle class African American males lag

significantly behind in grade point average and on standardized tests.

Although there was research that sheds positive light on African American males, the negative research was much more prevalent. Because of what the media and statistics have stated regarding African American males, I sought to find the connection between fathers' influence and sons' decision whether to pursue higher education. Because society seems to believe that African American males are a lost generation, I sought to find out why. Is it because of lack of role models? Is it because of lack of opportunity? Is it because of lack of desire? Is it because of lack of support? Who or what is the strongest person, situation, or event that has influenced African American males' decision whether to pursue higher education?

*I thought I would find out why
I thought I would find out why most of this population is lost
I thought I would find out why the murder rate is so high
I thought I would find out why the high school drop out rate is through the roof
I thought I would find out why at colleges nationwide, females outnumber them
I thought I would find out why life seems so hard for this population
I figured if I could just talk with several of these individuals, maybe I can help*

*Not just read books and list statistics
But actually ask questions and get descriptive answers
Not just talk about how they act
But actually observe their behavior
Not just assume what they are going through
But actually listen to their concerns
Actually reflect on their words and experiences*

*Who are they?
African American males are who I am speaking of
The population America labels "lost"
The population that is known as the underdogs
The population I hope to find*

The idea that positive and nurturing social environments influence the educational experiences of college students is a consistent thread through research on African Americans in higher education (Polite & Davis, 1999). Of particular importance has been the notion of social

support and how it influences academic achievement. Harvey (2002) suggested that African American males have had a particularly difficult struggle in their attempts to achieve equity and inclusion in the American society. Structural and psychological obstacles have been consistently placed in their paths to deter their efforts to achieve the inalienable rights of freedom, justice, and equality that America has promised as fundamental elements of citizenship. I agree with Noguera's thoughts regarding African American males.

For African American males who are more likely than any other group to be subjected to negative forms of treatment in school, the message seems clear: individuals of their race and gender may excel in sports, but not in math or history. The location of Black males within schools, in remedial classes or waiting for punishment outside the principal's office, and the roles they perform within school suggests that they are good at playing basketball or rapping, but debating, writing for the school newspaper, or participating in the science club are strictly out of bounds. Such activities are out of bounds not just because Black males may perceive them as being inconsistent with who they think they are, but also because there simply are not enough examples of individuals who manage to participate in such activities without compromising their sense of self. Even when there are a small number of Black males who do engage in activities that violate established norms, their deviation from established patterns often places them under considerable scrutiny from their peers who are likely to regard their transgression of group norms as a sign of "selling out" (Noguera, 2002, p. 6).

Significance of the Study

Although African American males have been widely studied and continue to be studied (Blair, 1997; Griggs, 1992; Mboya, 1999), Greif, Hrabowski and Maton (1998) suggested that

very little has been written about the role of fathers in African American families. They found that many fathers played a key role. These researchers suggested subsequent research needs to look more at the relationship between sons and fathers (those who live in the home and outside of the home) and between young males and other older male role models in their lives.

Research (Gordon, 2002) has demonstrated that women greatly outnumber men in higher education. In addition to being outnumbered by gender in higher education, African American males are also outnumbered by other races. This study was needed due to the gap in research regarding the influence fathers may have on their sons' decision whether to pursue higher education. My research has expanded the knowledge base in the area of African American males and higher education. I have not simply provided statistical data, but I sought to add meaning to existing literature and also to fill the void in current literature as it relates to the influence of African American fathers on their sons' decision whether to pursue higher education.

Rationale for the Study

So you study violence
So you study drug use and abuse
So you study the high school drop out rate
So you study father absence

So you study high divorce rates
So you study homicide rates
So you study special education presence
So you study women vs. men in education

*So why not study African American fathers and their
influence on their sons' decision to pursue or not pursue
higher education*

As I reviewed the existing research regarding African American males, I could get a clear picture of what society thinks of African American males based on the titles of the articles. Some examples were *Lost boys: African American males*, *young African American males*:

Continuing victims of high homicide rates in urban communities (Davis & Muhehausen, 2000), *Multi-generational anger in African American males: Fathers behind bars* (Gooding Sr., 2005), *Do inner-city African-American males exhibit 'bad attitudes' toward work?* (Lattrell & Beck, 2000) and *The trouble with Black boys: The role and influence of environmental and cultural factors on the academic performance of African American males* (Noguera, 2005). All of these titles have a negative connotation.

Book titles had similar themes: Kill them Before they Grow (Porter, 1998), Sins of the Father, (Madlock, 1998), Rich dad, Poor Dad, (Kuyosoki & Letcher, 2002), and Countering the Conspiracy to Destroy Black Boys, (Kunjufu, 1995). The literature addressed how African American men are dying, how fathers are absent from the home, how the African American family has no male role models, the high drop out rate of African American adolescents, and the number of African American men in prison. However, I was unable to find much research regarding the perceptions of African American fathers' influence on their sons' decision whether to pursue higher education. My research explored why African American males are choosing or not choosing to pursue higher education.

Definitions of Terms

Absentee fathers - fathers who are not present in the home

Black/ African American - used interchangeably in this study; an American of African descent (Encarta Dictionary).

Family system - group of adults and kids related by genes, emotions, and social, spiritual, emotional, and physical laws, who regularly live with each other.

Father – a male who has a biological son.

Father figure – a male who conducts fatherly duties to a younger male who is not his biological

son.

Higher education – a four-year academic institution (college or university).

Illegitimacy/Illegitimate – not carried out, made, or constituted in accordance with the law, the rules governing a particular activity, or social norms and customs (Encarta Dictionary).

Poverty - the state of not having enough money to take care of basic needs such as food, clothing, and housing (Encarta Dictionary).

Role model – an individual that is looked upon favorably by another individual.

Stereotype – an oversimplified standardized image or idea held by one person or group of another (Encarta Dictionary).

General Education Degrees (GED) – a degree equivalent to a high school diploma.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Overview

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of African American sons of their fathers' influence on their decision whether to pursue higher education. This chapter presents a review of relevant literature which examines the current state of African American families, the importance of fathers to African American male development, African American males and higher education, and paternal influence on African American males' higher education aspirations.

There is a vast amount of information regarding African American male violence, school drop-out rates, and absentee fathers (Ajo & Lee, 1992; Bakersville, 2004; Gant, 1995). However, there is little data regarding the influence of fathers on their sons' decision whether to pursue higher education. This literature review presents a background of what has been studied and what is currently being studied regarding African American fathers and education.

Introduction

"The problem of lagging Black male achievement is a national one" (Holsendolph, 2005). Starting a discussion about the achievement of minority students, let alone race, is a difficult task (Smith, 2005). The majority of teachers, principals, superintendents, and school board members remain complicit in their silence about the plight of Black male students; and Black children, particularly urban youth, are astute in discerning adults' perceptions of them (Livingston & Nahimana, 2006). These perceptions can have a profound influence and dictate how Black children view themselves and what they believe they can achieve.

Boys reared in communities plagued by poverty, limited opportunities, and high rates of incarceration enter the adult world economically and politically emasculated (Livingston & Nahimana, 2006). Unfortunately, for Black youth, the juvenile incarceration rate is more than three times as high as for Whites (Smith, 2005). Far too often, the only guidance young Black males receive comes after they have committed an offense against the social order (Lee, 1991).

Moreover, Black males face major academic and social hurdles (Lee, 1996). Although many Black males achieve significant educational success, many others experience prohibitive challenges, often becoming frustrated, losing hope, and ultimately dropping out or being pushed out of school: 22 % of those expelled from school and 23 % of those suspended are Black males (Smith, 2005). To add to these disturbing statistics, fewer than half of Black males receive diplomas with their high school cohorts (Smith).

Over the past 30 years, considerable debate has focused on the issue of whether the public school system can educate Black male children and provide them the skills needed to be productive citizens (Livingston & Nahimana, 2006). In elementary, middle, and high school, Black boys are left back or expelled more often than other groups (Samuel, 2005). They are also more likely to be placed in classes for learning disabled or retarded children. They struggle with teachers' and administrators' lower expectations and higher fears and Black boys drop out of school more often than other children do. Although many Black families value education and provide environments conducive for academic achievement and healthy development among Black children, urban communities can present a number of challenges to raising children.

Images and perceptions of young Black males as lazy, incompetent, unstable, and violent are pervasive throughout American culture (Samuel, 2005). These images and perceptions can arise from home, school or neighborhood. Unfortunately, it is not unusual for Black males to

reach adolescence with a mistrust of their environment, doubts about their abilities, and confusion about their place in the social structure (Lee, 1996). By the time many young Black males complete their adolescence, they have been pulled over or stopped by the police, followed by store security personnel, and heard the locking of a car door as they passed for no other reason than that they are young, Black, and feared (Livingston & Nahimana, 2006). These negative stereotypes lead many young Black men to devalue education and school and develop a macho or hyper-masculine posture (hard or thug) in an attempt to protect and define themselves.

African American Families

Gordon (2002) asserted that there exists a myth that African American men contribute little or nothing to the well being of their families. However, parents and the family represent the most important socializing agents and institutions for young males (Lee, 1996). Moreover, a particularly troubling aspect of family life is a home without a resident father or husband (Zuberi, 1998).

Among Blacks, out-of-wedlock births have jumped threefold, from an already high 22 % in 1960 to 68 % of all Black births today (Jordan, 1995). Most Black children are being raised by single mothers (Jordan; Zuberi, 1998). The majority of African American households with children are headed by women, and since the 1970s the odds of an African American child living in a mother-headed household have more than doubled. It is a social reality that Black male youth may have to form identities with either minimal or no positive adult male role modeling (Lee, 1996). Nearly three of five Black children (62 %) live with only one parent (Jordan). African Americans are the only ethnic group in which a majority of children live with single mothers. However, about 5 % of all Black single parents are men. About 327,000 Black children under age 18 are being reared by single Black men. These single Black fathers tend to

have at least a high school education, and nearly half of them own their own homes and have working-class to middle-class incomes.

Hanson (1995) suggested that if father once knew best, for a growing number of families today, father is nothing more than a figure from the past who barely affects daily life. He believes that the father was once the keystone of the family, but now the father has been reduced in many cases to little more than a child support payment. The simple truth is that while there are many Black fathers doing the right thing, there are still far too many who are not doing the right thing (Mitchell, 2006).

The breakdown of the American family, characterized by the rise of illegitimacy and the absence of fathers in the home, has created a problem that some say far outweighs the national debt, the health care crisis, and budget deficits (Hanson, 1995). Illegitimacy, poverty, and absent fathers are all on the rise in the African American community. Bloir (1997) examined the demographic and family process characteristics of 116 academically successful, low-income, urban, African American adolescents, in which he focused on factors supporting students' relative success. Approximately one-third (32%) lived in a two-parent household. Males were almost twice as likely as females to live with their father or step-father. For example, a typical home was comprised of four to five people: a single mother, the adolescent and two siblings, and in about one-third of the cases, a dad. Annual household income was slightly less than \$15,000. An average student had encountered three stressful life events in the previous two years.

Furr (1998) cited Graham, Beller and Hernandez' (1994) study in which they reported that, compared with children from intact families, children who have lived in a mother-only family complete fewer years of schooling, are less likely to receive high school diplomas, fall

behind their age cohorts in high school, and are less likely to enter college. Furr (1998) stated that King's (1994) study indicated father visitation has no beneficial effects for children's well-being in general, or for educational performance in particular.

The Importance of Fathers to African American Male Development

The ancestors of African American fathers are men who through sweat and blood fought for their rights as men in a racist society (Gordon, 2002). During the 1970s and 1980s, fatherhood emerged as a male role identity of increasing interest to both the general public and social science researchers (Ajo & Amos, 1992). Much of this heightened interest was due to the women's movement, the larger number of women in the work force, and the changing roles of women in American society, coupled with the subsequent impact on the family system. With these societal changes and shifts in research trends, a more inclusive exploration of fatherhood was initiated.

Gordon (2002) suggested that African American men may not meet the standard definition of fathers, but they have facilitated the overall successful endeavors of the Black community for generations. According to Gordon, they are the strength, discipline, and support that enable the next generation to prosper.

Johnson-Elie (2003) related his experiences with his father. He stated:

Daddy had only an eighth-grade education, but his expectations for me were a lot higher. He stressed education, telling me to get one so that I could achieve goals as lofty as the skyscrapers that his sweat helped to raise. Now, I'm trying to reinforce with my own children the values and the common sense that my dad taught me. He taught me a valuable lesson: Value your work and always put forth your best effort no matter what your position is in life. It's what I live today (p. 2).

According to Baskerville (2004), fatherhood is rapidly becoming the number one social policy issue in America. Absentee fathers have reached epidemic numbers in the African American community (Davis & Miller, 2004). Chen (2004) asserted that fathering cannot be ignored because fathers play an important role in helping their children grow. She noted that boys can learn from their fathers about growing up as a male and about male interests, activities, and social behavior. Loving fathers who provide limit setting, moral reasoning, and reasonable and firm guidance can help promote their children's competence. Zuberi (1998) noted that Moynihan emphasized the importance of a male presence in a household, and the disapproval of families without a male household head. Moynihan believes the economic well being of all African American children is enhanced by the presence of fathers in the household.

Davis and Miller (2004) suggested that, at present, the African American community is weak and on the verge of collapse because the foundation is weak. Davis and Miller suggested that the absence of Black fathers in far too many homes has contributed significantly to the deterioration of both family and community life. Yost (2004) stated that when fathers are absent, less is demanded of sons. He asserted that deficits in family functioning affect youth violence and aggression, substance abuse, academic achievement, cognitive performance, social and emotional adjustment, well-being, ethnic identity, and personality.

Fatherhood is in trouble in the Black community and throughout American society (Browning, 1999). Declining economic opportunities for inner-city Black men have decreased their ability to marry and support their wives and children. Wilson (2004) noted that African American males often are nurtured in a hostile and non-supportive environment which includes poverty, problems with the criminal justice system, unemployment, inequitable educational opportunities, and negative media images. Research (Davis & Miller, 2004; Lee, 1991; Lee,

Bailey & Jordan, 1997) suggested only Black men can teach Black boys how to be men. Lee (1991) believed only a Black man can model the attitudes and behaviors of successful Black manhood.

Historically, Black fathers have gotten a bad rap (Johnson-Elie, 2003). It is a social reality that many African American male youth may have to engage in the process of identity formation with minimal or no positive adult male role modeling, which compounds their existing issues (Lee, Bailey & Jordan, 1997). As a result, given the historical social and economic limitations placed on Black manhood in America, the range of adult African American male role models available to adolescent males may be severely restricted. Moreover, the developmental passage to adulthood can become a confusing experience for many African American male youth because the evolution of gender appropriate roles and behaviors for African American men has been stifled by historical and social powerlessness.

Fatherhood is a significant masculine identity (Ajo & Bryan, 1992). Gadsden, Wortham and Wojcik (2001) conducted a pilot study to examine the experiences of urban fathers, focusing on their views of the challenges of fatherhood and how they accounted for both their irresponsible and their promising fathering behaviors. An interviewee was asked where he got his image of what a father should do. He answered “all the years of not having one, wishing that I did...the pain in my life is what made me want to be a father to my child, because I wanted my father, you know. I prayed at night that my father would come (p. 15).”

Gadsden et al. (2000) asked whether the meaning of fatherhood for Black men is related to their economic standing, educational attainment, or age are relevant from a social, contextual perspective. Fifteen fathers who were participating in a voluntary fathering program participated in the study. Data were gathered by means of semi-structured, in-depth interviews. Fathers had

an opportunity to tell stories about their childhoods, relationships with their parents, their relationships with the mother(s) of their children, and their activities with their children. Most of the fathers reported that they were trying to break out of the intergenerational pattern of father absence of the child or incarceration. They were constructing new or different identities for themselves around fathering, and their own development, education, and sense of responsibility.

African American Males and Higher Education

Bill Cosby informed all of his children that they could become whatever they wanted if they pursued higher education (Dyson, 2005). Cosby stated that being equipped with an undergraduate and hopefully a graduate degree, they may become psychologists, anthropologists, engineers, or artists. They would never have to worry about how they would pay rent or buy food or a car, as it would all be provided along with a paid vacation.

Gordon (2002) asked “Why has there been and why does there continue to be a lag in the pursuit of a college education by African American males (p. 19)?” According to Hefner (2004), education in the 19th century was not only worth dying for, but was the Golden Fleece that best combated the vestiges of enslavement. By the 20th century, fueled by the work of the Freedmen’s Bureau, several colleges for African Americans were established to grant Blacks what had been denied them for so long – the right to know. Still, Black males continue to be confronted with a series of obstacles in their attempts to attain academic, career, and personal-social success (Lee, 1996).

According to Brotherton (2001), in the 1999-2000 academic year, the number of African Americans earning bachelor’s degrees exceeded the 100,000 mark: 103,874 degrees were awarded, an 8.74% increase over 1997-1998. In 1999-2000, of the degrees awarded at the top three bachelor’s-degree-awarding historically Black colleges and universities, Black men

accounted for just 37.4 % (Florida A & M University), 33.8 % (Southern University and A & M College), and 33.4 % (Howard University). At non-historically Black colleges and universities, the percentages are even lower. At Chicago State University, Black men received 23.6 % of bachelor's degrees awarded to African Americans; at Georgia State University and Temple University, Black men accounted for 25.4 % and 24.1 %, respectively, of bachelor's degrees awarded to African Americans.

Education in the African American community was once viewed as the key to living the “American dream” (Hefner, 2004). It is now viewed by many young Black males as an unnecessary barrier that stands between them and making fast money. The problem of low numbers of African-American males seeking higher education has been studied extensively (Morgan, 1996). Administrators, scholars, faculty, and students continue to actively discuss the socioeconomic and educational plight of African American males and their declining enrollment, retention, and graduation from institutions of higher education (Spradley, 2001). In almost every academic category, the 20-year growth rate of Black men in higher education is extraordinarily slow when compared with other groups, particularly their female counterparts (Hefner). This does not mean that the actual number of Black men enrolling and graduating from college has decreased over the last 20 years, but it does mean that the rate of growth over that time period is so sluggish that other groups are becoming far more educated relative to the population. Increasing the numbers of students who enroll in and graduate from postsecondary institutions is a widely supported societal goal, and the trend line for African American males continues to move in the right direction.

According to Smith (2005), more African-American males receive their General Education Degrees (GED) in prison than graduate from college. In 2000, a study by the Justice

Policy Institute revealed that 603,032 Black men were enrolled in higher education, whereas 791,600 were languishing in jails and prisons (Smith). Despite the discouraging statistics, the total reality shows that thousands of African-American males are achieving high levels of academic success (Harris, 1996). Jordan (1995) has questioned the research regarding African American males and incarceration. He stated that there are more African American men in college—517,000 as recently as 1991 in undergraduate, graduate, and professional schools. In fact, the percentage of Black male high-school graduates enrolling in college, about 30 %, has held steady for at least three decades. Jordan asserted that even including the number of Black men in custody, (i.e., free on bond awaiting trial or on probation) it probably would not exceed the number of brothers enrolled in institutions of higher learning.

The rate of growth in the number of African American male bachelor's degree holders became noticeable toward the end of the 1990s compared to what it had been earlier in the decade (Harvey, 1999). In 1993, the Association of American Medical Colleges reported a 23.1 % increase in the number of Black men who applied to medical schools compared to 1992 (Jordan, 1995). Harris (1996) concluded that the current data on African American males on such indices as college enrollment, prison statistics, and high school and college completion rates are dismal at best and frightening at worst. Holsendoph (2005) stated, "For too many Black men, setting foot on a college campus is like emerging from the airport as a stranger in a foreign land" (p. 1).

Paternal Influence on African American Males' Higher Education Aspirations

Noeth and Wimberly's (2002) study focused on the postsecondary planning of African American and Hispanic high school seniors in five of the nation's largest urban public school districts: Chicago, Los Angeles, Miami-Dade County, Milwaukee, and New Orleans. The

American College Test (ACT) field staff, the council of the Great City Schools staff, and local school administrators helped to identify four or five schools in each district to participate in the study. Participating schools had populations ranging from 850 to 5,000 students. ACT collected data from students in 23 public high schools in the five school districts. Counselors at each high school selected a range of 10-20 African American and/or Hispanic seniors who had taken the ACT Assessment to participate in the study. For students to participate in the study, they had to represent a range of the school's African American or Hispanic senior population in terms of background and plans and have completed the ACT assessment: 65% of the students surveyed were African American, 30% were Hispanic, and 5% belonged to other racial groups. Students were divided into two groups per school to complete the College Planning Survey, which included questions about potential influences on college planning. The study was conducted in late spring of the students' senior year. Students were asked about their educational expectations, long-term educational plans, and reasons for planning to attend college. During subsequent 90-minute focus-group sessions with trained facilitators, students were given the opportunity to elaborate on factors that influenced their postsecondary planning, discuss their college and career plans, and make suggestions regarding information that would help younger students to explore and plan for college. Participants reported varying educational levels of their fathers, ranging from high school attendance with no degree to graduate degrees. The findings clearly indicated that most students perceived their mother as being a strong influence on their college planning process. Fathers had a strong influence on students' college plans, but not to the same extent as mothers. Of the 85% who had a father or male guardian present, 43% said their father was very helpful and 19% indicated somewhat helpful.

Griggs (1992) investigated the factors that influence the academic and vocational development of African American and Hispanic youth. Data were collected via a questionnaire and structured interviews from 36 college juniors and seniors. Twenty-eight were female, of whom 18 were African-American and 10 were Latino. Six Latino and two African American males also participated. All subjects earned above average grades, aspired to earn at least a bachelor's degree, and had made a vocational decision. The following quotes illustrate the influence of fathers in vocational decision making:

Well, I guess my father. He has always been someone who worked for himself. He had his own refrigeration business as well as his own farm. He worked very hard, very long hours, but I never saw him being given orders on a job. I guess that may have been like a role model which I decided to follow (p. 12) .

Participants were asked "Which individuals were especially helpful to you?" One replied: "My dad, he always said I could do what I wanted to do and he never accepted anything less than my best effort." When asked "Who had the most influence on your plans?" one participant replied:

Well in a way, I guess my dad did because he is a factory worker and since I was a little kid, I've noticed that he works every single day. He probably works harder than people that make more than him. I've talked about it with him and he kind of scared me into making sure that I'm in college (p. 15).

In response to the question, "What about other friends that did not do well, what would have helped them?" replies included:

I can think of a few that didn't do very well in school. It tended to be people who had problems in terms of family structure. People who grew up with grandmothers because their parents were somewhere else. I think just seeing my dad and my mother get up and

go to work every day was very important. I think basically I can say I had good mentors. I worked at a bank and if I decided not to go to work, my dad would ask why. I had to be sick not to go. If I was sick and felt better around noon, he would say why don't you go on now and stay a little later. His mentality rubbed off on me. Some people don't have that in their family (p. 20).

Another participant responded "I wish they (peers) had a good role model or something they're interested in. For me, it was my father who taught me to be a success and I think having someone to look up to in the years of growing up will help you" (p. 20). In the previous quotes, participants identified who had the most influence in their lives and who modeled the importance of hard work and education. Their fathers served as positive role models.

The Commonwealth Fund Pilot Survey of Young African-American Men (1994) surveyed men in four cities: Los Angeles, Atlanta, Chicago, and New York. In the survey, factors were addressed that contributed to African American males' education. Educational attainment and schools, school-to-work transition, youth programs, sports, parents, and family income were assessed. Respondents indicated that parents who recognized the value of education and were involved with schools are an important factor. Students completing high school are more likely to have parents who met with their teachers and helped them with their homework. Those who stayed in school were more likely to have grown up in a two-parent household, and to feel close to their mother and father. Compared with those who stayed in school, young men who dropped out of school reported that their parents were less involved in supervising homework and in visiting their school and teachers. Both groups reported that parental support was the most important factor that helped or would have helped them to stay in school. The mothers of those who stayed in school were almost twice as likely as those who

dropped out of school to have been married while their sons were growing up (61% v. 38%). More than half of the young men who stayed in school (51%) reported that their father had lived with them while they were growing up, compared with 41% of those who dropped out of school. Only 14% of those who dropped out of school reported having a very close relationship with a father or male guardian while they were growing up, as compared with 30% of those who stayed in school.

In a study by Furr (1998), a sample of 231 students from two urban universities in the Midwest were administered a questionnaire to investigate the impact of fathers' behavior on their children's performance on college entrance examinations (CEE). About 21% were African American. Slightly less than 60% of the students came from intact families, which were defined as families in which the heads of the household were married to each other and were the parents of the children in the household. The remainder of the students came from divorced families, in which the biological parents were divorced and the children lived either with their mother only or with their mother and stepfather. Students whose parents had joint custody or whose fathers were awarded custody following the divorce were excluded from the sample. The study utilized several independent variables, which included fathers' education, ethnicity, income, fathers' encouragement, and fathers' involvement. Results indicated that non-custodial fathers' post-divorce behavior can greatly offset educational disadvantages. In intact families, fathers' ethnicity and income were related to CEE scores. In addition, when these students perceived their fathers as encouraging and involved in their education, their scores were higher.

In terms of parent-child interactions, children reported talking to their mothers fairly often and significantly less often with their fathers (Bloir, 1997). As the number of people living in the same household increased, perceptions of mother-child affect and parental involvement

decreased, while perceptions of father-child interaction, participation in family decision making, and grade point average increased. The data suggested that when fathers are present, the children grades are higher, closer to A than to B+ averages. Bloir suggested this may be attributed to father-present families with increased father involvement with schooling, and more harmonious family interactions.

A study was conducted by Mboya (1999) to determine whether there are significant differences in academic achievement between father-present and father-absent adolescents. Data were collected from 276 high school students in South Africa. Academic achievement was measured by the Human Sciences Research Council's (HSRC) Scholastic Achievement Test, covering biology, english, and mathematics. Father-present students were found to score significantly higher than father-absent students. The findings suggested that a father's absence due to work conditions (i.e., demanding work schedule) has a deleterious effect on the scholastic performance of young people.

Greif, Hrabowski, and Maton (1998) conducted a study that focused on fathers' stories. The purpose of the study was to understand how a high-achieving group of African American college age men are succeeding. The fathers who raised these men were interviewed. The fathers were asked about their upbringing. In addition, the following questions were asked: How important was education to their parents? Did the fathers receive special messages about being Black and about being male? How did the fathers' mothers and fathers work as a team? And how did they raise their sons and help them to succeed when so many young African American males do not? A father who was a college graduate mentioned:

My father was a truck driver and my mother a midwife. He lost his leg in 1940 and was a huge role model for his perseverance to carry on as he did. My mother supported him

along the way. My mother only made the fifth grade and my father the eighth, so their push was to have us graduate, which we all did. That was a great achievement for them. My father was a strict disciplinarian, especially for the boys. We were like cinderellas growing up and we had to be in by midnight. He made sure we were home safe. He was from Jamaica, a proud man who wanted to keep his sons and daughters intact. I think that had a great influence on how I raised my children (p. 31).

Another father mentioned:

Both my parents completed high school. They separated when I was young. But I was lucky in that I spent time with both of them. My mother was a housewife and raised me, my five brothers and sisters, and her own brother and sister, who were only a few years older than me. I dropped out of high school, and that brought a lesson home that you have to complete your education. My father was a truck driver and then a foreman. I would travel with him, and we'd see all kinds of traits in people, and he'd ask me. "Do you want to do that?" And I'd say, "No." He'd say, "You've got to get an education." I was working when I was fourteen as a laborer, and as I got older I was doing the billing. I realized that to get a good job, I'd have an education, especially being a Black man in the 1950s (p. 30).

The fathers provided a rich diversity of experience, from the sons of sharecroppers and military personnel to the sons of the unschooled and teachers. Even though these fathers were from various backgrounds, they all had sons who placed in the top 2% of all African American students in terms of math SAT scores and high-school grades. Greif, et. al (1998) found several themes that characterized the fathers' varied approaches to guiding their sons to academic success. The roles of provider, decision maker, socializer of children, and husband were heard

loud and clear from the fathers. The fathers described a special relationship with their sons, one where they were clearly in charge. The following themes emerged: families placed the highest value on education and succeeding academically; fathers were raised by parents who worked hard; fathers were raised strictly; religion was emphasized; the fathers' parents, regardless of how many children were in the family, were actively involved in their children's lives; families usually had a traditional division of roles; and families encouraged overcoming adversity.

A limited number of research studies have been conducted regarding African American males, African American families, and African American fathers and education. There remains a void in the research regarding the influence of African American fathers on their sons' decision whether to pursue higher education.

To summarize, Noeth and Wimberly (2002) studied potential influences on college planning. Griggs (1992) investigated factors that influenced the academic and vocational development of African American youth. The Commonwealth Fund Pilot Survey of African American Men (1994) addressed factors that contributed to African American males' education. Furr (1998) investigated the impact of fathers' behavior of their children's performance on the College Entrance Examinations. Mboya (1999) studied whether there are significant differences in academic achievement between father-present and father-absent adolescents. Lastly, Greif, Hrabowski, and Maton (1998) focused on the fathers' stories, to understand how a high achieving group of African American college men were succeeding.

The previous research focused on either adolescent sons or fathers as participants in the studies. In my research, participants included adult sons. The words "youth," and "factors" were used as descriptors in several of the previous studies. These words can imply that the information researchers were seeking may be general, not specific. Though several of these

studies resemble some aspect of my study, none have sought to research the perceptions of African American sons of their fathers' influence on their decision whether to pursue higher education.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Rationale for Qualitative Methodology

How do African American fathers influence their sons' decisions whether to pursue higher education? Miles and Huberman (1994) stated that qualitative data are a source of well-grounded, rich descriptions and explanations of processes in identifiable local contexts. Qualitative research investigates the poorly understood territories of human interaction (Glesne, 1999). Like scientists who seek to identify and understand the biological and geological processes that create the patterns of a physical landscape, qualitative researchers seek to describe and understand the processes that create the patterns of the human terrain. With qualitative data one can preserve chronological flow, see precisely which events led to which consequences, and derive fruitful explanations (Miles & Huberman). Good qualitative data are likely to lead to unanticipated findings and new integrations; they help researchers to get beyond initial conceptions and to generate or adjust conceptual frameworks.

In addition, the findings from qualitative studies have a quality of "undeniability." Personal commitment, trust, and time are the key to rich data and useful interpretations (Glesne, 1999). Words, especially when organized into incidents or stories, have a concrete, vivid, meaningful flavor that often proves far more convincing to researchers, policymakers, and practitioners than pages of summarized numbers (Miles & Huberman, 1994). As a researcher, I am interested in participants' stories. I sought to hear each individual's perceptions of the influence his father has had on his decision whether to pursue higher education.

Understanding involves getting at participants' perspectives, but it is more than that (Glesne, 1999). It is reaching some collective understanding that includes the researcher and

those researched. Qualitative data also focus on naturally occurring, ordinary events in natural settings (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Confidence in the data is reinforced by local groundedness, the fact that the data were collected in close proximity to a specific situation rather than through the mail or over the phone. Another feature of qualitative data is their richness and holism, with strong potential for revealing complexity; such data provide “thick descriptions” that are vivid, nested in a real context, and have a ring of truth that has a strong impact on the reader.

Moreover, the fact that such data are typically collected over a sustained period makes them powerful for studying any process. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggested that qualitative data places emphasis on people’s “lived experiences,” and may be well suited for locating the meanings people place on the events, processes, and structures of their lives. Qualitative data are also helpful for discovering “perceptions, assumptions, prejudgments, presuppositions,” and for connecting these meanings to the social world around them. Because of the richness of qualitative data, the stories told of actual experiences of participants, I believe gaining information qualitatively has opened the door to generating a theory regarding African American sons’ perceptions of their fathers’ influence on their decision to pursue higher education.

Grounded Theory

Creswell (2005) defined grounded theory design as a systematic, qualitative procedure used to generate a theory that explains, at a broad conceptual level, a process, an action, or interaction about a substantive topic. It is a set of carefully grounded concepts organized around a core category and integrated into hypotheses (Glaser & Holton, 2004). Grounded theory is usually utilized to generate a theory rather than use one “off the shelf.” Generating a theory from data means that most hypotheses and concepts not only come from the data, but are systematically worked out in relation to the data during the course of research (Glaser & Holton).

Grounded theory is used to explain a process, action, or interaction; when the researcher wants a step-by-step, systematic procedure; or when the researcher wants to stay close to the data (Creswell, 2005). I utilized a step-by-step systematic procedure to generate a theory to offer more insight into African American fathers' influence on their sons' decisions whether to pursue higher education.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) stated that the goal of grounded theory is to formulate hypotheses based on conceptual ideas that others may try to verify. The hypotheses are generated by constantly comparing conceptualized data on different levels of abstraction, and these comparisons contain deductive steps. Grounded theory does not aim for the "truth" but strives to conceptualize "what's going on" using empirical data. There is a systematic generation of theory from data that contain both inductive and deductive thinking.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) stated the results of grounded theory are not reporting of facts but are probability statements about the relationship between concepts, or an integrated set of conceptual hypotheses developed from empirical data. Empirical means observed, experimental, practical. This type of data could be acquired only through face to face conversation. I could not acquire this information by simply reporting the crime rate, poverty rate, or high school drop-out rate of African American males. In order to understand "what's going on," I had to communicate with these men, observe their non-verbal behavior, notice if there was a change in their tone of voice when certain questions were answered, reflect on certain feeling words, and reflect on questions that they wished not to answer.

Grounded theory was relevant for this study because there is no existing theory related to the perceptions of African American sons of their fathers influence on their decision whether to pursue higher education. Grounded theory emerged from the need to develop theory from the

exploration of human interaction and behavior in social contexts (Glaser and Strauss). Therefore, utilizing grounded theory as a qualitative approach was most beneficial in learning how African American sons perceive their fathers' influence on their decision whether to pursue higher education.

Pilot Study

After realizing that I really want to know sons' perceptions of their fathers' influence on their decision whether to pursue higher education, I decided to conduct a pilot study. Though the participants' in this study consisted only of adults, I wanted to talk with younger males to get an idea of their thought processes at an earlier age.

The first round of interviews included a focus group and three individual interviews. Participants consisted of six African American males' ages 11 and 12. The participants were students at an elementary school, which was also the location of the focus group discussion. All but two of the participants resided with their fathers. All participants were asked general questions regarding their family members, such as: How many people live in your household? Can you tell me their relationship to you? Questions were also asked regarding their perceptions of their fathers, including: How much time do you spend with your father? Does your father have a college degree? If you could describe your father in one word, what would that word be? My goal was to witness what might arise from asking general questions. Would participants begin to focus more on their fathers? Would they talk more about their mothers? I wanted to identify where general conversation would take us. I found that the younger participants did not seem excited to talk about the relationship they had with their fathers and kept their answers short. They seemed to talk more about their mothers. However, they all shared their fathers' thoughts regarding higher education.

For the second round of interviews, I spoke with two African American adult males, ages 29 and 30, both of whom held a college degree. The interviews were held in a college setting. More specific questions were asked regarding their perceptions of their fathers and higher education, such as “Do you feel that your father has influenced your decision to pursue higher education?” The adult participants were very straightforward with their answers, allowing me to specify what I would like to learn from them. Due to the detailed answers I obtained from the pilot study participants, the data allowed me to move from a general to a more specific research question.

Researcher Assumptions

I realize that I hold various assumptions regarding African American fathers. I chose to conduct this study based on my key assumption, which is that fathers directly or indirectly influence their sons’ decisions whether to pursue higher education. Based on my experience as a college counselor, I have learned that a high number of African American males do not pursue higher education. A high number of fathers are absent in the African American home. As a result, I assume there is a lack of male role models in the African American community.

Another bias I possess is that most African American fathers have lost their place in the home. This bias is centered on personal experiences. As an individual reared in a single mother home and having been surrounded by African American families with no father figure, this bias has some basis in circumstances.

I also assume that most African American fathers do not encourage their sons to pursue higher education. It appears that a large number of African American men hold blue collar jobs, which may have a connection with the number of males who pursue higher education. In my past experience as an inner city youth, I noticed that a large number of African American boys

were influenced by men in their neighborhoods. In my line of work, I often ask young boys what they would like to be when they grow up. They usually respond by stating a career with which they are familiar. This is usually a career held by an adult male in their family or community.

The last assumption I can identify suggests that a large number of African American men believe making money quickly is more important than earning a college degree. This bias derives from the large number of African American men who choose to pursue careers in which a limited amount of education is required, such as a laborer or even a drug dealer. If my assumption is correct, this definitely can have an impact on the number of African American males who choose to pursue higher education. Finally, I assume that African American fathers want what is best for their sons. However, because these fathers did not have positive role models, it may be difficult for them to understand how to raise their sons. Overall, I presume that the physical presence of fathers, educational level of fathers, and the relationship between fathers and sons have an influence on their sons' decision whether to pursue higher education.

Role of the Researcher

Glesne (1999) suggested that researchers clearly define their roles. Therefore, it was imperative for me to maintain my identity as a researcher in this study. I believe a researcher is one who asks questions and listens, in order to gather information. The definition of a researcher is situationally determined, depending on the context, the identities of others, and the researcher's own personality and values (Glesne). Because I could identify with these responsibilities, I felt very competent in assuming this role. My role was to ask questions, in order to shine light on the experiences of African American males regarding their relationship with their fathers and their pursuit of higher education.

I believed that there would be times when my counselor identity would be hard to suppress. Even though some counseling techniques, such as active listening and attending, may be useful, other techniques, such as asking questions are relevant to the study. As a counselor, I was always concerned about why and how things happen. This could be both an asset and a deterrent in my researcher role. A researcher is as interested in gaining information as a counselor is, but may word questions differently. Therefore, there is a thin line between the roles of counselor and researcher.

In my pilot study, my adult subjects perceived me as a counselor/interviewer, whereas the adolescent group perceived me as a teacher or social worker. Due to school administrators' rapport with me, it seemed as if I was simply perceived by the participants as someone who cares about the participants' success and whether they have achieved what they define as success. With the latter in mind, I define my researcher role as someone who is interested in the chosen population and whether they will pursue higher education.

I believe maintaining good rapport with participants is essential. Glesne (1999) described the term rapport as the character of effective field relationships. In qualitative inquiry, the nature of relationships depends on at least two factors: the quality of the researcher's interactions to support the research (rapport), and the quality of the researcher's self-awareness of the potential effects of self on the research (subjectivity). Good rapport can be the single factor that enables participants to be honest in an interview.

As mentioned earlier in the pilot study section, my role was perceived differently with each participant or group. However, in each role, I believed that I was trusted by the participants. There had to be a level of trust in order for participants to disclose truthful information to me. For this study, I disclosed my role at the beginning of my meeting with

participants. All participants were allowed to ask questions regarding both my role and the study.

Research Design

A key characteristic of a grounded theory design is a process approach (Creswell, 2005). For example, the research problem leads to a study of a central phenomenon. The central phenomenon addresses a process which contains a sequence of activities, including actions by people and interactions by people. A grounded theorist begins to understand this by developing categories, relating categories, and developing a theory that explains what the researcher has found. This phenomenon would address the interaction between the son and the father. More specifically, what type of behaviors, non-verbal or verbal, did the father exhibit that may have had some influence on his son?

The search was for 15 African American males, ages 20 to 29. These males were members of Household of Faith Church, and participants in the JOB 1 youth program. I serve as a member of Household of Faith Church, and a partner with the JOB 1 Youth program.

As a member and Dance Ministry Director at Household of Faith Family Worship Church International, I had access to African American males who were interested in participating in the study. In order to inform the congregation, following church service, I set up a station for interested persons to sign up to participate. From this pool of participants, there were varied educational levels. Therefore, I hoped to obtain participants whose decisions were both to pursue and not to pursue higher education.

Because of this previous partnership with the Job 1 program, I also had access to African American males who met the criteria to participate in the study. My working relationship with

the director of the center allowed me to gain access to this population. Therefore, the director of the program arranged for me to meet with volunteers from the program.

Study participants included males who are currently enrolled in college, males who possess a college degree, and males who have never attended college. Their participation was strictly voluntary. Once individuals were identified and agreed to participate in the study, five individuals participated in a preliminary focus group to begin the study. The purpose of this focus group was to gather information from the participants regarding their thoughts on how fathers influence their sons' decision whether to pursue higher education. In addition, the information gathered also helped to revise and fine-tune questions for individual interviews. Following the pre-focus group, a different group of nine individuals participated in two rounds of individual interviews. These individuals did not participate in the pre-focus group. This was my first time meeting with the participants individually; thus, questions were more specific than questions asked during the focus group, but not yet straight to the point. During the second round of interviews, I provided a summary of my analysis of the first interviews. I then presented this summary to the interviewees for clarification. I asked them if I had interpreted their responses correctly and if they would like to add any information to what I had presented. This served as a form of member checking.

To conclude the study, five individuals participated in a final focus group discussion. These individuals also participated in the pre-focus group discussion. This discussion allowed them to share their opinions with each other. During the post focus group discussion, I presented my findings and interpretation of my findings.

Once information was received on all rounds of interviews and focus groups, I then began to develop graphs and charts to display the data.

Data Collection

Data collection consisted of a preliminary focus group discussion, nine individual interviews, and a post-focus group discussion.

Criteria for Selection of Participants

The following criteria were applied in selecting participants for this study:

1. Participants must be of the male sex.
2. Participants must be African American.
3. Participants must range in age between 20 and 29.
4. Participants must be willing to participate in two focus groups or two individual interviews.
5. Participants must be able to identify their biological father or identify a consistent father figure since childhood.

Focus Groups

Focus groups may be useful at virtually any point in a research program, but they are particularly useful for exploratory research when rather little is known about the phenomenon of interest (Stewart & Shamdasnai, 1990). As a result, focus groups tend to be used very early in a research project and are often followed by other types of research that provide more quantifiable data from larger groups of respondents.

In addition, focus groups can yield a great deal of specific information on a selected topic in a relatively short period of time (Vaughn, Schumm & Sinagub, 1996). They offer new dimensions to data collection because of their emphasis on dynamic group interaction. The groups allow respondents to react to and build upon the responses of other group members (Stewart & Shamdasnai., 1990).

Preliminary Focus Group Discussion

Five individuals from the Household of Faith Family Worship Church International (HFFWCI) participated in the preliminary focus group discussion. The discussion was held at the HFFWCI. The intent of this focus group was to gather information from the participants regarding their thoughts on how fathers influence their sons' decisions whether to pursue higher education. The purpose was also to gather information to help revise and fine-tune questions for individual interviews. In order to attain this information, the following questions were asked:

- Tell me a little bit about yourselves.
- If you had to define the word “father,” how would you define it?
- If you had to describe your father in one word, what word would that be?
- Tell me your thoughts regarding higher education.
- Are you satisfied with your current educational status?
- Can you explain to me how your father influenced your decision whether to pursue higher education?

The discussion helped me understand major influences of African American fathers on their sons.

Individual Interviews

Weiss (1994) stated that through interviewing we can learn about places we have not been and could not go and about settings in which we have not lived. We can learn through interviewing about people's interior experiences. This is what I planned to learn through conducting individual interviews. My questions were formulated to learn general information about the interviewees, their fathers, their siblings, and their educational aspirations. However,

because I am a qualitative interviewer, I sought open ended answers that offered information about the interviewee's innermost experiences.

If researchers have the right informants, they can learn about the quality of neighborhoods or what happens in families (Weiss, 1994). Learning about the quality of neighborhoods was quite relevant in this study. Even though I was not searching to answer the question of how the quality of neighborhoods influences African American males' decisions whether to pursue higher education, there was significance in what occurs in the interviewees' neighborhoods.

During individual interviews, I also learned about men who served as role models to the participants as children. Interviewing brings together different persons and personalities (Glesne, 1999). Because of this, I was able to learn about their perceptions of their relationships, their families, their work, and themselves.

First Round of Individual Interviews

The preliminary focus group discussion participants' responses to the questions assisted me in confirming the questions that were asked in the individual interviews. The individuals who participated in the individual interviews did not participate in the preliminary focus group discussion. During the individual interviews, I learned about the interviewees, their fathers, their siblings, and their beliefs toward higher education. I also learned about men who served as role models to the participants as children and their perceptions of their relationships with their fathers. The following is a list of questions that were asked in the first round of individual interviews:

- Tell me a little bit about yourself.
- Tell me about your neighborhood as a child.

- What are some of the careers the adult males held in your neighborhood?
- Tell me about your father.
- What was your relationship like with your father?
- What are your beliefs regarding higher education?
- If you could change your decision regarding pursuing higher education, would you change it?
- What are other factors that contributed to your decision whether to pursue higher education?
- Did you have any conversations with your dad about college?

Second Round of Individual Interviews

All nine individuals who were interviewed participated in the second round of individual interviews. The second round of interviews served as a form of member checking. I compiled a summary of my analysis of the first interviews. Thereafter, I presented this summary to the interviewees for clarification. I then asked the interviewees if their responses were interpreted correctly and if they would like to add any information to the pre-existing summary. The second round of individual interviews concluded with the following question: What are your overall thoughts regarding fathers' influence on their sons' decision whether to pursue higher education?

Post-Focus Group Discussion

. In the post focus group discussion, individuals were present who participated in the preliminary focus group discussion, as well as in-depth interviews. During the post focus group discussion, I presented my proposition, findings, and interpretation of the findings. The post focus group discussion assisted me in making meaning of information gathered from the

preliminary focus group discussion and the in-depth individual interviews. The following questions were asked:

- Tell me what you think the following statement implies: “My father was my role model, even though he did not have a college education.”
- Tell me what you think the following statement implies: “Plain and simple, he’s my daddy, that’s it.”
- Tell me what you think the following statement implies: “I probably can’t tell you one time in my life that my daddy told me he loved me, but it showed in his actions.”
- Do you believe that males feel like they are less masculine or macho if they attend college?
- Tell me what you think the following statement implies: “I don’t feel no love or no hate.”
- Do you feel that there were any other factors that influenced your decision whether to pursue higher education?
- Do you feel that your environment, the neighborhood you grew up in, and/or the careers you saw as a child, had any influence on your decision whether to attend college?
- Do you believe that your fathers’ level of education has an influence on your decision whether to pursue higher education?
- Do you think college it is inconceivable for some guys to think they can attend college?
- Do you feel your fathers have had a direct or indirect influence on your decision whether to pursue higher education?

Data Analysis Procedures

The essential elements of grounded theory methodology include theoretical coding, open coding, selective coding, memoing, sorting, and writing up (Glaser & Holton, 2004). The conceptualization of data through coding is the foundation of grounded theory development. Theoretical codes give integrative scope, broad pictures, and a new perspective. In open coding, the process begins with line-by-line coding of the data to identify substantive codes emergent within the data. The researcher codes for as many categories that will fit, while coding into as many categories as possible. New categories emerge and new incidents fit into existing categories. Open coding allows the analyst to see the direction in which to take the study by theoretical sampling, before he or she has become selective and focused on a particular problem.

In this study, open coding was necessary. The process of coding the data began with line-by-line coding of the interviews and focus group discussions. I then categorized the data based upon the content of the codes. Even though I may have previously considered several categories, new categories I had not anticipated emerged. Selective coding was also used to analyze the data received from research participants. Selective coding means to cease open coding and to delimit coding to only those variables that relate to the core variable in sufficiently significant ways as to produce a parsimonious theory (Glaser & Holton, 2004).

There are several categories that codes may be placed in that may not relate to the core variable of the study. Therefore, this process was used to limit those categories that are not relevant to the influence of fathers on their sons' decision whether to pursue higher education. Even though much of the information participants offered had relevance to the core variable, there was a portion of data that was not useful. I began to code only for data that contributed to

the theory of how African American fathers influence their sons' decision whether to pursue higher education.

Memos were also useful. Memos are notes the researcher writes throughout the research process to elaborate on ideas about the data and the coded categories (Creswell, 2005). In memos, the researcher explores hunches, ideas, and thoughts, and then takes them apart, always searching for the broader explanations at work in the process. The basic goal of memoing is to develop ideas (codes) with complete freedom into a memo fund that is highly sort-able (Glaser & Holton, 2004). Memos help the analyst to raise the data to a conceptual level and develop the properties of each category that begin to define them operationally.

I did not get to the meat of the data until I took time to elaborate on the codes and categories. This is where the information really began to get "juicy." Once I began to memo, I compared some codes to other codes, explored statements that were made, and looked for connections between statements. The idea was to sort out all the codes and look for meaning. Memoing was the beginning of the end of generating a theory.

After I completed coding and memoing, I proceeded to the next step. Sorted memos generate a theoretical outline, or conceptual framework, for the full articulation of the grounded theory through an integrated set of hypotheses (Glaser & Holton, 2004). Theoretical sorting of the memos is the key to formulating the theory for presentation or writing. Sorting is essential because it puts the fractured data back together. With sorting, data and ideas are theoretically ordered. Sorting integrates the relevant literature into theory. Data obtained from interviews and focus groups assisted me in forming a theory.

My literature search did not reveal any research to support my research question regarding African American males and education. The literature does not speak specifically

about the perceptions of African American sons of their fathers' influence on their decision to whether to pursue higher education. Therefore, I chose to conduct a grounded theory inquiry. Through interviews and focus groups, I have generated a theory that elaborates on the perceptions of African American sons of their fathers' influence on their decision whether to pursue higher education.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the thoughts and perceptions of African American sons regarding their fathers' influence on their decision whether to pursue higher education. Data collection consisted of a preliminary focus group, two rounds of individual interviews, and a post focus group discussion. Profiles of the research sites, the focus group participants, and individual participants are presented. The categories that emerged regarding the father's influence are presented. The properties, dimensions and relationships among these categories are presented as an initial theoretical statement.

Site Profiles

Seven participants who volunteered to be a part of this study were members of the Household of Faith Family Worship Church International. Three were participants in the Job 1 Youth Career Program. Two participants were members of the Jomajo performing group. The remaining two individuals were walk-ins. They were not members of the two research sites. They were simply referred by friends. The Household of Faith Family Worship Church International (HFFWCI) is one of the fastest-growing churches in the city, located in Harvey, Louisiana and New Orleans, Louisiana (Beautiful Black, 2007). The HFFWCI is pastored by Antoine M. Barriere. Pastor Barriere's goal is to build believers who worship Christ, strong in faith, family, and finances, all to fulfill the word of God. Under the leadership of Pastor Barriere and First Lady Dale Barriere, the membership has been taught extreme faith, forever family and "out of debt" finances, all while continuing to make friends.

JOB 1 is the City of New Orleans' office of workforce development (www.cityofno.com, 2007). Its purpose is to identify and align the supply of workers in the city with the needs of growing businesses. Through monitoring the needs of a knowledge-based economy and providing career counseling and training, JOB 1 leverages the capabilities of citizens to fill necessary positions while working with local businesses to customize training, screen applicants, and help forecast future demand. The Youth Career Center serves as home base for all JOB 1 Youth Services. The center offers: paid/unpaid work experience, summer employment opportunities, employment and career counseling, General Education Development (G.E.D.), current job listings, training, adult mentoring, alternative secondary school service, occupational skill training, and tutoring.

Jomajo is a performing arts company that was founded in 2006. The group is composed of an array of actors, dancers, and singers. Their mission is to assist in rebuilding New Orleans by bringing back African American theater. The group has performed at such venues as Ashe Cultural Center, Zulu's Lundi Gras Celebration, local churches and schools. Their most recent production was the Broadway hit "Dreamgirls," directed by Leo Jones, who is also the founder and director. Two participants in the study were members of the Jomajo performing arts company.

Participants' group profiles

Prior to participating in the study, participants were given a profile sheet to complete (See appendix E), which assisted me in creating the participants' demographics table (Table 1). The participants' group profile is presented to depict an overall view of the group demographics. Fourteen individuals volunteered to participate in this study. All participants ranged in age between 20 and 29. Five individuals participated in the preliminary focus group discussion, nine

individuals were individually interviewed, and five individuals who participated in both the individual interviews and the preliminary focus group were included in the post focus group discussion. Of the 14 participants, only five were fathers. Twelve participants had one or more siblings and two participants had no siblings. Two participants were pursuing their General Education Diploma (G.E.D.), while one held a G.E.D. Another individual held a high school diploma. Four individuals had some college experience and five were enrolled in a higher education institution at the time of the study. One participant held a bachelor's degree.

Educational levels of the participants' fathers were varied. One father attended high school but did not attain a high school diploma. Four fathers earned a high school diploma. Four fathers attended college but did not possess a college degree. One earned an associate's degree and two earned a bachelor's degree. Two of the participants' fathers held advanced college degrees.

Individual Profiles

Individual profiles are presented to introduce each participant and offer participants' perceptions of their personal experiences. Even though participants are close in age and are of the same gender and race, their thoughts and experiences differ.

Participant #1: Tee

As he sat very attentively as a participant in the focus group discussion, Tee put on his eyeglasses and presented as a soft, yet well-spoken individual. He is 20 years old and a member of the Household of Faith Family Worship Church. He is from the Caribbean Islands and has traveled an extensive distance to attend Xavier University, where he is majoring in chemistry. Tee does not have any children; he has three siblings. Tee's father holds an Associate's degree.

Tee

described his father as “encouraging.” He stated, “My father greatly influenced me. Now that I’m looking back in retrospect, I could see how he did encourage us, but when I was in it, like when he was preparing us for SATs, I just didn’t want to study.”

Participant #2: N

While I waited anxiously for N to arrive to the group, time passed slowly. I asked one of the participants to call him to assure that he would be attending the focus group discussion. When N arrived, he remained calm and relaxed, appearing not to know what to expect. N is 25 years of age. He is a member of Household of Faith Family Worship Church. He has three siblings and one son. N attended college for a short time, but did not persist to completion. His father attended high school, but did not persist to attain a high school diploma. N described his father as “absent.” He mentioned:

That would be the one word I would use. That’s self explanatory. He just wasn’t there. My mom was dad and grandmother, and all them [he believes that his mom and grandmother played the role of his daddy]. They played all of those roles. You learn from different people as you grow up, that God places in your life what a man is. So you don’t always need a man there to become a man. God will place the people there to help you to be what He wants you to be.

Participant #3: JT

JT was the last to arrive at the focus group discussion. As everyone sat and enjoyed the food provided for them, JT tried hard not to share in the meal, due to his decision to eat healthy foods. However, he did not withstand temptation for too long. Before the discussion began, JT chose to try two pieces of chicken, and he was satisfied with his choice. JT was very helpful

during the discussion. He decided to pick up the tape recorder and hold it up to each person who spoke. He also served as the disciplinarian when the group began to get a little playful.

JT is also a member of the Household of Faith Family Worship Church. He is 21 years of age. He does not have any children; he has two siblings. His father pursued higher education, but did not attain a college degree. JT described his father as an “instructor.” He said:

If I had to give an example for that, it’s kind of like when you go bowling and they put the guard rails up, that’s kind of like my daddy. He’s kind of like a guard rail to a certain extent. He gives me all the information I need, if possible. At one point, he used to try to punk me into going to college. But then realized that wouldn’t work. So now he gives me all the information it takes to succeed in life, to even go further than any college degree could ever give me. And this type of instructor, you won’t find at any university, any college at all. This is like the instructor of life.

Participant #4: Jay

Jay is a 24-year-old father of one daughter. He is a member of Household of Faith Family Worship Church. Jay was the second participant to arrive to the focus group discussion. He was dressed in casual pants, shirt and tie. He appeared to be very bubbly in personality and ready to get the conversation started. Jay enjoyed food and drinks while waiting patiently for the other participants. Jay holds a bachelor’s degree. His father has some college experience but does not hold a degree. Jay did not have much to say when asked, “If you had to describe your father in one word, what word would that be?” However, he answered:

I felt like the Cosby Show family. We had a perfect family. He was a Godly man. He was a preacher. He was a good example. He showed love to his wife. And I just looked up to him. I wanna say just being a leader.

Participant #5: JW

JW is a 26-year-old musician, who is a member of Household of Faith Family Worship Church. He has five siblings and is not a father. JW did not like the rule of having to hold the football in your hand before being allowed to speak. However, he seemed to be very serious about the topic and offered in-depth responses. JW attended college, but did not graduate. His father holds a master's degree. He described his father as "perfect." JW said:

Out of everything that I went through, it's hard to see it when you look back on it, but he was compassionate. I never saw him lie [he never witnessed his father tell a lie]. He was always a truthful person. His family was his priority over anything. That's why I would describe my dad as being perfect. And apart from all that, the most important thing my dad ever did for all of us was give us Jesus.

Participant #6: Dee

Dee was the first individual to participate in an individual interview. The interview was held in a conference room at the JOB 1 Career Center. Dee is a participant in the JOB 1 Youth Career Program. He arrived dressed casually in blue jeans and a tee shirt. As we walked to the conference room, he mentioned that he was just leaving class. He is a 20-year-old student at Loyola University, majoring in Drama Communications. He is employed at the Anthony Bean Community Theater and is also an aspiring actor. Dee has two siblings and no children. His father holds a high school diploma. Dee seemed very comfortable talking with me. He maintained eye contact and was quite attentive. When asked "What was your relationship like with your father?" Dee responded:

My birthday is on January 15th. On that day I got a card. And that was the last time I talked to my father recently. But going back to my childhood, I mean it was sparingly, he

came in and out. It wasn't no like real relationship so to speak. I kind of figured that out on my own, between looking at what was right and what was wrong, what I want and what I didn't want. I kind of like raised myself, so to speak, as far as becoming a man.

Participant #7: KB

KB arrived to my home comfortably dressed in blue jeans, a tee shirt, and a baseball cap. It seemed as if he did not know what to expect. However, once we began conversing, KB seemed to relax a bit. As we sat on the sofa, it appeared as though KB became more and more interested in the topic of conversation.

KB is 27 years of age and an only child. He does not have any children. KB is an aspiring actor and is a member of the performing group Jomajo. He attended Grambling State University before deciding to enter the military. He does not hold a college degree. His father completed a high school education. When asked about his father, KB responded:

He always planned for the future. He kept the family supported. My father is a very, very, smart man. He only had a high school education. He never went to college, but he's very, very, very smart. My father always had my best interest in mind. My father is pretty much my role model, as opposed to any other males in the family.

Participant #8: MJ

MJ is a 21-year-old participant in the JOB 1 Youth Career Program. MJ and I met in the conference room of the JOB 1 Youth Career Center. As he walked in dressed casually, with his hair braided to the back, a baseball cap covering most of his braids, and two gold teeth shining, he smiled and said, "Are you Tameka?" I was eager to begin conversing with him. MJ is currently pursuing a General Education Diploma. His father was a medical doctor who is now

deceased. His mother is also deceased. MJ has four siblings; one is deceased. When asked about his father, MJ stated:

Oh my father, my father was a doctor. My father went to college. He went to UNO for 8 years and he became a doctor at University and Ochsner hospital. My father deceased now and my mom. My dad, he had wife problems and he killed himself.

Participant #9: AM

AM is 22 years of age. He is a participant in the JOB 1 Youth Career Program, where he is currently working toward his General Education Diploma. He also works as a self-employed barber. AM has two siblings and one daughter. His father has a high school diploma. AM and I met in the conference room at the JOB 1 Youth Career Center. AM arrived at the center before me and was waiting as I walked through the door. As we sat, AM appeared to be a mature individual who was eager to get started. When asked about his father, AM responded:

My father is my best friend. I can go to him for anything. We don't ever get into it. He know me, I know him. Just like today, he's sitting outside right now. He'll help me and I'll be there to help him. But any time I get into a jam, he's there. He's my stepping stone. He wasn't with my mama during my young age. But basically, he stuck there and showed me that he doesn't have to be there to show me how to be a man. He let me go, but he also guided me.

Participant #10: Joe

Joe asked me to meet him at a local community college in the rear parking lot. Because I am a bit directionally challenged, I had to call Joe to confirm the directions. Once I finally found the correct parking lot, Joe and I found a cement table located on campus. This made for a

comfortable meeting area. The sun was shining, and the love bugs were active. It was a relaxing setting.

Joe is a 20-year-old student at Howard University. Post-Katrina, he decided to attend a local community college to save money to return to Howard. Joe is studying Film Production, in hopes of becoming a movie director. He is a member of Household of Faith Family Worship Church. He has one sibling and no children. His father attended Louisiana State University, but did not persist to degree completion. When asked about his father, he stated:

My father is a very humble person. He inspires me not through words, but his actions; even the way he treats my mom. He treats my mama with respect. He is a very giving person. I would say I have a good relationship with my dad.

Participant #11: Bee

As I maneuvered through Bee's neighborhood trying to find my way to his home, it became very difficult because due to Hurricane Katrina, there were no street signs. Once I found Bee's home, I rang the doorbell; only to be surprised to hear Bee say that we could not meet inside. He suggested we meet outside. While we stood for a minute trying to figure out an appropriate place to meet outside, I suggested that we simply sit in my car. Bee agreed.

Bee is a 20-year-old student at Southern University at New Orleans (SUNO). He is classified as a sophomore and is studying Pre-Journalism/Mass Communications. He attended Alabama State University prior to Hurricane Katrina. After Hurricane Katrina, he returned home to attend SUNO. Bee has two siblings and no children. His father earned a bachelor's degree from Southern University of Baton Rouge, Louisiana. When asked about his father, Bee responded:

He's a patient person. We had our ups and down, like father and son goes. But I'll just say that I can honestly say that I can come to him with a problem and he will always have a solution or he will try his best to have a solution. And I sometimes take him for granted and think he's just being old and set in his ways. When all the chips fall down, he always comes to bail me out, when my friends can't do it.

Participant 12: Mic

I was surprised to be greeted by Mic's 3-year-old-daughter who opened the door and welcomed me into their apartment. The atmosphere was busy, as his wife was preparing dinner and feeding their newborn baby. She attempted to settle the kids down so that Mic and I could begin the interview.

Mic is a 29-year-old father of three. He does not have any siblings. He holds a commercial driver's license, and he is employed as a truck driver. He does not possess a college degree, although he earned a General Education Diploma. Mic believes that his father has a high school diploma. When asked about his father, Mic responded:

As far as I remember, when we lived in the project, he used to come from time to time and I used to go by his house from time to time. Well, he got out of jail about 7 or 8 years ago; we were working a construction job together. And that was actually the last time I saw him. He ended up going back to jail. Plain and simple, he's my daddy and that's it. It's no love. It's no hate. That's the man that made me and that's it.

Participant #13: Tee II

Tee II is a resident of New Orleans east. It was equally difficult for me to locate his home due to the absence of street signs. However, it was a joy to reach his home to be greeted by his warm family. When I arrived, I was welcomed by his parents, his wife, and his handsome

twin boys. It was a beautiful Saturday afternoon, and everyone seemed to be relaxed in the comfort of their home.

Tee II is 20 years of age. He has one sibling and is the father of two. Prior to Hurricane Katrina, he attended Louisiana State University. He currently attends Southern University at New Orleans (SUNO), where he is studying Computer Technology. His father is a graduate of Southern University of Baton Rouge, Louisiana. When asked about his father, Tee II replied:

My dad just retired from the school department. His father instilled things in him and he did his best to instill it in me. When I went away to college and I was doing my thing and having fun living the college life, I never forgot the things he taught me. I think I would call my dad like a man, a strong person. He doesn't show a lot of emotion. Maybe one time in my whole life, I ever seen my dad cry. The way he raised me and showed me that he felt, that he loved us.

Participant #14: Al

After rescheduling our first meeting, Al arrived to my home promptly. He appeared comfortably dressed in black jeans and a navy blue tee shirt. His long dreadlocks were pulled to the back. Before he sat, he pondered for a moment about what side of the sofa he would like to sit on.

Al is 29 years of age. He has one sibling and one is deceased. Al is a member of the Jomajo performing group, where he is an actor and singer. He is an eighth grade teacher by profession. Al pursued higher education, but does not have a college degree. He is 18 credits away from completing a college degree. His father pursued higher education for a short time, but did not attain a college degree. When asked about his father, Al mentioned:

My mom and dad split up when I was about 6. When I was between the ages of maybe 6 and 9, he was around, but not a constant, maybe once every 2 to 3 months. But when I turned like maybe 10 or 11, I stopped seeing him a lot. And it wasn't like until I turned like maybe 21 that I started developing a real relationship with my father. He'd call at Christmas. He might call you for your birthday. And maybe one other time when he was on that sauce (gestured drinking). But don't get me wrong, I had a wonderful and blessed childhood.

Participant demographics are depicted in Table 1.

Data Analysis

Miles and Huberman (1994) suggested that one major feature of well-collected qualitative data is that they focus on naturally occurring, ordinary events in natural settings, so that we have a strong handle on what "real life" is like. Analysis consists of three concurrent flows of activity: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data tend to be analyzed through an inductive, ongoing and involving process of identifying themes within a particular context.

Ryan and Bernard (2007) suggested that theme identification is one of the most fundamental tasks in qualitative research and one of the most mysterious. At the heart of qualitative data analysis is the task of discovering themes.

Preliminary Focus Group Discussion

The intent of the preliminary focus group discussion was to gather information from the participants regarding their thoughts on how their fathers influenced their decision whether to

Table 1 - *Participant Demographics*

Pseudonym	Participation	Age	Educational Level	# of Children	# of Siblings
Tee	Pre and Post-focus group	20	Currently in college	0	3
N	Pre-focus group	25	Some college	1	3
JT	Pre and Post-focus group	21	High School Diploma	0	2
Jay	Pre-focus group	24	Bachelor's Degree	1	1
JW	Pre and Post-focus group	26	Some college	0	5
Dee	Individual Interview	20	Currently in college	0	2
KB	Individual Interview	27	Some college	0	0
MJ	Individual Interview	21	Currently pursuing G.E.D.	0	4
AM	Individual Interview	22	Currently pursuing G.E.D.	1	2
Joe	Individual Interview/Post-focus group	20	Currently in college	0	1
Bee	Individual Interview	20	Currently in college	0	2
Mic	Individual Interview	29	General Education Diploma	3	0
Tee 2	Individual Interview/Post-focus group	20	Currently in college	2	1
Al	Individual Interview	29	Some college	0	2

pursue higher education. A second purpose was to gather information to help revise and fine tune questions for the individual interviews.

As I prepared the refreshments for the participants, I felt a little anxiety. The anxiety was not due to lack of preparedness, but simply a feeling of wanting to know what the participants had to say. The setting was the second floor of the Household of Faith Family Worship Church. There were five tables, one of which we utilized for the discussion. The refreshments were set up on the table adjacent to the one we utilized. Outside the room, the atmosphere was quite busy. Various meetings were taking place simultaneously with our discussion. Prior to the start of the discussion, three little boys entered the room unannounced, searching for a way to get to the other side of the building. When we began, there were the beautiful sounds of gospel singers rehearsing in the background. However, this did not disturb the discussion.

As I conducted the analysis, I was able to derive themes from the preliminary focus group discussion. I utilized a set of coding procedures to help provide standardization and rigor to the analytical process. First I conducted a detailed line-by-line analysis of the focus group discussion transcripts to better understand participants' experiences. This is known as microanalysis (Patton, 2002). Second, open coding was completed in order to generate the initial themes of participants' experiences.

Participants provided basic descriptions of their beliefs, as they related to fathers and higher education. From these beliefs, characteristics of participants were identified. These characteristics were their spiritual beliefs and their definition of the term "father." Participants also found it important to justify their current level of education. Utilizing axial coding, a relationship emerged between participants' spiritual beliefs and their definition of the term

“father.” Participants offered a definition of fathers that related to their spiritual teachings (see Table 2).

Definition of the term “Father”

The second question in the preliminary focus group discussion was “How would you define the term father?” Consistent with participants’ spiritual beliefs, responses included spiritual references. Jay stated, “As long as he’s trying to do the right thing and he’s a Godly man and he gets his answers and advice from God, he should be a good father.” J.W. mentioned, “Someone who governed their lives according to the principles or way of God, whereas they studied the word of God and built their life around or set up around the way God had it, and instilled it in their children.” J.T. said, “I think a father is someone who can help lead and direct, whether it be like a spiritual, biological, step father.”

There was a relationship between how they defined themselves and how they defined father. Even if they did not view their biological fathers from this perspective, they consistently offered their viewpoint of what fathers should exhibit. Though participants offered definitions of fathers that included spiritual references, varied responses were mentioned when they described their fathers. Participants described their fathers in terms of role, meaning, and presence (see Table 3). Role is the part their father played in their lives. Meaning is how participants described their fathers in terms of what they mean to them. And presence implies whether the father was physically present or absent in their lives.

These participants utilized the words God, Godly, or spiritual when defining the word “father.” It is clear that they see fathers as men who follow the word of God, men who raise their children according to Christian principles. When participants spoke more about themselves, a strong theme of spiritual beliefs emerged.

Spiritual beliefs

Four of the participants serve as musicians for the church and one participant serves as the sound booth technician. Although all participants were members of the HFFWCI, I did not expect such a strong theme of spirituality to emerge. When I asked the participants to tell me about themselves, each individual mentioned God or church. J.W. stated, "I love the Lord very much and he's first in my life and everything that I do. I try to live a life that is pleasing to Him. Apart from God, I know that I would be nothing." Tee said, "I'm 20 years old. I go to Xavier [University]. I'm a chemistry major. I'm going into full time ministry after I graduate." J.T. responded, "The main things of my life are music and church. I'm a big time family man. I love the family. That's about it. Oh, and I'm 21 years old."

All participants also thanked God for their current situation. Nick offered, "I'm 25 [years old] and living life like I wanna live it. And I thank God because He's opened a lot of doors for me. I think God had His hand on me in a lot of that." J. W. said, "I was going to school to do something that my heart really wasn't in and God has blessed me in ways now that I've made more money being a musician quitting college, knowing that it wasn't for me."

Participants were very open about their belief and faith in God. After one individual would thank God, others would nod in agreement. They all defined themselves as Christian and were very thankful to God.

Table 2 – *Relationship between spirituality and definition of father*

Participant	Spiritual view	Definition of “father”
J.W.	“I love the Lord very much and he’s first in my life. I try to live a life that is pleasing to Him.”	“A father is someone who is right under God, someone who governed their lives according to the principles or way God and instilled it in their children.”
J.T.	“The main things of my life are church and music.”	“I think a father is someone who can help lead and direct, whether it be spiritual or biological.”
Jay	“We had a perfect family. My father was a Godly man. He was a preacher. He was a good example.”	“As long as he’s trying to do the right think and he’s a Godly man and he gets his answers from God, he should be a good father.”

Justification for level of Education

One participant in the preliminary focus group discussion held a bachelor's degree. One participant is currently enrolled in college, and three participants pursued higher education for a short time but chose not to continue toward a college degree. The question was asked, "What are your beliefs regarding higher education?" Participants who were not currently enrolled in college seemed to offer justification for their decision. J. W. stated eagerly, "I really believe that we spend too much time telling kids the wrong thing; to go to college, to get a good job, just so you can go to work for somebody else. I think it's for who it's for." It seemed as though J.W. was an advocate of entrepreneurship. He believed higher education is only necessary in some cases.

J.T. said forcefully, "I was on my way to college and I was about to waste my parents' money. To me, I think a college education is good, but I think life education is even better." J.T. believed it would have been a waste of his parents' money for him to pursue higher education. He agreed with J.W. that, as a musician, he did not need to attend college.

N offered, "I like learning. I just didn't really like school too much. I like learning things, just not in that atmosphere. It just wasn't for me. So I mean it's good for what it's good for." Consistent with J.W. and J.T., N agreed that, based on the individual and the chosen career, college may or may not be necessary.

I also found that participants who chose not to continue through college compared themselves to others who had completed college. For example, N stated, "I felt like I was better than a lot of the professors at what they were teaching. I know a lot of people graduated college that worked. They had to start at the bottom, then they get to the top and they're older." J.W. said somewhat aggressively, "Now I look at myself, not in a way that I look down on my friends,

Table 3 – *Participants descriptions of their fathers*

Described in terms of....	Description of Father	Participant
ROLE	Leader Encourager Instructor Role model Best friend	Jay Tee JT KB AM
MEANING	Perfect Best friend Humble, giving Patient The man that made me and that's it Strong person Awesome	JW AM Joe Bee Mic Tee II KB
PRESENCE	Absent No real relationship Not a constant presence [Father is deceased]	N Dee Al MJ

but my friends in high school, I'm doing way better than all of them. They were delayed, but I wasn't, because I stepped out on faith."

Overall, participants who were not currently enrolled in college believed that higher education is not for everyone. They stated that society teaches us that it is the norm, but it is not right for all individuals. They believed that dedication and motivation to succeed are more important than attaining a college degree and higher education does not necessarily signify attending a university. The fathers of all these participants encouraged them to pursue higher education. It appeared as though their fathers' words regarding higher education were important. It may be that, because they chose not to follow through with their fathers' advice, they felt it necessary to explain in detail why they chose to follow another route.

Final thoughts of the preliminary focus group discussion

When nearly one hour had passed, some of the participants began to signal me that they needed to leave. Bible study was scheduled to begin and they had to serve as musicians. I then asked the final question, which was, "Can you explain to me how your father influenced your decision whether to pursue higher education?" J.W. responded:

I would have to go from my dad to my spiritual father because my dad and I, that was one of the places where we actually clashed because my dad was somebody who hustled. So I would say the knowledge that my dad gave me of my spiritual father of God is what helped me to get to that next level to push to be able to say I know what's in me and I now that I'm going to be successful.

Tee responded:

My father greatly influenced me. Both of my parents are from the Caribbean where education is not free as it is here. So they pushed me hard because they had to work

really hard to get where they were. And as far as they could tell, coming from the Caribbean to here the best way to do that is to go college so my dad pushed me to go college.

Though J.W. spoke in detail earlier about how his father influenced him, when asked directly about his father's influence, he chose to talk more about his spiritual father. Tee began his response by stating that his father influenced him. While all participants were unable to respond to this question due to time restraints, J.W.'s and Tee's response set a hopeful foundation for the individual interviews.

I then thanked them for their participation. The goals of the preliminary focus group discussion were accomplished. Those goals were to gather information from participants regarding their thoughts on how their fathers influenced their decision whether to pursue higher education and to gather information to help revise and fine tune questions for the individual interviews.

First Round of Individual Interviews

During the individual interviews, I learned in-depth information about the interviewees, their fathers, and their beliefs toward higher education. The interviewees also informed me about men who served as role models to them as children and their perceptions of their relationships with their fathers. I was amazed at the differences among participants. Overall, during our discussion, participants came across as innocent, intelligent, talkative, shy, interested, inquisitive, regretful, mature, wishful, and spiritual.

As with the focus group discussion, microanalysis was utilized to code the interview transcriptions line by line, followed by the process of open coding. Memos were also utilized. Utilizing memos allowed me to explore ideas to search for broader explanations of participants'

thoughts. The process of memoing also allowed me to develop codes, which gave me freedom to categorize the data based upon the content of the codes. Once I began to memo, I compared some codes to other codes, explored statements that were made, and looked for connections between statements. In addition, selective coding was used to analyze the data obtained from the participants. Selective coding was done to end open coding and to delimit coding to only those factors that relate to the influence of African American fathers on their sons' decision whether to pursue higher education in sufficiently significant ways as to produce a hypothesis or theory.

Fathers' Influence on Their Sons' Decision Whether to Pursue Higher Education

I sought to answer the very important question of how sons perceive the influence of their fathers on their decision whether to pursue higher education. Directly or indirectly, all sons believed their father had an influence on their decision whether to pursue higher education. Al, Dee, and Mic did not want to follow in their fathers' footsteps. They wanted to become better men than what their fathers exhibited. Sons who perceived their fathers positively felt that their fathers had a direct influence on their decision whether to pursue higher education. Fathers' level of education also seemed to have some influence on their sons' decision whether to pursue higher education (see Table 4).

KB's father directly encouraged him to pursue higher education. He also led by example by sacrificing to fund his high school education. Therefore, speaking the words and modeling the behavior influenced KB's decision. KB offered:

As far as my dad and his influence, my dad sacrificed a lot just to send me to high school. He was my role model, even though he didn't have a college education. He didn't help me prepare, but he pushed me to go to college.

AM's father did not pursue higher education. Even though AM looked up to his dad, he knew that his father was not afforded the opportunity to earn a college degree. As a result, he had made the decision to take advantage of his opportunity. So an indirect way, his father influenced his decision. AM said:

[speaking of his father] Yes indeed, you know how people say that the sequel will be better than the first one. So I feel like my dad didn't have the opportunity to go to school like I have now. So I'm like it, "Take advantage of it."

Joe's father directly assisted in his preparation for college by instructing him to write essays. He constantly encouraged him to follow through with what he planned to do. Joe repeatedly stated that his father influenced his decision.

Joe mentioned:

He made me write essays every day. But now when I write essays, it's like nothing. My dad influenced me. He teaches me all the time, don't talk about it, be about it. I used to always talk about going to college and graduating. I put my applications in or whatever. If he didn't tell me to be about it, I probably would've let it go and just kept talking like I'm going to Howard and ending up staying here. So that was one way he influenced my decision.

Tee feared his father. However, he respected him as well. Both the fear and respect allowed him to listen to his father's advice, which was to pursue higher education. So Tee was influenced directly and indirectly.

Tee shared:

A lot of my relationship with my daddy, when I was younger, was built on fear. And I was afraid to disappoint him. And as I got older, that fear turned into respect. And you

always wanna make your parents proud. It made me want to go to school. So I think it had a big influence on me.

Table 4 – *Educational Levels*

Participants' level of education	Participant	Fathers' level of education	Presence
Pursuing G.E.D.	MJ	*Advanced college degree	*Inconsistent presence
	AM	*High school diploma	*Full presence
High school diploma	N	*Some high school	*No presence
	JT	*Some college	*Some presence
	JW	*Advanced college degree	*Full presence
	Mic	*High school diploma	*Very little presence
	KB	*High school diploma	*Full presence
	Al	*High school diploma	*Inconsistent presence
In college	Tee	*Associate's degree	*Full presence
	Tee II	*Bachelor's degree	*Full presence
	Joe	*High school diploma	*Full presence
	Dee	*High school diploma	*Inconsistent presence
	Bee	*Bachelors degree	*Full presence
College degree	Jay	*High school diploma	*Full presence

Before I could ask if Al's father was an influence, he answered the question. As a young man, Al was not pleased with his father's behavior and inconsistent presence in his life. Therefore, he decided not to follow in his footsteps. As a result, Al's decision was indirectly influenced by his father. Al said:

I wanted to be an example. I wanted to be everything my father was not. If you ask if he was an influence on me going to college, yes he was. Is he an influence on the way I think today? Yes he is, because I think that in life and in every experience you learn from it. And you become smarter when you learn from your experiences, whether they are negative or positive experiences. I didn't want to be the same type of man that he presented himself to be. So yeah, it was an influence.

Whether fathers required their sons to complete an activity, or simply encouraged them to pursue higher education, sons perceived their fathers to be influential. Nevertheless, when participants were asked about their fathers' influence, they discussed other factors that were related to their decision whether to pursue higher education. The other factors, which include participants' beliefs toward higher education and their neighborhood environment, spoke so loudly that it was sometimes difficult to discover the fathers' influence.

Participants' beliefs toward higher education

Although participants' education level varied, they all seemed to agree that a college education is important. Dee mentioned: “. . . I believe a higher education is a necessity in this mainstream society. . . The way our system is made, you don't necessarily have to go to college, but you have to have a plan and most of the time people find that plan in college.” Dee is currently pursuing a bachelor's degree.

Joe offered, “I feel like education, it’s not the only way, to go to college or whatever. But it’s one of the best roads to succeed. So I feel that higher education, it opens up a lot of opportunities.” Joe is currently pursuing a bachelor’s degree. Mic said, “I strongly believe in higher education/college. I’m gonna try to instill that in my kids.” Mic chose not to pursue higher education.

Bee shared, “And frankly to me, I feel that it is necessary to go to college, because we’re seen as statistics. And I would like us as a people to prove everybody wrong. So you have to beat the odds.” Bee is currently pursuing a bachelor’s degree.

Participants’ beliefs regarding higher education seemed to be related to their decision whether to pursue higher education. Participants who believed earning a college education is important, but chose not pursue higher education, offered justification. In addition, participants’ beliefs also seemed to be reflective of their fathers’ beliefs toward higher education and/or their fathers’ decision to pursue higher education. If their fathers encouraged them to pursue higher education, or did not encourage them but felt that pursuing higher education was vital, sons ultimately believed that a college education is important.

Neighborhood environment

When I asked the participants to tell me about their neighborhood as a child, some lived in negative environments, whereas some lived in family neighborhoods. For example, MJ responded, “Ghetto, mostly everybody around there on drugs; they try to make money just to get that. I used to see a lot of crackheads going in abandoned houses. But now I see them going up the street doing it.” Mic stated “Growing up in the project, the area was rough. You seen a lot of people strung out on drugs. You learn faster than the average child growing up in a suburban area, growing up in that type of environment.” MJ and Mic were exposed to negative

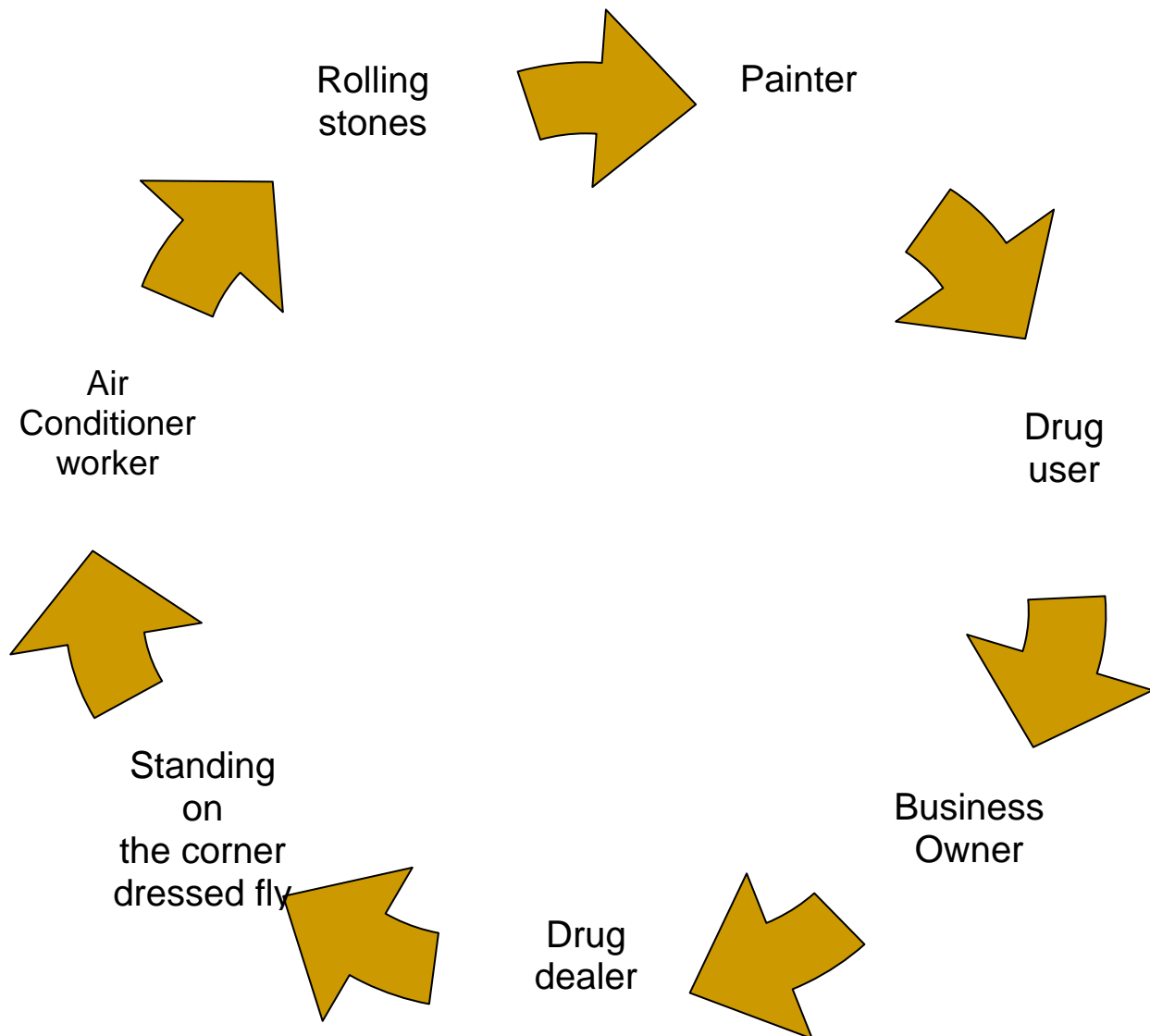
environments at a young age. They were not exposed to higher education. They quickly learned how to survive in a negative environment. And at that time, higher education was not a part of their future plans.

Other participants grew up in close-knit family environments. Dee described his neighborhood as, “A quiet neighborhood in the East off of Bullard; It was a nice neighborhood.” KB mentioned, “My neighborhood was pretty much a quiet, close-knit neighborhood. I had my grandmother, great-grandmother, aunts, cousins and uncles lived in the same block. So I guess you would pretty much say it was a family neighborhood.”

Participants were reared in both negative and positive family environments. As a result, they were surrounded by other African American males who held a variety of careers. Participants were asked about the careers adult males held in their neighborhoods (see Figure 1). Joe responded, “The careers were drug dealers and crackheads. If they were more successful, they’ll just work at Wal-mart or something. But when I moved to the West Bank, I moved around lawyers and doctors. I saw a brighter future.” Mic mentioned, “I never seen guys going to work. All I saw was dudes that were older than me standing on the corner dressed fly. I never saw like actually men getting up going to work every day. I never saw that.” Both Mic and Joe were surrounded by males who either did not work or held illegal jobs. Mic seemed upset when he mentioned that he never saw guys getting up to go to work. Mic’s father was not present. Mic did not pursue higher education.

Joe seemed to speak with a little resentment. However, when Joe moved to another neighborhood, he then gained hope because of the positive careers Black men held. Joe’s father was present. Joe currently attends Howard University. Tee said “Our neighbors that stayed

Figure 1 - Careers adult males held in their neighborhood



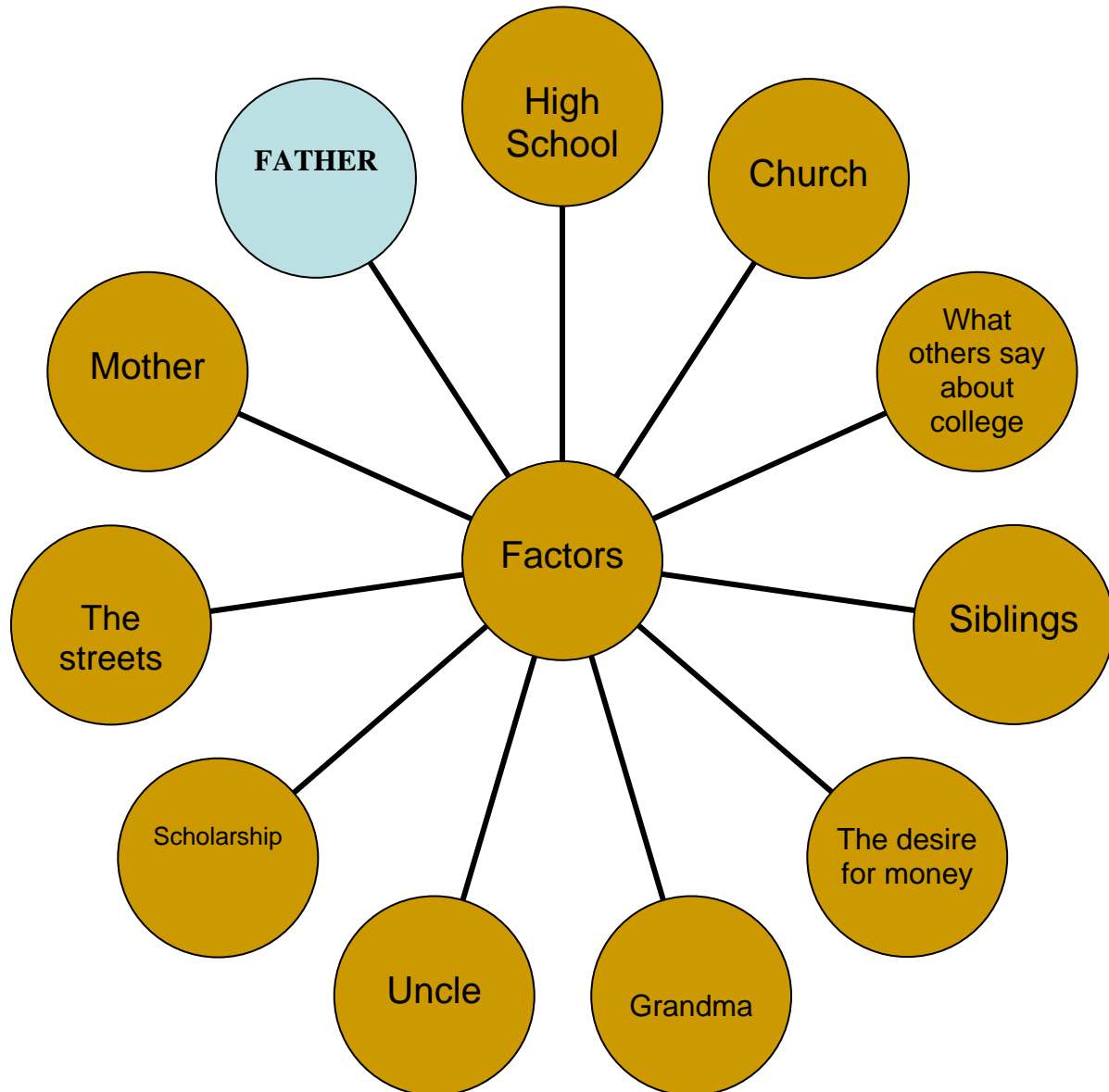
across the street, he worked on air conditioners. The neighbors on the side of us were one of the battered families. They were in and out of jail. I mean stealing cars and robbing people, selling drugs.” Tee’s father was present. He currently attends Southern University at New Orleans. Though some participants lived in negative environments, fathers still seemed to have a stronger influence on their decision whether to pursue higher education than the environment had.

In addition to fathers, other factors were identified as having influenced participants’ decision whether to pursue higher education (see Figure 2). Based on several participants’ responses, the other factors were family members and high school. Participants were asked, “What are some other factors that contributed to your decision whether to pursue higher education?” Dee responded thoughtfully, “High school, they pushed college in high school. At St. Aug [St. Augustine High School], they were like you better have a plan. If you’re not going to college, you better know what you’re doing.” KB mentioned, “My parents were important factors, neither one of my parents went to college, but they understood the importance of college. . . . sending me to St. Aug was the best thing that they could’ve ever done for me.” AM also offered, “Yeah, my older sister, she got two kids. She does a 12-hour job, overnight. And she still goes to school. ` She has kind of been an influence as far as education, totally. She fell off twice, but she kept going.” Though other family members and participants’ high school may have contributed to their decision, fathers still had a strong influence on their decision whether to pursue higher education. During the second round of individual interviews, participants confirmed their thoughts regarding their fathers.

Second Round of Individual Interviews

Nine individuals participated in the second round of interviews. To begin the interviews

Figure 2 - *Other factors that contributed to the decision whether to pursue higher education*



I provided interviewees with a summary of my analysis of the first interviews. I then asked the participants if I had interpreted their responses correctly and if they would like to add any information. This process served as a form of member checking.

All individuals expressed confirmations of the summary provided. Each participant was satisfied with the information he had offered previously. Six of the nine participants who participated in the individual interviews had given thought to the topic since the first time we met. The final question for the second round of interviews was: What are your overall beliefs regarding fathers' influence on their sons' decision whether to pursue higher education? Overall, 12 of the 14 participants believed that their fathers were an important influence on the decisions they made whether to pursue higher education. Two participants were unsure; one's father is deceased and is not present in his life. However, their overall beliefs regarding fathers were insightful.

Joe responded, "I think fathers have a big say on influencing their children to get higher education. The father's voice is stern, even though the mother says something. When a father says it, they really believe it." Joe implied that males may listen more to what their fathers say versus their mothers. Males will hear their mothers, but will pay attention to their fathers.

Tee II believes that only fathers can guide sons down the correct path. He believes the influence begins early in males lives. Tee II offered:

I feel that your father should play an important role in that aspect, as well as everything in your life. I think it's hard for a woman to teach a young boy how be a man. And so you wanting to go to college, that's something you think about when you're in high school.

So even before you get to college, I feel like you need a man in your life to show you the

right thing, to show you the way to walk. I think your father has a real big role in your life.

Dee had strong beliefs regarding fathers and higher education. He believes that a father's influence is essential to a son's decision. Dee suggested:

I believe fathers have a very big influence, period. It's not just higher education. I mean the influence is just as vast, big, I mean just raisin of sun. If you just narrow it down to higher education, fathers should be essential to that decision. I mean basically, that's where you develop who you are. And boys especially need that. They need that male telling them, okay, college is the way to go. If you don't want to go to college, you better come at me real with some plans so we can ensure the security for the rest of your life.

Al's thoughts were related to fathers as role models. He suggested that if fathers believe in higher education, most likely their sons will believe in it. Fathers should exhibit what they wish for their sons to follow.

Al's response was similar to others:

I think that fathers are a big influence on their children in general, especially their sons. I think the way a father views a particular thing, it kind of takes the child's view of that thing. So if I'm saying yeah to education, my child is going to say yeah to education. If I'm saying yeah to the streets, my child is going to say yeah to the streets. It's not just what you say. It's how you present it and how you carry yourself. So I think fathers play a very important role in a child's education or furthering their education.

Overall, participants believed that fathers do play a vital role in influencing their sons' decision whether to pursue higher education. They believed that what fathers say, as well as what fathers do, influence their sons. Many participants seemed to place fathers on a pedestal.

Several participants seemed to compare the mother's influence to the father's influence, expressing the belief that the father's influence was stronger than the mother's influence on sons' decision. During the post-focus group discussion, participants spoke more specifically about their beliefs regarding fathers.

Post Focus Group Discussion

During the post-focus group discussion, I presented my findings and interpretation of the findings. The post focus group discussion assisted me in making meaning of information gathered from the preliminary focus group discussion and the in-depth individual interviews. Information received from the preliminary focus group and in-depth interviews was discussed in more detail, confirming the information previously gathered. All participants agreed upon several subjects. The subjects were: fathers' educational level, fathers' emotions, masculinity, neighborhood environment, and college as an unrealistic goal.

Fathers' Educational Level

Participants believed that fathers do not have to be college graduates to be good fathers. A college education does not teach how to be a good father. When asked to interpret the following quote, "My father was my role model, even though he did not have a college education," J.W. responded, "It doesn't take a man with a college education to be a father. It was the fact that his father was there and he was involved and he was active."

Based on participants' stories, it seemed as though fathers referenced their own level of education when encouraging their sons to pursue higher education. If fathers did not attend college, they encouraged their sons to take advantage of the opportunity to attend because they did not have the opportunity. If fathers did pursue higher education, they used themselves as a

reference to show that college is worth the time and effort. Participants believed that education is an important means to an end though not an end in itself.

Fathers' Emotions

Participants believed that men do not typically show emotion. Three participants reported that their fathers were not emotional men, yet they were aware of their concern for them. When asked to interpret the following quote, "I probably can't tell you one time in my life that my daddy told me he loved me, but it showed in his actions," Tee II responded, "A lot of times, a lot of men, they don't necessarily tell you they love you. A lot of men are not like that." J.W. said, "I really didn't hear my daddy say I love you, not until my later years. He showed in his actions, he was there. You can truly appreciate it when somebody says it." Joe responded, "If he shows with the words and doesn't act upon it, then it don't mean nothing. Because if he's telling you he loves you, but he's beating his wife or whatever, you still gonna go against his words."

Sons' perceptions of their fathers love for them may have influenced on how they described their relationship with their fathers. If they believe their fathers care for them, they may then respect their opinion regarding higher education. If sons do not feel love from their fathers, they may not respect their fathers' opinion regarding higher education.

Masculinity and Higher Education

Participants agreed that males who pursued higher education were not viewed as less masculine or less "macho." In fact, some participants agreed that males who pursued higher education were looked up to in their community. Tee II stated, "Man, I've seen my daddy pick this dude up off his feet and body-slam him because he disrespected his mama. My dad was stocky, he was also educated. I used to enjoy looking at my daddy's college yearbooks."

J.W. said, “My daddy went to college and that dude was tough. My father was an educator and all young men looked up to him. So if anything, that was the epitome of toughness.”

The fathers of 12 of the 14 participants were present in their lives. These 12 participants looked up to their fathers. They viewed their fathers as masculine, regardless of whether the father had pursued higher education. Because their fathers continued to provide for them, it did not matter if they had pursued higher education.

Neighborhood environment

A theme that emerged from the individual interviews was that participants believed one’s environment can have both negative and positive influences on the decision whether to pursue higher education. I asked, “Do you believe that your environment, the neighborhood you grew up in, and the careers you saw as a child had any influence on your decision to pursue higher education?” J. W. responded:

Environment definitely does make a decision, because you gotta realize, okay I grew up in the lower ninth ward. The majority of fellas around there were in the profession of “slinging.” At that time, my potna was bringing in \$1200 a week. This dude was like in 10th or 11th grade. It’s sad to say he’s dead now, a good friend of mine. White people, most of them go to college. So they’re in one environment, so you get one extreme or the other. Now in my case-sensitive situation, I was in the middle of the street pharmacist and all that, but I had a father there.

J.W.’s response typified the perception that, although environment may play a vital role in decisions African American males make, the presence of a father seems to outweigh the influence of the neighborhood environment.

College as an unrealistic goal

Participants agreed that there are males that believe that it is not realistic for them to attend college. I asked the question, “Do you believe college is a high and mighty thought for some guys?” Tee replied, “Yeah, I know people like that. Like growing up, their parents told them, ‘We just don’t got it [their parents do not have the money to finance a college education].’ So when it comes time, you’re gonna have to go out there and work. It’s like that.” Joe said, “There was like a group of people I used to hang with, they’ll be like ‘Man, why you going to college? Do you see how much money I’m making?’ I think each one of those dudes; they don’t have father figures at all.”

College is an inconceivable thought for some African American males. This may be because fathers were not present in the homes of these males, or because fathers simply did not encourage them to pursue higher education. As we brought closure to the post focus group discussion, all participants believed their father had a direct influence on their decision whether to pursue higher education.

Of the themes that emerged from the post-focus group discussion, there appeared to be a relationship between fathers’ educational level and college being an unrealistic goal for some African American males. I found that if fathers are present in the home and expose their sons to higher education, whether it is through general conversation, physically bringing them to a college campus, or assigning tasks to them that will prepare them for college, sons are not likely to view college as an unrealistic goal. If the father has pursued higher education, he will use himself as a personal example to encourage higher education. If the father has not pursued higher education, he will present higher education as an opportunity he did not have but would like his son to have.

Sons' perceptions of relationships with their fathers

In grounded theory studies, the research question may change several times (Creswell, 1998). The answers to the research question, “How do sons relationships with their fathers influence their decision whether to pursue higher education?” evolved as participants spoke specifically about their relationships with their fathers.

When participants were asked to talk about their relationship with their fathers, Dee replied “Going back to my childhood, I mean it was sparingly, he came in and came out. It wasn’t no like real relationship so to speak.” Dee currently attends Loyola University. His father did not pursue higher education and did not encourage him to pursue higher education. He did not want to follow in his father’s footsteps.

AM responded “He’s my best friend. I can go to him for anything.” AM is currently pursuing his G.E.D. As a child, he did not live with his father, but his father remained in his life. AM believes that his father did not have the opportunity to attend college. Therefore, he would like to take advantage of the opportunity he has to attend college. He plans to do so once he attains his G.E.D.

Mic stated, “Plain and simple, he’s my daddy and that’s it. It’s not no love. It’s not no hate.” His father showed very little presence in his life as a child. As a result, he did not encourage him to pursue higher education. Mic decided not to attend college.

Tee II said “It’s good. I think I would call my dad like a man, a strong person.” His father was present and continues to be present in his life. His father also encouraged him to pursue higher education by using himself as an example and exposing Tee II to the college life at a young age. Tee II currently attends SUNO.

Participants' relationships with their fathers appeared to have a strong influence on their decision whether to pursue higher education. If fathers were present prior to age 18, the influence appeared to be direct. Participants seemed to have more respect for fathers who were present in the home, and to value their opinions regarding higher education. If the relationship with their father was inconsistent or non-existent, fathers indirectly influenced their sons' decision whether to pursue higher education. Not speaking about the topic of higher education, or living without a college degree, sent a loud message to sons.

Summary

In my experience interviewing African American males, I found that maintaining good rapport with the participants was essential to this research. Because I established positive rapport with participants, they seemed to be honest and comfortable sharing information.

In what ways do African American sons perceive their fathers as an influence on their decision whether to pursue higher education? This is the question I sought to answer. The purpose of this study was to evaluate African American males' perceptions of their father's influence on their decision whether to pursue higher education. Consistent with the purpose of the study, I explored the connection between fathers' influence and sons' decision whether to pursue higher education. Participants offered vital information to assist me in answering the research question. Fathers influenced their sons' decision whether to pursue higher education by encouraging them; leading by example, whether positive or negative; and having conversations about college plans. Among sons and fathers, there was a wide range of educational levels. However, consistently in the participants' stories, all believed that their father had contributed to their decision whether to pursue higher education.

Table 5 - *Sons' thoughts regarding their fathers*

- "My father always kept a job."
- "My father was my role model, even though he didn't have a college education."
- "My father was a very, very good support system."
- "He's awesome."
- "He was basically like giving me money every now and then, but my mom really took care of me."
- "He always tried to make me go to school."
- "He'll come over and check on me, chill with us every now and then. But he wasn't there like a father is supposed to be there."
- "He's my best friend."
- "If he could help me, he helps me."
- "My father is a very humble person."
- "I would say I have a good relationship with my dad."
- "When all the chips falls down, he always comes to bail me out, when my friends can't do it."
- "He used to come by from time to time, and I used to go by his house from time to time."
- "Plain and simple, he my daddy and that's it."
- "I don't feel no love or no hate."
- "That's the man that made me and that's it."
- "I think I would call my dad like a man, a strong person."
- "I probably can't tell you one time in my life when my dad ever told me he loved me in my life, but it shows in his actions."
- "His father instilled things in him and he did his best to instill it in me."
- "I wanted to be everything my father was not."
- "My father and I had a fist fight in the middle of the street when I was about 16 years old because it was during one of them times where I hadn't seen him in about 5 or 6 months."
- "Absent, that would be the word I would use."

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

This study examined the perceptions of African American sons of their fathers' influence on their decision whether to pursue higher education.

Summary of findings

*Five African American males participated in the preliminary focus group
One seemed shy, yet outgoing
One was quite expressive, yet still reserved; assuring that he would not be out of the loop
One not knowing what to expect
One being quite helpful, making sure that everyone showed respect
And one who was well-spoken and punctual, viewing each topic from both points of view*

*As the focus group discussion took its course
Spirituality was a common theme
God, the Savior and Lord seemed to be the Dean
The Dean of this discussion, as the Dean is the overseer of its department
These men felt that God was the overseer and reason for their enlargement*

*Each male shared their definition of the term "father"
While most experienced the presence of a father, one participant's father could not be any further
Further from who, further from him because he described his father as "absent"
Absent in his life, absent from his daily activities, "he just wasn't there"
But he remains a constant presence in his son's life, unlike his father who did not dare*

*All males believed that college was important
Yet three did not regret their decision to not persist to degree completion
But chose to explain thoroughly their reason for early deletion
They compared and compared and compared
Compared themselves to their fathers, to their classmates and significant others
While remaining complicit in their decision not to pursue higher education
There was continued justification*

*In-depth interviews were rather interesting
Men felt that the neighborhood environment could be a major influence on young males
Whether positive or negative, both seem to equally prevail
Drugs, money, cars, and careers are a driving force
All of these things seem to take its course
Its course on the decisions males make
Decisions made about life, about education, and about career*

*Five African American males participated in the post focus group discussion
Two of whom did not participate in the preliminary focus group discussion
Two of whom seemed to be honest and willing to share*

*Yet they believed it rare to find fathers who will say they care
“I love you” is not said often in this culture
But it is okay because action speaks louder than words*

*All males believed that fathers do not have to possess a college degree to be a good role model
But those who do possess a college degree are not seen as less masculine or less macho
In fact, they are heroes
“My daddy went to college and that dude was tough”
If fathers were a positive presence in their lives, whether they pursued higher education or not, it seemed to be enough*

*Some say money is the root of all evil
Some say you need money to be looked upon as equal
These men seemed to think that money may be a driving force in decision-making
Whether it's lack of money, pursuit of money, or fast money
Money, money, money, money 🎵
“It's all about making money because that's what you need in life”*

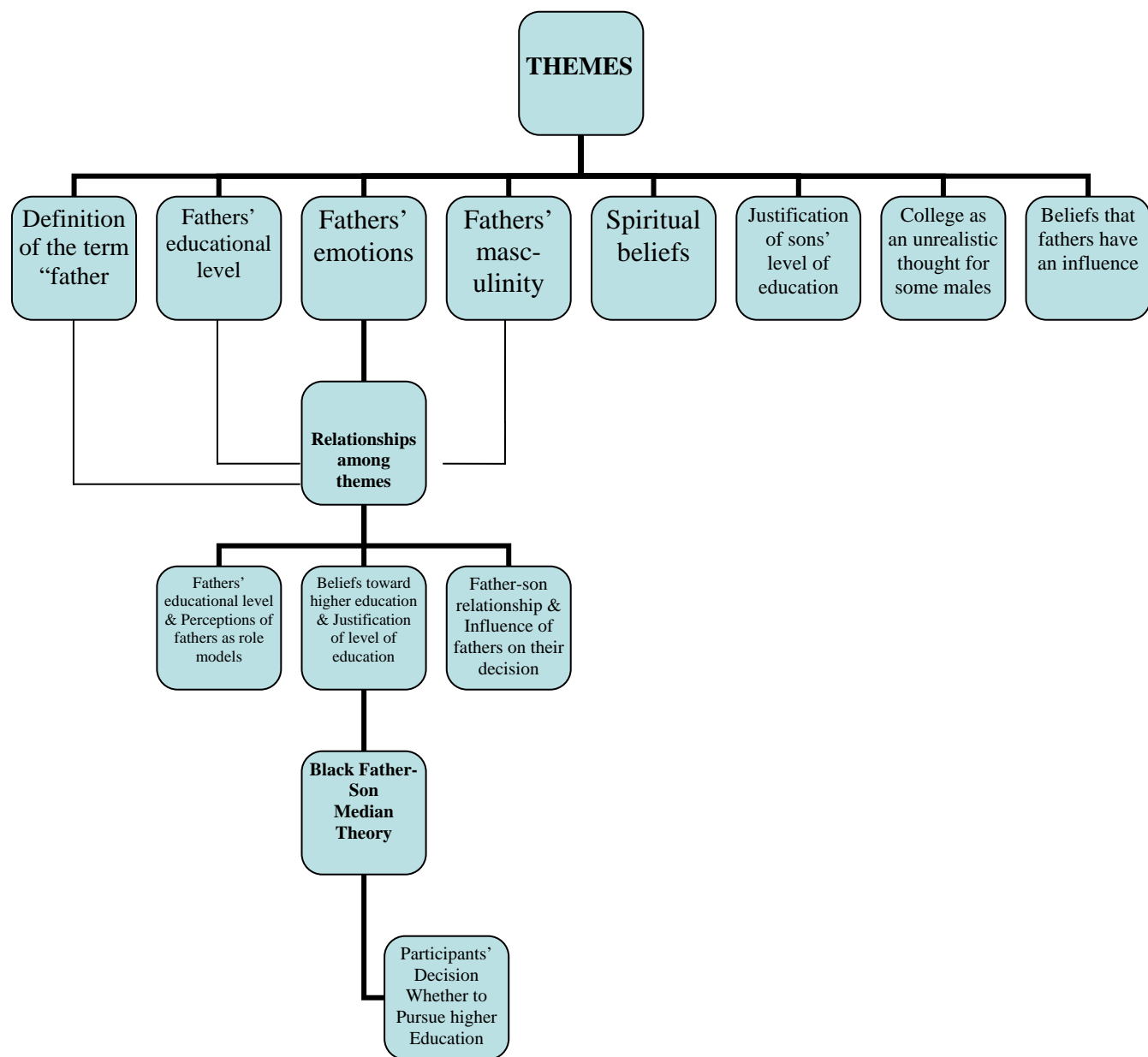
*Many ask why are you going to college?
College takes too long; I can make \$1500 a week right here in the neighborhood
Some can't picture it, sitting in a classroom for hours
While others are out there on the block clocking dollars
It's inconceivable, not logical, not realistic*

*All themes arrived at one central thought
All males believed that fathers have an influence on their sons' decision whether to pursue higher education
Whether they decided to go or not go, there was a direct or indirect influence from the father
African American males and education, a culture to be studied*

In this chapter, the findings are discussed as they relate to previous studies. Implications for clinical practice and for counselor education and supervision are suggested. Limitations of the study are discussed. Suggestions for further research are offered. My hypothesis, in the form of a grounded theory, is presented. The chapter concludes with a reflection on my personal experiences of sharing with the participants.

Various studies have been conducted regarding African American males and education. Noeth and Wimberly (2002) studied the postsecondary planning of African American and Hispanic high school seniors in five of the nation's largest urban public school districts. The

Figure 3 – *Participants Decision-making process*



findings indicated that most students perceived their mother as being a strong influence on their college planning process and that fathers had a strong influence on students' college plans, but not to the same extent as mothers. Griggs (1992) investigated the factors that influence the academic and vocational development of African American and Hispanic youth. Participants identified strong fathers who had the most influence in their lives, who modeled the importance of hard work and education. Their fathers served as positive role models.

Based on the information participants shared with me during the focus group discussions and in-depth interviews, participants perceived their fathers to be an influence on their decision whether to pursue higher education. Participants ultimately believed their father directly or indirectly influenced their decision. They seemed comfortable enough to speak openly about their educational levels, beliefs toward higher education, and relationship with their fathers.

Samuel (2005) suggested that images and perceptions of young Black males as lazy, incompetent, unstable, and violent are pervasive throughout American culture. Contrary to those images and perceptions, the majority of the participants in this study were pursuing various levels of education and energetically working toward a career goal. Lee (1996) noted the social reality that Black male youth may have to form identities with either minimal or no positive adult male role modeling. This study confirmed that some African American male youth are placed in positions to form identities with little or no positive adult male role modeling. Conversely, many Black male youth are surrounded by positive male role models.

Glesne (1999) believed that qualitative research investigates the poorly understood territories of human interaction. I believe that Black male youth are a poorly understood territory. Furr (1998) conducted a study to investigate the impact of fathers' behavior on their children's performance on college entrance examinations (CEE). About 21% of the participants

were African American. Results indicated that non-custodial fathers' post-divorce behavior can greatly offset educational disadvantages. When these students perceived their fathers as encouraging and involved in their education, their scores were higher. This research study has qualitatively explored the perceptions of African American sons of their fathers' influence on their decision whether to pursue higher education.

The process of open coding allowed me to develop themes from the data. Those themes that emerged from participants' stories included similar definitions of the term father, perceptions of fathers' educational level vs. being a role model, views of fathers' emotions and masculinity, beliefs that fathers have an influence on their decision whether to pursue higher education, similar beliefs toward higher education, justification for their level of education, feelings of college being an inconceivable thought for some males, and spiritual beliefs. Through axial coding, the relationships that stood out were fathers' educational level and participants' perceptions of their fathers as role models, which was similar to Furr's (1998) and Griggs (1992) findings, participants' beliefs toward higher education and justification for their level of education, and participants' relationship with their fathers and the influence fathers had on their decision whether to pursue higher education. The relationships among themes that arose from axial coding are specifically discussed in the following section.

Fathers' educational level and participants' perceptions of their fathers as role models

Fathers' educational levels were varied. Of the 14 participants in the study, one father did not complete high school. Four fathers completed high school but did not pursue higher education. Four fathers had some college experience and one had earned an associate's degree. Two fathers had earned bachelor's degrees and two had earned advanced college degrees. Some

participants viewed their fathers as role models even if they had not pursued higher education, whereas others viewed their fathers as someone they did not want to emulate.

KB stated, “My father was my role model, even though he didn’t have a college education. He was still somebody to look up to.” He described his father as “awesome.” KB continues to maintain a close relationship with his father. AM said, “He’s my best friend. He’s my stepping stone.” AM’s father did not pursue higher education. He believes that his father is his guide and consistently supports him. Al offered, “I learned at an early age that just because my father said he was going to do something, didn’t necessarily mean he was going to do it.” Al’s father did not pursue higher education. His father’s presence was very inconsistent in his life, and to Al, his father’s actions implied that he was not concerned about Al’s well-being.

Overall, if fathers were present in the home, or made an effort to be involved in their sons’ lives, sons respected them for that effort. Whether fathers decided to pursue or not pursue higher education, their views about higher education were heard if they held a positive presence in their sons’ lives.

Participants’ beliefs toward higher education and justification for their level of education

All participants believed that college is important. Even though all males did not pursue higher education, they seemed to respect those who did. Some males felt that pursuing higher education is the key to becoming successful. Dee mentioned “I believe higher education is a necessity in this mainstream society.” Others believed that the choice to pursue higher education depends on the chosen career. Some participants agreed that their chosen career did not require a college degree and seemed to be satisfied with their decision to withdraw from school. Conversely, even though those participants stated that they were satisfied with their choice not to pursue higher education, they continued to offer justification for their choice. JT said, “People

will pay you based on what you know and you don't need a college education, but I'm not downing a college education at all." JW stated, "I have the natural gift of music, and I didn't necessarily have to go to college and I could do it and make money off of it and better myself on my own." They also compared themselves to those who chose to pursue higher education. N stated, "A lot of people who work with my wife envy us because it took them so long to get where they are because college delayed them from the experience. I'm 25 and I'm living life like I want to live it." JW said, "Not that I look down on my friends, but my friends in high school, I'm doing way better than all of them."

Each participant agreed that they would instill the importance of education in their own children. Even though some participants chose not to pursue higher education, it seemed as though they felt that they had missed out on an opportunity, based on their continued justification for their choice and comparisons to others. Because participants believed a college education is valuable, they seemed to need to justify their decision to attend for only two semesters or less.

Participants' relationship with their fathers and the influence their fathers had on their decision whether to pursue higher education

Of 14 participants, one father was not present at all in his son's life. One father was present very little. Three fathers' presence was inconsistent and one father was somewhat present. Eight fathers held a strong presence in their sons' lives. Ultimately, if participants experienced a good relationship with their father during their childhood and teen years, their father had a direct influence on their decision whether to pursue higher education.

Joe said, "I would say I have a good relationship with my dad." Joe's father encouraged him to pursue higher education and prepared him for college. Joe is currently enrolled in a higher education institution. Tee described his relationship with his father as, "It's good." Tee's father also encouraged him to pursue higher education and prepared him for what it entails. Tee

is also a student at an institution of higher learning. Dee stated, “It wasn’t like no real relationship so to speak.” Dee’s father did not encourage him to pursue higher education. He chose to pursue higher education because he did not want to be like his father who chose not to pursue higher education.

One participant’s situation seemed unique. After studying the relationships between themes, I took a deeper look at MJ’s decision whether to pursue higher education. Other participants whose fathers had pursued higher education usually followed in their fathers’ footsteps. Participants who pursued higher education when their fathers had not, chose to do so because of the fathers’ direct or indirect influence. However, MJ’s father was a physician, and MJ chose not to complete high school. His father committed suicide when MJ was 17 years old. MJ stated, “He took care of me until I was like 14. He was basically giving me money every now and then, but my mom really took care of me. When he moved out, that’s when he stopped.” His father seemed to have held an inconsistent presence in his life. MJ also mentioned, “He really wasn’t around me once I got older, about 15. He’ll come over and check on me, chill with us every now and then. But he wasn’t there like a father is supposed to be there.” Although MJ’s father was well educated, he only encouraged him to finish high school. They did not have any conversations about college. During MJ’s critical teen years, his father was in and out of his life. He was no longer present in the home. In addition to his father not being present, MJ was also living in a negative environment where he surrounded by drug dealers and drug users. Because his father did not have a strong presence in his life, he chose not to follow in his father’s footsteps of pursuing higher education. In addition, due to the cause of death of his father, his father may have been unstable and unable to focus on MJ.

Other factors that contributed to sons' decision whether to pursue higher education were high school, other family members, church, and the neighborhood environment. Based on the themes that emerged from the data and relationship between them, I was able to formulate my hypothesis, which is the Black Father-Son Median Theory.

The Black Father-Son Median Theory

Grounded theory emerged from the need to develop theory from the exploration of human interaction and behavior in social contexts (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Grounded theory is defined as a systematic, qualitative procedure used to generate a theory that explains, at a broad conceptual level, a process, an action, or interaction about a substantive topic (Creswell, 2005). The results of grounded theory are not reporting of facts, but are probability statements about the relationship between concepts, or an integrated set of conceptual hypotheses developed from empirical data (Glaser and Strauss). Grounded theory was relevant for this study because there is no known theory related to the perceptions of African American sons of their fathers' influence on their decision whether to pursue higher education.

A grounded theorist begins to understand the data by developing categories, relating categories, and developing a theory that explains what the researcher has found (Creswell, 2005). The process of coding the data began with line-by-line coding of the interviews and focus groups. I then categorized the data based upon the content of the codes. Glaser and Holton (2004) suggested that the conceptualization of data through coding is the foundation of grounded theory development.

While coding, the idea was to sort out all of the codes and look for meaning. Sorting integrates the relevant literature into theory (Glaser & Holton, 2004). Once I began to memo, I compared codes, explored statements that were made, and looked for connections between

statements. Memoing was the beginning of the end of generating a theory. The existing literature, plus data obtained from interviews and focus groups, assisted me in forming a theory. I utilized a step-by-step systematic procedure to generate a theory to explain African American fathers' influence on their sons' decisions whether to pursue higher education.

The Black Father-Son Median Theory (BFMT) states that African American males' decision to pursue higher education is a result of their interaction with their environments, with precedence given to their interaction with their fathers, and perceptions of their fathers' views of higher education. This theory is based on 14 African American males who spoke about their perceptions of their fathers' influence on their decision whether to pursue higher education. For the purposes of this study, median is defined as the commonplace or center where fathers' actions influence sons' decision whether to pursue higher education. Environment includes the presence / absence of their fathers, the careers of their fathers and other careers viewed in the communities, and spiritual beliefs.

Though not all Black males choose to pursue higher education, they do view education as important. Dee mentioned "I believe higher education is a necessity in this mainstream society." Tee stated, "I value my education because it allows me to go places and see views that I would not have even thought to look at if I wouldn't have gone." AM offered, "The more education you get, the more you know about life."

Higher education is emphasized by Black fathers as a preferred means to an end whether or not these fathers themselves accomplished their ends through this means or not. Education is an important means to an end though not an end in itself. Joe said "I never seen my dad as a disappointment because he's provided for us. But he wants me to do better than him. He wants me to graduate and take a better road than he took." KB stated, "My father didn't have a college

education. He didn't help me prepare, but he pushed me to go to college. If they had a father of a lifetime award, I would put my dad in for it."

If fathers are present in the home and expose their sons to higher education, whether it is through general conversation, physically bringing them to a college campus, or assigning tasks to them that will prepare them for college, sons will not view college as an unrealistic goal. Tee II said "We've been going to Bayou Classic [college football game] since I could walk. All of his stories was based on his college days. I was always looking through his college yearbooks. So everything was always about college." Joe stated "Towards my senior year, he started giving me responsibilities that would come when I go to college. All that stuff, you think it wouldn't help in college, but it helps some kind of way."

The relationship Black males have with their fathers has a strong influence on their decision whether to pursue higher education. If fathers were present prior to age 18, the influence is direct. If fathers have an inconsistent presence in their sons' lives, the influence is indirect. Sons seem to adhere more to fathers' views of higher education if their presence is consistent. Dee stated, "It wasn't like no real relationship so to speak." Dee's father did not encourage him to pursue higher education. He chose to pursue higher education because he did not want to be like his father, who chose not to pursue higher education. Mic said "That's the man that made me ant that's it." Mic's father did not encourage him to pursue higher education. He chose not to do so. Al stated "I call you dad only because that's what I been calling you, not because I feel like you're my daddy." Al decided to pursue higher education. He said, "I wanted to be an example. I wanted to be everything my father was not."

Whether fathers physically required their sons to complete an activity, or simply encouraged them to pursue higher education, sons perceived their fathers to be influential. There

is a certain understanding that is intangible. The Black Father-Son Median Theory suggests that there is an intangible influence of Black fathers on their sons' decision whether to pursue higher education.

Limitations

Limitations are conditions that restrict the scope of the study or may affect the outcome and cannot be controlled by the researcher (Jensen, 2005). Limitations will be discussed to analyze possible threats to the study's validity. To narrow the scope of my study, I chose African American males aged 20 to 29 as my population. Therefore, I was not able to obtain data from more mature males. Males from an older age group may have offered different perspectives of the influence their father had on their decision whether to pursue higher education. In addition, only one participant possessed a college degree. Therefore, I was unable to acquire an extensive amount of data from those who have earned a college degree and can offer their perceptions regarding their father's influence on their decision whether to pursue higher education. Most of my data described the thoughts of those who did not possess a college degree. However, several participants currently were pursuing higher education.

For the preliminary focus group discussion, all participants were members of the same church and knew each other personally. This may have been a contributing factor to the themes that emerged. For example, the theme of similar spiritual beliefs may not have emerged if all participants were not church members. Their familiarity among each other allowed them to agree freely with each other. This may have been a limitation due to the fact that participants might have felt uncomfortable being confrontational with each other. It was also clear that participants who chose to pursue higher education did not want to offend the participants who chose not to pursue higher education. Moreover, the preliminary focus group discussion was

ended prematurely because the participants had to serve as musicians for the Bible study service that was about to begin. As a result, only two men were able to answer the question “Can you explain how your father influenced your decision whether to pursue higher education?” I believe that more valuable information could have been acquired in the preliminary focus group discussion. However, I was able to ask additional questions in the final focus group discussion.

The setting is very important when conducting in-depth interviews. Most of the interviews were conducted in a comfortable, productive environment. Unfortunately, though, one interview was conducted in a vehicle. This provided for an uncomfortable setting, which caused the interview time to be shortened. I believe the interviewee did not feel comfortable enough to share his views in depth. One follow-up interview, or member check, was conducted via telephone. This participant relocated to Birmingham, Alabama, shortly after our first interview. Even though he confirmed all information discussed in the first interview, more information could have been obtained had we met face to face.

A final limitation may have been my own subjectivity. As an African American female who grew up in a single parent home where my mother was the sole influence, I possessed a certain level of sensitivity regarding fathers. I do not have a relationship with my father, nor do I believe that he had an influence on my decision to pursue higher education. Although my race and experiences with African American males could have been helpful in building rapport with the participants, my biases may have been conveyed in some manner.

Implications

Implications for Clinical Practice

Wilson (2004) suggested that counseling approaches must be based on an understanding of and sensitivity to the personal history of African Americans. Based on the focus group

discussions and in-depth interviews, I learned that African American males live complex lives. Some are surrounded by negative environments from a very early age. They must struggle to embrace family, friends, and environment and learn to seek the identity that is right for them. Clinicians need to be cognizant of the issues Black males face. They should begin sessions by discussing clients' family history and neighborhood environment, and become familiar with therapeutic approaches that would embrace this population. When discussing family history, it may be helpful to ask specific questions about clients' fathers. Learning more about clients' fathers may give more insight into their situation. Completing a genogram with African American male clients may also be helpful.

While conducting focus group discussions and interviews, I realized that it is very important to establish rapport with African American males. Doing so will allow them to feel comfortable and therefore, to offer honest responses. Because of this, therapists should begin by building rapport with clients, while attempting to establish trust. If trust is not established, clients may not feel comfortable sharing personal information. It is imperative that therapists are not judgmental. Therapists must genuinely seek to understand the behaviors and challenges African American males face.

From the research, I found that participants seem to have several regrets. Assisting African American male clients may include having them to talk about plans that were deferred, what plans they are currently working on, and what they hope to accomplish in the future. Clinicians may explore why those plans were deferred.

Last but not least, therapists should be aware of their own biases. Therapists should assure that their biases cannot be viewed by clients. Clinicians must realize that African American male clients should not be treated as a representative of their gender and race, but as

an individuals. If clinicians believe they hold biases about this population, they may choose to address those biases with other clinicians before seeing clients. If therapists believe they are not prepared to adequately serve African American clients, they should refer them to other mental health professionals.

Implications for Counselor Educators and Supervisors

In almost every academic category, the 20-year growth rate of Black men in higher education is extraordinarily slow when compared with other groups (Hefner, 2004). Based on the data I have obtained, Black males are quite impressionable at a young age. Their interaction with environment and fathers plays a vital role in their decision whether to pursue higher education. Because there is such a strong influence from the environment, it would be wise for Counselor Educators to go out into the community as a form of outreach. Counselor Educators may visit community organizations, pre-college programs, middle and high schools and neighborhood sports organizations.

Last year, 587 doctorates were earned by African-American men (Margaret, 2004). Based on my findings, it is suggested that Counselor Educators and Supervisors:

1. Educate themselves on the educational background of the family.

Based on my research, the educational history of the family is a factor in Black males' thoughts regarding higher education, as well as their decision whether to pursue higher education.

2. Educate themselves regarding social struggles of African American males.

Participants mentioned that, in society there are various struggles they experience. These struggles also have an impact on their decision whether to pursue higher education.

3. Educate themselves on African American beliefs toward higher education.

Several participants' beliefs regarding higher education have been influenced by their father or

their experiences. These beliefs are ultimately the driving force that led to their decision regarding pursuing higher education.

4. If possible, partner African American male supervisors with African American male supervisees.

Based on participants' thoughts, Black males are more receptive to other Black males. Therefore may learn more when paired with African American males.

5. Conduct monthly individual advising sessions to assess any challenges.

Counselor Educators may meet with students a minimum of once per month in order to establish rapport, so that they will feel comfortable with discussing any concerns.

6. Self evaluate in order to address any biases.

If Counselor Educators possess any biases toward African American males, consult with other non-biased professional. If the Counselor Educator believes he or she cannot effectively work with African American males, please refer them.

Implications for Future Research

Findings suggested that African American males believed their fathers had an influence on their decision whether to pursue higher education. Even though other factors were explored, this study focused particularly on fathers' influence. Further research might explore the perceptions of African American males regarding other factors that contributed to their decision whether to pursue higher education. Participants in this study also believed that environment plays a vital role in the decision-making process of many African American males. Thus, particular focus might be given to environmental factors. In addition, I found that spirituality was a big influence on the overall decisions African American males make; thus, the influence of religion on African American males' decision whether to pursue higher education may merit

further study.

While I listened to the participants stories, I learned that several of them were raised by strong Black women whom they affectionately call “mama.” These women played a part in their decision regarding pursuing education, as well as in their life decisions. Researchers may want to study the influence of mothers on their African American sons’ decision whether to pursue higher education.

Conversely, there may be Black males who are unsure of what led to their reason for pursuing or not pursuing higher education. This uncertainty may be explored further by conducting interviews to identify factors that contribute to their current educational status. Additionally, in this study all males felt that college is important. However, some felt that college was not necessary for them, specifically. In my personal experiences, there are many Black males who exhibit negative attitudes toward college and those who attend college. As a result, future research may explore African American males’ negative attitudes toward college and those who attend college.

Quantitative research might also be conducted to answer the following questions:

1. What is the relationship between African American males’ level of education and their fathers’ level of education?
2. What are the effects of environment on African American males’ decision whether to pursue higher education?
3. What are the factors that influence African American males’ decision whether to pursue higher education?
4. Is there a significant difference between mother-only homes and mother and father homes in preparing their African American sons to pursue higher education?

5. What is the relationship between religion and African males' decision whether to pursue higher education?

Although African American males have been widely studied, I believe there is more research to be done. Research might also be conducted in the areas of (a) university professors' attitudes toward African American male students; (b) university preparedness in educating African American males; and (c) single African American fathers preparing their sons for higher education.

Personal Reflections

Growing up in a single-mother home, my father did not play an active role in my life. In fact, I visited with him only on rare occasions. My father did not pursue higher education. Furthermore, I am from what you would probably call a large family. I have one brother, three aunts, and five uncles, all of whom have one or more children, which gives me an abundance of cousins. Of my five uncles, only the youngest pursued higher education and he did not persist to degree completion. Coincidentally, he did not have a relationship with his father. In fact, none of my uncles had a relationship with their fathers. My brother attended a community college for one semester but chose not to continue. He did not have a strong relationship with our father.

I was not surrounded by African American males who were educated past the level of high school. Therefore, the decision to study this topic was based on personal experiences. I knew early in my doctoral journey that I wanted to research the African American male population. However, I did not know what topic I wanted to address. However, I recalled other studies that always seemed to produce unfavorable results related to Black males. As I began to research current literature, I realized that African American males are not pursuing higher education in high numbers. I then related the literature to my personal experiences and decided

to study the perceptions of African American males of their fathers' influence on their decision whether to pursue higher education.

From the preliminary focus group discussion to the post-focus group discussion, I truly enjoyed listening to the participants' stories. It was enlightening to be educated on their journey toward their decision whether to pursue higher education. They were a group of young men who did not seem to mind sharing their experiences with others. They talked, laughed, ate, drank, and most importantly, shared. The rapport between the participants and I was surprisingly great. I thought I would have difficulty arranging to meet with them a second time. But, to my surprise, they were willing and ready to meet again. In fact, MJ asked if I would be willing to assist him in enrolling in college. This question brought me a sense of fulfillment. I felt that I had played a part in his decision to pursue higher education. He also spoke with his instructor at the school, where he is studying to earn a certified trade, about our meetings. I was elated that my interviews with MJ sparked such an interest in his desire to learn more about himself and education.

During this study it was important that I remain aware of my biases. Prior to conducting the study, I believed that the majority of African American fathers do not encourage their sons to pursue higher education. My research proved that there are many African American fathers who stress the importance of pursuing higher education.

At the completion of this study, I am now a true believer in qualitative research. Perception is so very important. If researchers want to genuinely get a question answered, it makes sense that they go to the source. I wanted to identify if African American fathers had an influence on their sons' decision whether to pursue higher education. So I went to the source, Black males. They not only answered my questions, but they invited me into their world, a

world where they are often challenged, misunderstood, and taken for granted. This time was set aside for them to tell their stories. And their stories have given them a voice.

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APPENDIX A

Human Subjects Approval

**University Committee for the Protection
of Human Subjects in Research
University of New Orleans**

Campus Correspondence

Barbara Herlihy, PI
Tameka Bob, Co-I
348-L ED

February 15, 2007

RE: The influence of African American fathers on their sons' decision to pursue
higher education

IRB# 07jan07

The IRB has deemed that the research and procedures are compliant with the
University of New Orleans and federal guidelines.

Please remember that approval is only valid for one year from the approval date. Any
changes to the procedures or protocols must be reviewed and approved by the IRB
prior to implementation.

If an adverse, unforeseen event occurs (e.g., physical, social, or emotional harm), you
are required to inform the IRB as soon as possible after the event.

Best of luck with your project!

Sincerely,



Laura Scaramella, Ph.D.
Chair, University Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research

*University Committee for the Protection
of Human Subjects in Research
University of New Orleans*

Form Number: 07jan07

(please refer to this number in all future correspondence concerning this protocol)

Principal Investigator: Barbara Herlihy
Tameka Bob

Title: Professor
Graduate student

Department: ELCF

College: Education

Project Title: The influence of African American fathers on their sons' decision to pursue higher education

Dates of Proposed Project Period From 2.8.2007 to 4.20.2007

Approval Status:

☐ Full Board Review

☒ Approved Date: 2-15-07

☒ Expedite

☒ Deferred Date: 2-8-07

☐ Exempt

☐ Disapproved Date:

☐ Project requires review more than annually. Review every _____ months.

**approval is for 1 year from approval date only and may be renewed yearly.*

1st continuation Signature of IRB Chair

Date:

2nd continuation Signature of IRB Chair

Date:

3rd continuation Signature of IRB Chair

Date:

4th continuation Signature of IRB Chair

Date:

Committee Signatures:



Laura Scaramella, Ph.D. (Chair)

James Evans, LCSW

Pamela Jenkins, Ph.D.

Isabelle Maret, Ph.D.

Ann O'Hanlon, Ph.D.

Richard B. Speaker, Ph.D.

Kari Walsh

Kathleen Whalen, LCSW

APPENDIX B

Interview Protocol

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Pre-Focus Group Discussion

- Tell me a little bit about yourselves.
- If you had to define the word “father,” how would you define it?
- If you had to describe your father in one word, what word would that be?
- Tell me your thoughts regarding higher education.
- Are you satisfied with your current educational status?
- Can you explain to me how your father influenced your decision whether to pursue higher education?

First round of individual interviews

- Tell me about yourself.
- Tell me about your neighborhood as a child.
- What are some of the careers the adult males held in your neighborhood?
- Tell me about your father.
- What was your relationship like with your father?
- What are your beliefs regarding higher education?
- If you could change your decision regarding pursuing higher education, would you change it?
- What are other factors that contributed to your decision whether to pursue higher education?
- Did you have any conversations with your dad about college?

Second round of individual interviews

Member checks

Post-Focus Group Discussion

- Tell me what you think the following statement implies: “My father was my role model, even though he did not have a college education.”
- Tell me what you think the following statement implies: “Plain and simple, he’s my daddy, that’s it.”
- Tell me what you think the following statement implies: “I probably can’t tell you one time in my life that my daddy told me he loved me, but it showed in his actions.”
- Do you believe that males feel like they are less masculine or macho if they attend college?
- Tell me what you think the following statement implies: “I don’t feel no love or no hate.”
- Do you feel that there were any other factors that influenced your decision whether to pursue higher education?

- Do you feel that your environment, the neighborhood you grew up in, and/or the careers you saw as a child, had any influence on your decision whether to attend college?
- Do you believe that your fathers' level of education has an influence on your decision whether to pursue higher education?
- Do you think that college it is inconceivable for some guys to think they can attend college?
- Do you feel your fathers' have had a direct or indirect influence on your decision whether to pursue higher education?

APPENDIX C

Consent Forms



THE UNIVERSITY of
NEW ORLEANS

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP,
COUNSELING AND FOUNDATIONS

African American Males' Perceptions of Their Fathers' Influence on Their Decision
Whether to Pursue Higher Education

Informed Consent

(Individual Interviews)

- **Purpose of the research**

The purpose of this study is to evaluate African American males' perceptions of their fathers' influence on their decision whether to pursue higher education. I would like to understand your feelings toward your father's influence on your decision to go to college or not go to college. Although there is research that shares positive information on African American males, I find that the negative research is much more common. There is also low numbers of African American males attending college. Therefore, I would like to find the connection between fathers' influence and sons' decision whether to attend college.

- **Description of the study**

Once you volunteer to participate in the study, you will participate in two individual interviews, beginning the week of February 19, 2007. The interviews will be held at Job 1 Youth Career Center, Household of Faith Church or other location that is convenient for you. Only you and I will be present for the interview. There will not be any other participants. The interview will last approximately 45 minutes – 1 hour. You will be asked questions related to your background, father, family situation and beliefs about higher education. If you do not feel comfortable answering a particular question, you are not required to answer. You will also be invited to participate in the post focus group discussion. A focus group is a group of individuals who gather together to achieve a common purpose. For example, you and other individuals will come together to discuss your thoughts about African American fathers' influence on their sons' decisions to attend or not attend college. Focus group discussions will be held at Household of Faith Family Worship Church International. The focus groups will last approximately 1 hour. In this discussion, a summary of information will be presented from the pre-focus group discussion and all individual interviews. Please note that you may know some of the other participants in the group. You will help me make meaning of information gathered from your first focus group session and from my individual interviews.

- **Foreseeable risks**

During the interviews, participants may be asked personal information as it relates to their father and/or household, which may cause some discomfort. Participants may feel uncomfortable sharing this personal information. All data will be kept confidential. If a participant feels any discomfort, he may stop the

- **Foreseeable risks**

During the focus groups, participants may be asked personal information as it relates to their father and/or household, which may cause some discomfort. Participants may feel uncomfortable sharing this personal information when others are present. All data will be kept confidential. However, the researcher will not be able to guarantee anonymity due to other participants being present. If a participant feels any discomfort, he may withdraw from the group at any time. Participants may get up and leave the group or simply not say anything further for the duration of the group. All participants will be informed of their right to withdraw from the group prior to beginning. In addition, a Licensed Professional Counselor referral list will be distributed prior to beginning the focus group.

- **Benefits of the research**

Participants may gain a feeling of relief by sharing information they have not shared previously. Participants will also have the opportunity to receive feedback from others that may assist them in their personal growth.

- **Confidentiality of records**

Participants' names will not be used in the reporting of results of this research. The data will be stored on audiotapes and then on a removable disk which will be in a locked file at all times. Only members of the researcher's dissertation committee will be allowed to access the data. Once the study is completed, all identifying data will be destroyed.

- **Contact information**

If participants have any questions regarding the research or your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact Dr. Richard Speaker at the University of New Orleans at (504)280-6607. For any other questions, you can contact the Principal Investigator, Dr. Barbara Herlihy at (504)280-6661 or bherlihy@uno.edu or the Co-Investigator, Tameka Bob at (504)914-1301 or tcbob@uno.edu.

Participation in this study is voluntary. Refusal to participate in this study will involve no penalty or loss to the individual. In addition, participants may discontinue participation at any time without any penalty. Your signature states that you are volunteering to participate in this study.

_____ Participant's Name	_____ Participant's Signature	_____ Date
_____ Principal Investigator, Dr. Barbara Herlihy	_____ Co-Investigator, Tameka Bob, M.Ed., NCC	



THE UNIVERSITY of
NEW ORLEANS

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP,
COUNSELING AND FOUNDATIONS

African American Males' Perceptions of Their Fathers' Influence on Their Decision
Whether to Pursue Higher Education

Informed Consent

(Focus Groups)

• **Purpose of the research**

The purpose of this study is to evaluate African American males' perceptions of their fathers' influence on their decision whether to pursue higher education. I would like to understand your feelings toward your father's influence on your decision to go to college or not go to college. Although there is research that shares positive information on African American males, I find that the negative research is much more common. There is also low numbers of African American males attending college. Therefore, I would like to find the connection between fathers' influence and sons' decision whether to pursue higher education. Because society seems to believe that African American males are a lost generation, I would like to find out why.

• **Description of the study**

To gather information for my study I will conduct 2 focus groups and a number of individual interviews. Those who volunteer for the focus groups will not partake in the individual interviews. However the individual interviewees will also participate in the second focus group discussion. Once you volunteer to participate in the study, you will participate in two focus groups.

A focus group is a group of individuals who gather together to achieve a common purpose. For example, you and other individuals will come together to discuss your thoughts about African American fathers' influence on their sons' decisions to attend or not attend college. I will ask a question and each person that would like to answer will do so. This is the general procedure of a focus group. The focus groups will be held at Household of Faith Family Worship Church International at two separate times. The focus groups will last approximately 1 hour. You will be asked to participate in a discussion about the influence of AA fathers on their Son's decision to pursue higher education. Please note that you may know some of the other participants in the group. In the first group you will help me understand major influences of AA fathers on their sons. In the second group you will help me make meaning of information gathered from your first focus group session and from my individual interviews. We will be joined in the final focus group discussion by 10 individuals with whom I have had in-depth interviews.

- **Foreseeable risks**

During the focus groups, participants may be asked personal information as it relates to their father and/or household, which may cause some discomfort. Participants may feel uncomfortable sharing this personal information when others are present. All data will be kept confidential. However, the researcher will not be able to guarantee anonymity due to other participants being present. If a participant feels any discomfort, he may withdraw from the group at any time. Participants may get up and leave the group or simply not say anything further for the duration of the group. All participants will be informed of their right to withdraw from the group prior to beginning. In addition, a Licensed Professional Counselor referral list will be distributed prior to beginning the focus group.

- **Benefits of the research**

Participants may gain a feeling of relief by sharing information they have not shared previously. Participants will also have the opportunity to receive feedback from others that may assist them in their personal growth.

- **Confidentiality of records**

Participants' names will not be used in the reporting of results of this research. The data will be stored on audiotapes and then on a removable disk which will be in a locked file at all times. Only members of the researcher's dissertation committee will be allowed to access the data. Once the study is completed, all identifying data will be destroyed.

- **Contact information**

If participants have any questions regarding the research or your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact Dr. Richard Speaker at the University of New Orleans at (504)280-6607. For any other questions, you can contact the Principal Investigator, Dr. Barbara Herlihy at (504)280-6661 or bherlihy@uno.edu or the Co-Investigator, Tameka Bob at (504)914-1301 or tcbob@uno.edu.

Participation in this study is voluntary. Refusal to participate in this study will involve no penalty or loss to the individual. In addition, participants may discontinue participation at any time without any penalty. Your signature states that you are volunteering to participate in this study.

Participant's Name

Participant's Signature

Date

Principal Investigator, Dr. Barbara Herlihy

Co-Investigator, Tameka Bob, M.Ed., NCC

APPENDIX D

Potential Participant Checklist

POTENTIAL PARTICIPANT CHECKLIST

African American Males' Perceptions of Their Fathers' Influence on Their Decision Whether to Pursue Higher Education

The following criteria will be applied in selecting participants for this study. Please answer yes or no for each question.

1. Are you of the male sex? ☐ Yes ☐ No
2. Are you of the African American/Black race? ☐ Yes ☐ No
3. Are you between age 20 and 29? ☐ Yes ☐ No
4. Are you willing to participate in two focus groups and/or two individual interviews, plus a post focus group discussion? ☐ Yes ☐ No
5. Are you able to identify your biological father or identify a consistent father figure? ☐ Yes ☐ No

APPENDIX E

Participant Profile Sheet

PARTICIPANT PROFILE SHEET

African American Males' Perceptions of Their Fathers Influence on Their Decision Whether to Pursue Higher Education

1. Age _____
2. Are you a high school graduate? _____ Yes _____ No
3. College Education _____ None _____ Some _____ Degree
If you possess a degree, please list type _____
4. Can you identify your biological father? _____ Yes _____ No
5. If no, can you identify a father figure? _____ Yes _____ No

Barbara Herlihy, PhD., Principal Investigator
Tameka Bob, M.Ed., NCC, Co-Investigator

APPENDIX F

Counselor Referral List

COUNSELOR REFERRAL LIST

Referral List of Licensed Professional Counselors

1. Rhonda Vappie-Aydin, LPC, 715 South Broad ST, New Orleans, LA 70119, (504)658-5640
2. Jamison E Davis, LPC, 2000 Lakeshore DR., UNO Ed Bldg Rm.184, New Orleans, LA 70148, (504)280-6661
3. Barbara Herlihy, Ph.D, 2000 Lakeshore DR., 348 Education Bldg., New Orleans, LA. 70148, (504)280-3990
4. Theresa Phillips, Ph.D, 6801 Press Drive, New Orleans, LA., 70126 (504)286-5102
5. Sundy Barjon, LPC, 1111 Milan, New Orleans, LA., 70115 (504)495-3126

VITA

Tameka Bob is a lifelong resident of New Orleans, Louisiana. She earned her Bachelor of Science Degree in Psychology from Northwestern State University in the year of 1998. In 2001, she earned her Master of Counselor Education from Southeastern Louisiana University. Tameka earned her Doctorate of Counselor Education, with an emphasis in College Counseling, from the University of New Orleans in 2007.

Tameka is a member of the American Counseling Association and the Louisiana Counseling Association. She has years of higher education experience as both a professional counselor and administrator. Tameka has presented locally on topics which include: Test preparation, study skills, coping with stress, making the transition from high school to college, ACT preparation and more. She presented on the topic of First Generation College Students: getting them there and keeping them there, at the Louisiana Association of Student Assistance Programs Conference.