



The Experiences of African American and Latino Fathers on College Campuses

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ABSTRACT

Although the research on fatherhood is extensive, little attention has been given to men who are fathering young children while attending college. Fathers who are student parents has been overlooked in the literature on fatherhood. These fathers have also being invisible in the student support literature on college campuses. We examined challenges and factors that may have impacted retention among 17 African American and Latino fathers pursuing higher education. This study was conducted through phone interviews and focus groups. Our interview and focus group data later revealed an emergence of five themes: support systems, uncertainty in parenting practices, co-parenting relationships, role responsibility as a father, fatherhood role as motivation. All of the fathers in our study shared that their children and their role as fathers was their greatest motivation to finish their education. Our findings have implications for both college administrators and community-based programs seeking to serve fathers and their families.

INTRODUCTION

- Sample of heterosexual African American and Latino student-fathers
- Focused on lived experiences of both residential and non-residential fathers
- Advancing the literature on barriers and resilience factors that enable African American and Latino fathers to maintain their dual roles as a student and parent.

Research Questions

- What are the experiences of African American and Latino men enrolled in full-time studies and parenting a child five years old or younger?
- What types of support do African American and Latino men who are student-parents have in place?

METHODS

Phenomenological analyses were used as the methodology to analyze fathers' transcripts from the one-on-one interviews and two focus groups. Phenomenological analyses seek to capture and expound the meanings of a lived experience (Quinn, 2002). The use of this method facilitated the process of organizing and categorizing themes through open, axial and selective coding. The research team consisted of three individuals who used an interactive process of combing through fathers' transcripts, to identify and provide evidence for themes that emerged from the data.

Participants

- N = 17 heterosexual fathers that attended either an HBCU or HSI
- Participants ranged in age from 18 to 30 years old
- Race/Ethnicity of fathers were self-identified as:
 - Black (n=10)
 - Hispanic/Latino (n=7)
 - Each father had children under the age of 7

Design & Procedure

- We Conducted eight One-on-one Interviews two Focus Groups
- We used the same series of questions for both the interviews and the focus groups
- Guided by the Ecological Systems Theory we asked fathers questions related to their sense of self, their relationship with their child's mother and their systems of support both on and off campus.
 - Due to the dynamic nature of focus groups (group process) we were able to capture multiple responses from one questions. Interviewees often required secondary probing questions in order to elicit more in depth responses. a to these
 - Each focus group consisted of 4-7 fathers, and lasted 30-90 minutes

Analyses

- Utilized a constant comparative method from the grounded theory approach
- research team members analyzed the data
- Initial phase—open coding process
- Second phase—axial coding
- Third phase—selective coding

RESULTS

Thus far, 5 themes have emerged from the data:

1. Support Systems

"And so just more support, just more support around things of that nature, but geared specifically towards single parents and also more resources for single parents who still have to pay some sort of child support while in college."

2. Uncertainty in Parenting Practices

3. Co-parenting Relationships

"...I suppose we would probably have to rely on each other a lot more, I don't know if I would be more of a burden to her if I didn't have a support system...I think we would be able to work something out. I think she's understanding."

4. Role Responsibilities as a Father

5. Fatherhood Role being a Motivational Factor

"...he's kind of the reason why I went back to school because I didn't go to school for a while. When he was born I went back to school... he's the reason I'm in school..."

DISCUSSIONS

- African American and Latino student fathers are determined to complete their education, but are also faced with unique circumstances beyond those experienced by students of color.
- These fathers strive to stay involved in their children's lives even when they are non-residential fathers, while also fulfilling their desire to complete their education.
- With adequate support and understanding, we do not find any reason why student fathers cannot be successful in both their roles as fathers and students.

FUTURE WORK

- Future research should focus on more diverse campus setting across the United States in order to capture a greater scale of student-father experiences.
- Development of father friendly resources on college campuses.

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