Raising Black Males From a Black Father's Perspective: A Phenomenological Study

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Abstract
The role of Black fathers and the lessons they teach their sons have received little attention. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the perceptions of what current Black fathers learned from their parents, family, and society about education, male roles, and success. Seven Black fathers provided their perceptions of what they learned growing up that they share with their sons. Six themes emerged from the seven interviews: (a) fathers are role models, (b) it takes a village, (c) critical juncture, (d) exposure, (e) education was mandatory, and (f) essential ingredients. The discussion focuses on the impact Black fathers have on the development of their sons. Implications for counseling and future research are also presented.

Keywords
Black males, Black fathers, male development, phenomenology

Black males have a unique experience in America. In a qualitative study by Maton, Hrabowski, and Greif (1998), a research participant encapsulated this experience,

> A white male … doesn't have to fight society's view of you. They're already saying, "Oh well, you can be a doctor, you can be this." But if you're a person of color, you have to prove [that you] … can excel, can be a doctor … it's sort of like you're assumed guilty, until proven innocent. (pp. 639–640)

Due to the unique sociocultural experiences of Black males, it is useful to distinctly examine their childhood developmental experiences. These experiences often influence Black male development and can continue to impact Black males in future generations especially as it relates to their roles as fathers.

Researchers have examined the important role of fathers in male development for decades (Harper & Fine, 2006; Maton, Hrabowski, & Greif, 1998; Millen & Roll, 1977). The quality of the father–child relationship positively affects the child's overall well-being (Harper & Fine, 2006). Researchers reported that the presence of a residential, biological father or an actively present nonresidential, biological father can (a) inhibit violence in adult men (Mackey & Mackey, 2003), (b) lead to better psychological functioning (Dubowitz et al., 2001; Millen & Roll, 1977), and (c) have a profound influence on academic and professional achievement (Hebert, Pagnani, & Hammond, 2009; Maton et al., 1998). The presence of a father who demonstrates love, support, guidance, and is a positive role model is an invaluable contributor to healthy development in young Black males (Hebert et al., 2009; Morman & Floyd, 2006).

Review of the Literature

Father and Son Perspectives of Fatherhood

Hebert, Pagnani, and Hammond (2009) conducted a study using biographical analysis to explore paternal influence on high-achieving, gifted males. The participants consisted of men from multiple ethnicities who were influenced by the positive relationship experienced with their fathers. Criteria for participation included men who displayed evidence of giftedness in contributions to their professional domains, had national prominence, and had autobiographies or biographies written about them. The researchers reported common themes among the father–son dyads of these successful, high-achieving males to include the fathers providing guidance, encouragement, support, inspiration, maintaining high expectations, and demonstrating a strong work ethic.

Morman and Floyd (2006) have examined what it means to be a good father. They took a grounded theory approach and interviewed both fathers and sons regarding "good fathering." Through an open-ended questionnaire, the researchers asked, "What does being a 'good father' mean to you?" (p. 120). The open-ended responses were coded through an iterative approach and condensed to 20 categories. The top five

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responses from fathers included expressing love, being a role model, available, a teacher, and provider. The sons' top five categories included expressing love, support, involvement, availability, and being a role model.

Parenting Black Sons

Maton et al. (1998) intentionally sought to forfeit the deficit focus in research on Black males and examine this population from a strength perspective. They conducted a qualitative study on 60 high-achieving Black males and their parents in an effort to investigate parenting and contextual factors that contribute to outstanding academic achievement in this population. The themes that emerged from their investigation included the parents maintaining a persistent and determined academic engagement that began in preschool and persisted throughout their educational career. The parents and sons commented that there were very high expectations, a continued focus on the importance of education, and continued involvement and advocacy regarding school and educational placements. Another theme that emerged included strict discipline and limit setting. Participants shared that in a society where juvenile pranks by a Black male can be easily construed as criminal behavior, it is vital to vehemently instill in them the difference between right and wrong. A third theme that emerged included the presence of love, support, communication, and modeling. Fathers were described as positive role models who worked hard daily to support their family financially and were simultaneously available to help with homework and attend sports practices. They provided time, unconditional love, and open, honest communication (Greif, Hrabowski, & Maton, 1998). The fathers remarked that they spoke with their sons as opposed to lecturing them. The final theme that emerged from the study by Maton, Hrabowski, and Greif included a sense of connectedness to the community and to community resources. Extended family members, extracurricular activities, peers, and teachers were seen as influential in the son's academic development. The fathers in the study acknowledged to their sons that they would encounter additional challenges because they are both Black and male, but the fathers encouraged their sons to not allow stereotypes or bias to deter them from achievement (Greif et al., 1998). The fathers drew on their own achievement despite the odds, pride in African American history and achievements, and their faith, as strength to overcome the barriers that stand before Black men; they encouraged their sons to do the same.

Theoretical Framework

Parents have a powerful impact on who children are and who they will become (Bettelheim, 1987). Researchers continually suggest that children are greatly influenced by the behaviors, attitudes, and parenting styles of their caregivers (Barth, 2009; Mathew, Wang, Bellamy, & Copeland, 2005; Sanders & Turner, 2005). In order to adequately understand a parent's style, it is vital to understand the parent and the influences that have shaped the parent's development. Ogbu (1981) advocated that to understand the parenting norms of particular groups, it is vital to understand the ideas regarding success among a particular culture. Parenting practices are molded toward shaping children into that culture's definition of a successful adult. Ogbu contended that "certain populations possess unique instrumental competencies that meet their societal needs, and they adapt their child-rearing techniques to inculcate these needs" (p. 417). In his cultural ecological model, he asserted that child rearing is a culturally organized formula that is shared by the parents, family, and other institutions or settings in which the child interacts. He further contended that to understand child-rearing practices of a given culture, it is vital to understand the theories of success within that cultural group. These ideas of success inform and guide child-rearing practices. Children who develop certain ideas regarding success become adults who maintain these ideas and eventually pass them on to their children (Ogbu, 1981).

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the perceptions of what current Black fathers learned from their parents, family, and society about education, male roles, and success. We further explored how these experiences and beliefs influenced the fathers' parenting constructs and child-rearing practices. We asked Black fathers who were raising young Black males to describe what they believe were keys to successful outcomes in Black male development. Phenomenology was the research method chosen in an effort to understand the meaning and essence of Black male development as perceived by the Black fathers in this study. The specific research questions included: (a) How do childhood messages and experiences with parents, family, and society influence Black male development in the area of education, male roles, and success? and (b) What do fathers of young sons, based on their own experience, knowledge, and insight, believe that it takes to raise a successful Black male in America today?

Method

A phenomenological study was conducted due to the emphasis on capturing the essence of the lived experiences of the participants (Moustakis, 1994). We investigated the meaning and essence of the participants' experiences as they reflected upon their childhood and upbringing. We also conducted a narrative analysis searching for common themes among the words of the research participants in an effort to provide a description of their experiences that represented the participants as a whole.

Researcher as Instrument

Kline (2008) described the importance of qualitative researchers describing their role as instruments in research studies as it relates to their experiences with the phenomenon, their personal beliefs and biases concerning the phenomenon, and their relationship to the research approach. The first author is a Black female who has experience with Black male

development as a sister, cousin, friend, and mother. Through these experiences, she has learned that the experience of being a Black male in America is unique and their development is a delicate process. She completed an epoche prior to beginning the research study where she began the process of journaling her thoughts in relation to the phenomenon that ended at the conclusion of the study (Moustakis, 1994). The second author is a White female with two daughters. She brings a unique perspective as an outsider to Black families. The third author is a Black male father with three daughters. While he has no sons, his experience as a father inspired his interest in this study and provided him with an insider viewpoint. To control for potential bias, he discussed his experiences as father with the coauthors of this study and journaled how he was impacted by the findings, so that his thoughts did not interfere with the findings from the participants. All three authors have experience with qualitative research.

Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of the data was established by utilizing verbatim interview transcripts for data analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Triangulated methods of data collection included audiotaped interviews, written interview responses, and participant observation, which also helped establish credibility (Maxwell, 2005). Interviews were conducted until saturation was reached and the themes were continually repeated with no new themes emerging (Creswell, 2007). Following saturation, two additional interviews were conducted to verify that saturation was achieved. To further validate the results of our study, we member checked with two research participants to ensure that the data reported adequately represented the themes that were expressed (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Interview Questions

The interview questions were created in an effort to answer the research questions. Herndon and Moore (2002) emphasized the significant role that the values and practices of family members play in forming Black children's ideas regarding education. The first interview question was formed in relation to this idea: (a) What messages did you get about education and academic success growing up? Parents typically replicate the parenting styles that they experienced as children (Bavolek, 2000)). This phenomena helped guide the second interview question: (b) What messages did you get about what it means to be a good son and father? Ogbu (1981) stressed the significance of understanding a culture's ideas regarding success when investigating parenting practices in a given culture. Parenting practices are geared toward molding children into that culture's definition of a successful adult. In accordance with this framework, the last four interview questions emerged: (c) What messages did you get about what it means to be a successful Black male in America? (d) What particular childhood experiences represent the messages that you were given? (e) How do you think those

messages influenced who you are today? and (f) Based on your own experience, knowledge, and insight, what do you believe it takes to raise a successful Black male in America today?

Each participant answered each of the above questions; however, the questions were not asked in the same order. Due to the emergent qualities of the interviews, the six grand tour questions were asked at different times in each of the interviews. Additional questions were asked based on the participants' answers to previous questions.

Participants

Purposeful and criterion sampling (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007) was utilized in the selection of seven Black males to explore their perceptions of what they learned from their parents, family, and society about education, male roles, and success. The criteria necessary for inclusion in the study was that each participant was a (a) Black male (b) over 21 years of age, and (c) lived in the same home with a biological son. Participants had an average age of 34.1 years. Each participant was a high school graduate; additionally, one participant had 2 years of college, two participants had bachelor's degrees, and one participant had a master's degree. Also, each participant resided with the mother of his children. Five of the seven participants grew up in homes with their mother, father, and siblings; and the other two participants grew up with their mothers and siblings, and they had fathers who were active in their lives. Finally, five of the participants were married, two participants were never married, and the participants had from one to five children.

Data Collection

The purpose of the study was to describe the perceptions of what current Black fathers learned from their parents, family, and society about education, male roles, and success. After receiving institutional review board approval, each participant provided his informed consent following a discussion of the purpose and goals of the study. Pseudonyms were created to protect the identity and confidentiality of each participant. Participants completed a demographic questionnaire, and participated in a 30-min audiotaped interview with the first author of the study. Following the completion of the interviews, the interviews were transcribed and verified for accuracy. Participants took part in member checking interviews that focused on verifying the accuracy of the themes and the selected quotes. The participants agreed that the results reflected their shared experiences.

Data Analysis

A phenomenological research design using the Stevick–Colaizzi–Keen Method of data analysis was utilized to understand the phenomenon of Black male development from the participants' perspectives (Moustakis, 1994). Data analysis was conducted by the first author and was reviewed by the third

author. The first step in the data analysis process included interview transcription. Following transcription, the transcripts were read repeatedly, and each statement that significantly described the meaning and experience of Black male development was extracted, related, and clustered into themes (Moustakis, 1994). Using verbatim examples, the significant statements were combined, creating a description of the textures of the experience for each participant. Then from the textural–structural description of each participant, a composite textural–structural description was created that captured the meaning and essence of the experience of the phenomenon of Black male development that represented the group as a whole (Moustakis, 1994). The result of the data analysis process was the identification of six themes and a description of the essence of the participants' experiences.

Results

From the seven verbatim interview transcripts, 161 significant statements were extracted. These significant statements were grouped into six themes that emerged from the seven interviews: (a) fathers are role models, (b) it takes a village, (c) critical juncture, (d) exposure, (e) education was mandatory, and (f) essential ingredients. Each theme is discussed in this section.

Fathers Are Role Models

Six of the seven participants noted that their mothers did most of the daily child rearing, but when discussing the influences on who they became each participant discussed what they learned from their fathers. The lessons from their fathers echoed in their minds throughout their development, Kevin recalled, "It was hard for any other message to come because the message that I got from my dad was astounding." The "lessons" came from what their fathers told them. Mathew recalled, "My dad just always taught me to think differently about certain things" and Randall noted, "He [my father] would always preach on ... how to conduct yourself." John recalled that his father, "always told me the right thing. Everything that he would tell me would come to pass. And he was always nice. He wouldn't yell at me or curse at me or anything."

The most significant lessons came not only from what their fathers told them but from what they saw their fathers do. Terrence remembered "my dad wasn't a strong voice; I wish he would have been a stronger voice, but he wasn't." Terrence longed for his father's guidance, but later realized that "he didn't really instill a lot into me verbally. But now when I look at it, it was actions that were speaking louder than his words." The participants recalled learning so much from just observing their fathers.

The two participants who did not grow up in the same home with their fathers agreed that "[If my dad lived with me] it would have been more structured. There would have been more consistency ... and I probably would have made better choices," but all participants valued the lessons that their fathers taught them. Gregory said,

Basically you have to be a good father because your kids are going to look up to you. You have to do what's right ... you want them to follow the same footsteps that you're in and even become something better than what you are.

The participants' fathers were their role models. They valued their current role as father largely due to what their fathers gave them.

It Takes a Village!

As the participants reflected on their childhood, five of the seven participants recalled the influence that church, aunts, uncles, and grandparents had on their development. Randall remembered, "We were a close family. We always had aunts and uncles and growing up Catholic, the priest would eat at our house on Sundays." Terrence recalled,

> We were raised in church, so everything was church. Being a moral, good person at any cost ... We had a lot of family around all the time. Just not my mom and dad, but their brothers and sisters were always around. So that had a lot of influence on me growing up.

James said, "Grandfather, I think that was the person that I idolized the most in part because I was around him most growing up." Mathew remembered:

> Major influences were ... in the younger ages I guess I would have to say my parents ... and growing up in the church. I went to church a lot growing up and ... also my grandparents ... I saw my grandparents a lot, both my mom's parents and my dad's parents lived in the same neighborhood, so I guess the whole family atmosphere and going to church and everything ... Growing up in a black family and ... going to a school that is mostly white ... you go to your family and they hear that you are learning about certain things and they might try to give you different perspectives especially on like history and certain things ... even [my] grandpa ... he would be like ... so ya'll are learning about so and so, well you know it really happened like this ...

Extended family members added richness and perspective to the participants. Kevin remembered what he learned in church, "the involvement in the congregation played a huge role in my development ... learning bible stories, scripture quoting ... speaking at different events ... that played a huge role in preparing me to do different things in the world." Church, aunts, uncles, and grandparents gave these developing males additional role models and a broader, more solid foundation.

Critical Juncture

A juncture is a point of time, "especially one made critical or important by a concurrence of circumstances," or a point of time in which "a decision must be made" (juncture, n.d.).

Many of the participants described a time in their development where they had to make a decision on which way their lives would go. Mathew said, "I guess I started to shift like around 15, 16, 17." For some this involved experimenting with alcohol and marijuana, for others it involved criminal activity, or hanging around people who participated in criminal activity. Mathew described the experience when he said,

> Sometimes Black people especially back then, you kind of had this thing where it's like "keeping it real," Like, you have to "keep it real," and you can't be a nerd and things like that. So you felt like you had to dress a certain way and you had to drink and smoke every now and then to be like ... a hip person ... cool person ... it's just the whole cool thing. I think that's what it was, I think a lot of kids try to be cool from time to time and sometimes being cool is doing the wrong thing.

Kevin recalled a time where he felt desperate financially and was around negative peer influences:

> One thing led to another ... I could have very well ended up ... well ... I don't know it could have gone either way, but I know I would have done some time in prison ... My dad did everything he could to protect me ... and that made a huge impact because had he not stepped in I probably wouldn't be sitting here talking to you right now. I probably would be doing 40 years.

For all the participants, there eventually came a time when they realized, as James expressed,

> I had a choice as to if I wanted to make something better of myself, then here was the path to take (gestures toward a path) and if I wanted to hang out with the crew that just was comfortable ... then I could have rightfully done that, but I chose not to, being young, I didn't see it any other way.

It was at this critical juncture that they recognized "I did have choices," and, like Gregory, they resolved that "I'm gone try to keep myself on the right track to be here for my kids ... Because without me being here that will impact them in a difficult way."

Exposure

All participants viewed being exposed to different experiences that were outside of the neighborhood and outside of the norm as a huge contributor to healthy development. These concepts included family trips, extracurricular activities, and parents' work environments. James remembered,

> Exposure. I think ... when I say exposure my parents ... growing up in [my neighborhood], if I would have stayed in [my neighborhood], if my parents wouldn't have taken me outside of [my neighborhood] and exposed me to other things, then I may have been caught up with the population there that may be comfortable with what is put in front of them. I think the exposure that I have received with my cousins on to my aunts ... seeing them

successful ... [really influenced me]. When I'm saying exposure, get [ting] out of town, interact[ing] with other folks in other areas and see[ing] how they live and how things go, And I think you really find an appreciation for life if you do those things. So we got to travel a lot of places, we travelled to the east coast, up just shy of Canada to Michigan, and stuff like that, we got to get around other folks to see their way of thinking and see their way of living and stuff. I think that is critical.

John stressed the importance of seeing, "the nicer side of life, nice vacations, and educational experiences." Mathew emphasized the importance of

> hav[ing] opportunities ... to be able to do things, travel places, and just ... read ... not just read about stuff that's a waste of time like fictional books and things like that, but read about history, and different types of cultures. I don't know ... I am always reading.
>
>   Extracurricular activities played a huge part in the area of exposure. Terrence recalled, "The piano ... It really saved my life because I would have to break away and go to choir rehearsal." Gregory remembered, Sometimes we would get out of school and go fishing ... me, my dad, my brother ... my cousins we all played football, played baseball ... go to the park, go to the YMCA. We were always spending our time doing something ... keeping ourselves busy ... Doing those things ... a lot of things kept us out of trouble or trying to make bad choices. We were always keeping ourselves motivated to doing good things and positive things ... things that keep yourselves busy.

Three of the seven participants wished their parents would have done more as far as exposing them to extracurricular activities. James recalled,

> There were certain things I was exposed to, but then there were certain abilities that I learn that I possessed but it wasn't until after I had finished college, so maybe I would have gone a different route in college versus the degree that I obtained, just because some of the talents that I possess, I didn't know that I had them because I wasn't fully exposed to certain things ... and that is where I say being in a single household, maybe if my dad was still there then maybe he would have picked up on and saw in me certain things that as a kid, I wouldn't see in myself. And maybe that would have opened up different doors. That is one of the things that I am going to be keen to.

John summed it up when he said,

> Things that influence raising a successful young black man right now. I would say give them a bunch of knowledge and make sure they're exposed to a lot. Different things that the average young black man is not exposed to.

Education Was Mandatory

For four of the seven participants, their parents valued education to the point where, like Kevin said, "it was mandatory ...

mainly my daddy. My daddy instilled in us the value of education. It was one of those kinds of homes where you don't bring home below a B." He always said, "If you want to do well in life you have to get a good job, if you want to get a good job, you have to get a good education."

Role models really influenced the participants' view of education. James recalled, "I think with the fact that my father and his three sisters ... they all finished college, my mother finished college ... you know ... so there was a mold there ... Then my mother was a school teacher, so she was heavy on education." For Kevin,

> My mom, my dad, my uncles my aunts ... they were all educators ... My dad was very consumed with learning. He got a bachelor's degree, then a Master's degree. He was already employed and continued to try and learn more. Number one to get as much knowledge as he could and number two, I learned that the reason he was trying to continue his education was that he could get a higher income. So the correlation between him being more successful and getting an education is what motivated him.

Two of the seven participants' parents exhibited their value for education by graduating from college, and those participants grew up with the same values and obtained a college degree. Three of the seven participants' parents valued education but did not graduate from college, and neither did the participants. Another two of the seven, like Terrence, wished their parents would have valued education.

> They never really stressed education. It was never really stressed. It was more experiential ... where you get experience through life. I had one aunt, she was a school teacher, and she stressed education. Nobody else really talked about doing your homework, getting good grades. My parents were not college educated so they didn't really have the understanding of ... nobody really stressed the next thing.

I wish somebody would have stressed education. I wish I would have had a strong person that really knew the value of education because I think I had the smarts to be further along in life. I'm trying to do it now because I understand, but had I had that person there to nurture than I could have been a lot further than I am today.

Some participants were raised in families with role models who were college educated and that same value of education was passed to them. Other participants acquired a value for education through later life experiences. Gregory encapsulates the participants' experiences with education, "education is basically what everybody needs. Anywhere you go, a lot of people are going to look at ... you know ... where your education skills are at. That's what I believe."

Essential Ingredients

The culminating interview question asked participants to describe what they believed it took to raise a successful Black male in America today. Common essential ingredients included the themes discussed: being a role model, extended family support, church, exposure, extracurricular activities, and a strong emphasis on education. The only additional factor that was common among the participants included an emphasis on having a friendship with their sons. This was one aspect that many of the participants felt that they did not have with their fathers growing up. Kevin recalled,

> My dad was very stern and very strict, and for the most part it worked, but while ... I am very much the same way, I want to try to create ... I want to listen more ... and I want to try to understand ... not just homeboys ... not that we can't be, but I do want things to be in a place where he feels comfortable opening up to me.

John believed that it is important to "be their best friend. Make sure they can talk to you about anything ... at whatever age ... from a young age." Mathew shared, "I know your parents role is not to be your friend ... as some people say ... I want to be on more of a friend level with my kids rather than always trying to be an authority." Randall summed it up when he stated,

> [I want to be] their friend, but their parent at the same time. Some people say that you can't do both, but I don't believe that. I think you can be a parent and a friend. I think in certain situations you have to choose one. But I think you can do it in a way that you still show yourself friendly.

Discussion

For the specific portion of our research question that addressed, how do childhood messages and experiences with parents, family, and society influence Black male development in the area of male roles? we determined that the participants learned through example. Though there were no criteria for the participants' having a relationship with their father, each participant described a close relationship with their biological father. Future research could explore if the presence of a father contributes to an understanding of what a fathering relationship should or should not be. Kevin articulated what the presence of a father means when he said that a huge part of being an effective parent is to evaluate how you were parented:

> An understanding of *your* rearing. Meaning that what helped me be the parent that I am today, is having a good understanding of how my dad raised me ... even if there was an absence of your father ... knowing the value of his presence through his absence helps versus having the attitude of "my daddy was never around" and stopping right there.

Through this critical analysis, a father can begin to understand how his behavior influences the present and future of his children.

The theme *It Takes a Village*! speaks directly to the specific part of the research question focused on how family and social

experiences impact Black male development. The participants acknowledged the role that church, grandparents, and extended family members played in their thought formulation regarding education, male roles, and success. This is consistent with the work of Eckstein, Belongia, and Elliot-Applegate (2000) who noted that grandparents are influential figures who provide guidance, encouragement, support, and a sense of history to their families.

In the theme *Critical Juncture*, we reveal descriptions of a time in the life of our participants when they either gave in to negative peer influences and social stereotypes or they overcame the imprudence of youth to make choices that benefited their future. This theme aligns with the identity versus role confusion stage of development (12–18 years old) posited by Erikson (1968) in his theory of psychosocial development. It is in this stage that a young man's development is not based on how he is treated by others, but on the decisions he makes for himself. Erikson went on to point out that it is during this stage a boy becomes a man, and he must struggle with overcoming peer influences and social pressure to determine his own sense of what is right and what is wrong and make choices based on these convictions. Using this theme, we uncovered the influence that society and peers have on our participants. In a society where juvenile pranks by young Black men can be easily misconstrued as criminal behavior, it is imperative that as children they are given the necessary love, esteem, and guidance from their parents so that when they reach this critical juncture, the young man's decisions will align with his training (Maton et al.,1998).

The participants indicated that when they were children they were exposed to different places and activities that allowed them to discover various interests and passions. John remarked:

> Things that influence raising a successful young black man right now ... I would say give them a bunch of knowledge and make sure they're exposed to a lot. Different things that the average young black man is not exposed to ... nice vacations, educational experiences ... not too much negative music ... positive music, encounters with God ... try to be around positive people ... people that have got it going on as opposed to being around negative people that will show them a negative way.

Two of the participant's tied the idea of *Exposure*, to cultivating the inherent gifts that lie within the young Black male. Kevin's words reflect these participants' ideas:

> [to] pay close attention to what [your son's] actions show that he is passionate about. While my dad gave me a great foundation and equipped me very well for life ... there were some things in life that I was very passionate about that as I reflect as a father today if I saw my son doing these things I would [cultivate them].

The theme *Education was Mandatory* aligns with Herndon and Moore's (2002) review of literature regarding the role that familial influence plays on the college experience of Black students. They asserted that if a Black family aspires to send their children to college, this expectation should be established early in their life. Herndon and Moore suggested the importance of young Black men and women experiencing persistent encouragement to meet educational goals and seeing examples of role models who have graduated from college. The participants discussed the influence that parents, family, and teachers had on their educational pursuits and achievement. Strong messages from the influential adults in our participants' lives served as a buffer against negative peer influences, especially regarding education. Kevin remembered a time when he moved out of his house during his critical juncture, and was participating in deviant behavior. His parents had so vehemently impressed upon him the significance of a good education that he never stopped going to school and went on to pay for his college education.

The theme *Essential Ingredients* speaks directly to our research question, What do fathers of young sons, based on their own experience, knowledge, and insight, believe that it takes to raise a successful Black male in America today? The participants' idea of success included being positive role models for their sons; exposing them to ''the nicer side of life,'' extracurricular activities, church; spending time with them; encouraging educational pursuits; and having open, honest communication with their sons. The addition of friendship as a common thread among the participants is consistent with the theme of *Mutual Admiration and Respect* that Hebert et al. (2009) discovered in their examination of paternal influence on high-achieving gifted males. It is significant for fathers to respect their sons as men and value their unique perspectives. Our study participants, Black males who are raising Black males, gave us insight into the meaning and essence of their experiences and perceptions of the essential ingredients to successful Black male development.

Limitations, Implications, and Directions for Future Research

There were several limitations to this study. First, participants were limited to Black fathers, over 21 years old who live with a biological son. Black mothers were not included in this exploratory study and should be included in future studies. The mother's role with the father should also be explored since this role could be supportive, indifferent, or augmentative. Second, the study did not include fathers who do not live with their sons, which would be another perspective for future research. Additionally, there were no fathers with daughters only, or fathers from other ethnic groups. Finally, this study took place in one geographic location, and results may be specific to this location.

The results of this study allowed the researchers to identify several implications for counselors and therapists including the importance of educating Black fathers on the significance of their role. Many times parents are unaware of how their relationship or lack of relationship with their children makes an indelible imprint on their children's hearts and minds.

Divorcing parents or single mothers should also be informed of the significance of cultivating the father son relationship. Counselors and therapists should help educate parents that young Black men need positive role models, the love and support of extended family members and support systems, exposure to experiences beyond their immediate environment, extracurricular activities, and a persistent emphasis and parental involvement in education. Parents should be knowledgeable of the critical juncture that young men experience in emerging adulthood and be supportive and involved in the lives of their sons during this significant time. Counselors and therapists can play a significant role in fostering flourishing environments for healthy Black male development through parenting education and family support and counseling.

Understanding the developmental needs of Black male children is critical to effective parenting and teaching. Future research efforts can focus on how teacher's perceptions affect the healthy development of young Black men during the critical juncture in their lives. Participants mentioned how their teacher's attitude served as a protective measure during this critical juncture or a harmful measure due to a feeling that the teachers "singled [them] out and expected [them] to fail . . . to be bad." Other research efforts could focus on Hispanic male development or other populations that experience challenges in the academic and criminal justice arena. It is crucial to understand the influences that affect the healthy development of various populations in our society in an effort to encourage healthy development in all American children.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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