

Running head: SERVING FATHERS OF COLOR

Effectively Serving Low-Income Fathers of Color

Andrew O. Behnke

NC State University

William D. Allen

Healing Bonds (Private Practice)

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Andrew Behnke, Ph.D.; North Carolina State University; Campus Box 7605; Raleigh, NC 27695-7605.

andrew_behnke@ncsu.edu

Abstract

Though the last decade has demonstrated an increased interest in research on fathers of color, little has been written to aide professionals and policy makers who serve fathers of color. This literature review employs four dynamic conditions--microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem--underlying a socio-ecological framework to present various key factors influencing the lives low-income African American and Latino fathers. By integrating multiple levels of thinking about these fathers, we situate our suggestions for effectively engaging these fathers within the reality of these men's diverse contextual and social environments. Discussion also includes best practices and examples of programs to guide professionals and policy makers working to better the lives of families of color.

Key words: Fatherhood, ethnic minority, context, best practices, applied, African American, Latino

*The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise with the occasion. As our case is new, so we must **think anew and act anew.** – Abraham Lincoln*

Effectively Serving Low-Income Fathers of Color

In recent years parenting research and intervention has grown to increasingly include fatherhood programming. However, despite an increasing number of fatherhood programs specifically aimed to serve low-income fathers of color, little has been written on effective and engaging practices to involve these fathers (Englar-Carlson & Stevens, 2006). Indeed policymakers and professionals generally focus on “the father” as the unit of analysis with little guidance for understanding the diverse contextual and social components that frame fathers’ lives (Marsiglio, Roy, & Fox, 2005). The intent of this review is to unlock the “father-only” thinking once common among professionals and policy makers to explore a more contextualized and “situated” approach to serving these fathers.

Ethnic minorities are expected to account for over 50 percent of the U.S. population by 2050 (U.S. Census, 2005). In fact, Latino, African American, and Asian American fertility rates are considerably higher than those for European American families and are expected to account for more than 90 percent of all births by 2050 (U.S. Census, 2005). Considering this burgeoning ethnic minority population, fathers of color will play a key role in the future of the United States (McLoyd, Cauce, Takeuchi, & Wilson, 2000). For instance, research has provided robust evidence indicating the positive effects of fatherhood programming and positive father involvement (quality involvement not just involvement; Pleck, 1997) on the physical, social, and emotional development of children and youth (e.g., Cabrera, Tamis-LeMonda, Bradley, Hofferth, & Lamb, 2000). Despite the great deal of energy that has gone into the study of fatherhood in the last two decades, research on ethnic minority fathers remains somewhat scattered and with relatively little focus (Cabrera & Garcia-Coll, 2004; Nelson, 2004). This article brings together research on lower income African American and Latino fathers to demonstrate best practices to effectively help and appeal to the needs of these fathers.

We have chosen to focus on key principals in the service of Latino and African American fathers because of our experience working with these fathers and because they numerically account for the largest number of fathers of color. We realize that the research and experiences cited in this article do not represent the full diversity of ethnic and immigrant fatherhood experiences in the United States. Yet, we feel that focusing on these two groups is warranted, considering the size of these groups of fathers and difficulties many of these fathers face. We acknowledge that there is vast diversity within the socially constructed Latino and African American ethnic groups (e.g., Umaña-Taylor & Fine, 2001), though we also believe that much of what we present in this article may be applicable to fathers of various cultures, backgrounds, and social classes. With this in mind, we use the multiple levels of the socio-ecological model to frame our discussion of key factors that influence the lives of fathers of color. We then illustrate best practices for effectively serving the growing numbers of Latino and African American fathers in the U.S.

Centering Fathers in a Socio-Ecological Framework

Fathers play a central role in the lives of their families, regardless of their ethnic background; however, various unique factors influence the positive father involvement of minority fathers. It is helpful for us to think about fathers of color using some of the structural components of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) socio-ecological framework. This theory can be used to conceptualize fathers in the terms of four dynamic conditions, the microsystem (e.g., father), the mesosystem (e.g., family), the exosystem (e.g., workplace), and the macrosystem (e.g., culture). For instance, fathers both influence and are influenced by their relationships with their children, their work environments, and the cultural milieu of which they are a part (Bulboz & Sontag, 1996). An ecological approach helps us to see the reciprocal linkages across systems, and can strengthen our ability to support effective involvement as we serve these fathers.

Fathers of Color as a Microsystem

Let us begin by looking (as most professionals have) at the father *microsystem* by examining individual level factors (i.e., human capital) influencing fathers of color. We begin by demonstrating some of the personal strengths and struggles faced by fathers of color, and two key principals for professionals and policy makers.

Resilient fathers. Though much research on minority fathers has been largely spurred by the treatment of fatherhood as a social problem, in the last decade a number of authors have depicted fathers of color as having hidden strengths, such as resilience and resourcefulness in light of the difficult situations many of these fathers face (Coley, 2001; Roy, 2005a, 2006). For example, fathers of color are often stereotyped as absent from the lives of their children. However, a recent study of ethnically diverse fathers, countered the generally negative portrayal of fathers of color, by showing that the African American and Latino fathers they studied were more physically involved, monitored their children more, and provided more consistent discipline than their European American counterparts (Toth & Xu, 1999). African American fathers more commonly reported that they bathed their children, changed diapers, disciplined their children, made appointments, and took them to activities.

Research has also shown that some fathers of color are generally more involved when their children are infants, and again when the children enter middle school age. Many of these fathers may recall experiences of being raised without the active participation of their fathers, and thus have taken it upon themselves to be more involved with their children (e.g., Roy, 2005a; Taylor & Behnke, 2005).

Even in cases where ethnic minority fathers are not consistently involved or coresident with their children, research suggest that some of them are quite emotionally involved in their children's lives (Ahmeduzzaman & Roopnarine, 1992; Coltrane, Parke, & Adams, 2004). In specific parenting domains ethnic minority fathers have been shown to do better than fathers from the majority

European American population (Hoffereth, 2003; Toth & Xu, 1999). For example, authors have shown that African American and Latino dads were more nurturing, engaged, concerned, emotionally supportive, and less controlling than European American fathers (e.g., Hoffereth; Mosley & Thomson, 1995; Toth & Xu). Researchers have also pointed out that although structural and economic obstacles prevent some ethnic minority fathers from living with or spending time with their children, these deprivations lead some fathers to heightened feelings of emotional attachment and responsibility for the children (Allen & Connor, 1997; Hoffereth).

Father struggles. Though fathers of color have many personal assets including the ones previously mentioned, many of these fathers also have personal difficulties with which they may struggle. Some of these fathers have had to cope with fewer opportunities for educational and occupational success, including limited access to higher education and better jobs (e.g., McLoyd, 1990; Wilson, 1999). Recent data indicate on average only 9 percent of Latino fathers and 14 percent of African American fathers have graduated from college, compared to 25% of Caucasian men (U.S. Census, 2005). This disparity directly influences their ability to find better jobs and potentially limits their ability to help their children succeed in school (Cabrera & Garcia-Coll, 2004; McLoyd). Indeed many fathers struggling to surmount educational and economic issues have increased and prolonged stress in their lives, and are at particular risk for physical and emotional problems (i.e., depression; Conger et al., 2002; Parke et al., 2004). However, considering these circumstances, some fathers of color beat the odds and gain the education and skills they need regardless of their struggles with poverty and poor educational and occupational opportunities.

The acquisition of English is a potential barrier for many immigrant fathers seeking education and employment in the U.S. For example, among Latino fathers, who comprise the largest group of these immigrants, more than two-fifths of them do not speak English (del Pinal & Singer, 1997). Language barriers often isolate these men from public resources such as public assistance, better

employment, and at times, their own children (Martínez, 2001; Taylor & Behnke, 2005). For instance, limited English abilities can make it harder for Latino fathers to know where their children are and what they are doing on a daily basis and decrease the likelihood of securing better paying jobs (Taylor & Behnke). Moreover limited language abilities may make it difficult to be involved in the interests of their children, and may impede attempts to be actively involved in their children's schooling (Shock, Behnke, & Plunkett, in press).

Mesosystem Factors Impacting Fathers of Color

Though much less recognized than personal factors, interpersonal relationships play a dominant role in the success of fathers of color. These types of personal relationships include relationships with family, friends, coworkers, individuals at church/synagogue, and so on. Often referred to as mesosystems, this level of ecosystem refers to connections between microsystems (unit of analysis) and exosystems (the outside environment). We will discuss two primary groups of relationships for fathers: family and peers.

Family influences on fathers. Social support from family can influence the means by which fathers of color interact with their children in both positive and negative ways (Summers, Boller, & Raikes, 2004). For example, healthy relationships between wives and husbands or between a father and child can often have the effect of increasing other positive relationships within a family (Dunst, Trivette, & Deal, 1994). We believe the benefits of healthy significant relationships can be particularly important for those facing extra-familial stressors such as poverty or institutional racism. These positive relationships also may lead to other beneficial life choices. Recent studies suggest that positive father-child relationships improve the lives of Latino and African American men. Mirandé (1997) and Fitzpatrick, Caldera, Pursley, and Wampler (1999) have showed that Latino fathers are most commonly very nurturing and concerned parents and that being a parent has a positive impact on their personal well-being. Researchers have shown that many African American men make huge sacrifices

to be involved their children's lives and have heightened feelings of responsibility for their children even though on average these fathers spend less actual time with their children because employment and other social and structural barriers limit their involvement (Allen & Conner, 1997; Jarrett, Roy, & Burton, 2002).

Significant familial relationships (e.g., spouses) can have a positive influence on fathers of color by providing social supports and economic resources that improve the prospects for effective parenting. However, these significant relationships (when volatile or contentious) can also have detrimental repercussions on other family relationships (Jarrett et al., 2002). For example, poor relationships with the mothers of their children (or the mothers' families) can lead to limited access and involvement particularly for nonresident fathers (Allen & Hawkins, 1999). "Gatekeeping" is especially common among those minority fathers who struggle with partner conflict, who have divorced or separated from their spouse, and/or who live at a geographic distance from their children (McLoyd, 1989). Relational problems can exacerbate and be exacerbated by inadequate or inconsistent economic support from these fathers.

Peer influences on fathers. Similar to factors discussed in relation to family member influences, friends and co-workers can also have both positive and negative influences on fathers of color (Summers et al., 2004). Though little has been written on the subject of peer influences in the lives of minority fathers, undoubtedly these fathers are influenced by their peers (Jarrett et al., 2002; Stier & Tienda, 1993). For example, a father may receive a good deal of informal support from other fathers with whom he plays basketball or works alongside during the day. Yet at the same time these same individuals may give bad advice or become a distraction if they unduly limit the time a father can spend with his child. Likewise, positive messages can be mixed with less healthy messages which can lead to ambiguities in terms of the way a father should interact with his family.

Exosystem Factors Impacting Fathers of Color

A third dimension that can be used to understand fathers of color is that of exosystems. This larger ecosystem generally refers to the broader structural systems in which an individual interacts, such as homes, schools, workplaces, churches, and neighborhoods. Similarly, contextual factors such as (im)migration may play key roles in determining the effective involvement of fathers.

School involvement. Though children spend more of their waking hours at school than in any other one context, fathers are typically less involved than mothers in their children's academic lives. Though fathers are about as likely to take part in extracurricular activities, that involve their children at school, many school teachers and administrators have cited an absence of paternal involvement in academic activities such as homework and teacher conferences (Nord, Brimhall, & West, 1997). Nonresident fathers may be even less likely to balance participation in their children's schools. Rather than simply pointing to the problem, various authors have provided various suggestions and programmatic solutions (e.g., Nord et al.; Ortiz, 2004). For example, some have maintained that much must be done to make schools more father friendly, as well as more welcoming of ethnically diverse families (Waterman & Zellman, 1998). Personal invitations to school events and the establishment of father/child groups may also prove effective (Shock, Behnke, & Plunkett, in press).

Work and the provider role. Unemployment and under-employment are serious barriers to success in the provider role for many fathers of color (McLoyd, 1990; Taylor, Leashore, & Toliver, 1988). For most men, fulfilling their obligations to financially provide for their children is a powerful expectation (Marsiglio et al., 2000), but given the relatively high rates of unemployment for both African American (11 percent unemployed) and Latino (7.4 percent unemployed) men, being able to successfully provide and be involved fathers is often difficult (U.S. Census, 2000). When these fathers cannot contribute fully to the financial and material well-being of their families, they can become demoralized and isolated from family life. Rather than the popular stereotype of "deadbeat dads," these are "dead broke dads"—fathers who lack the financial means to have consistent supportive

interactions with their children (Mincy & Sorensen, 1998). In their attempts to meet their financial obligations, some fathers enter the underground economy by “hustlin” or working off the books, a decision which can have potentially deleterious effects on family life (Roy, 2005a).

Employment and related work demands are also influential in the positive parent involvement of African American and Latino fathers. As many fathers of color have experienced firsthand the effects cyclical poverty, these fathers often must take the jobs no one else will take (Hecker, 2004). These jobs include agriculture, manufacturing, and service sector jobs, with their associated challenging working conditions and long, irregular working hours. Some fathers also feel that a lack of time and the fatigue from long, demanding working hours reduces the time they would like to spend with their children (Taylor & Behnke, 2005). Stresses related to working long hours for inadequate pay can at times spill over into parenting behaviors and other interactions (e.g., labile affect, irritability, and aggression) in the home (e.g., Conger et al., 1992, 1993). However, many fathers find ways to successfully navigate these difficult economic work related circumstances while raising their children (Danziger & Radin, 1990). Thus as with other fathers, work (or lack thereof) can have positive and negative effects on the quality of involvement among fathers of color.

Neighborhoods act as another primary exosystem to influence the ways fathers are involved with their children (Marsiglio et al., 2005). Neighborhoods may act as a backdrop to minority fathers’ daily life, but they also sometimes play a “lead role” by influencing these men’s family relationships and access to jobs (Coltrane, Melzer, Vega, & Parke, 2005; Hamer, 2005). Latino and African American fathers are overrepresented in poor urban neighborhoods with their lack of community resources (e.g., pools, good schools), high levels of street violence, and lack of educational and occupational opportunity (Gephard, 1997; Gephard & Brooks-Gunn, 1997; Vélez-Ibáñez, 1996). Some neighborhoods have been shown to act as “toxic environments” for raising children, with extreme levels of violence, substance abuse, and other illegal activity, as well as a lack of positive

characteristics such as green spaces and other community resources (Garbarino, 1995; Hamer, 2005). Ross Parke and others have shown that these poor neighborhoods can influence the ways parents interact with their children and have adverse effects on child outcomes (Coltrane et al., 2005; Hamer, 2005; O'Neil, Parke, & McDowell, 2001).

Immigration may make it more difficult for fathers to maintain strong relationships with their children. “Solos,” the term for immigrant men from Latin America who have left their families behind, make up a disproportionate number the current immigrant population in the U.S (Coltrane et al., 2005; Martínez, 2001). Due in part to difficulty in both legal and illegal immigration processes these men leave behind their families to seek employment in the U.S. and often become merely shadows to their wives and children. Likewise, internal migration to follow agricultural or other seasonal work has its effects on the parent/child relationship and should be considered by those who wish to provide services to migrant families (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994).

Macrosystem Factors Impacting Fathers of Color

Recently a more expansive set of macrosystem factors have been the focus of research with fathers (e.g., Marsiglio et al., 2005; Peterson, Steinmetz, & Wilson, 2004). These factors include economic, social, cultural, political, and historical forces that predominate in a society.

Poverty is also a real concern among African American and Latino communities. In 2000, 24 percent of African Americans and 23 percent Latinos lived below the poverty line (U.S. Census, 2000). These fathers often find themselves with restricted access to economic resources such as adequate housing, computers, savings, and vehicles (Coltrane, 1995; Jarrett, Jefferson, & Roach, 2000; Vélez-Ibáñez, 1996). Studies have consistently confirmed that this lack of important resources is associated with reduced levels of family functioning (e.g., negative interactions; e.g., Gomel, Tinsley, Parke, & Clark, 1998). For example, Simons and colleagues (Simons & Johnson, 1996; Simons, Whitbeck, Conger, & Melby, 1990) have shown economic hardship is related to heightened family conflict,

negative parent-child interactions, and overall unhealthy family interactions. Others have also shown that stresses related to poverty impact parenting behaviors and other parent/child interactions (e.g., labile affect, irritability, and aggression) in the home (Conger et al., 1992, 1993).

Socio-economic differences are often mistaken for ethnic differences in studies of ethnic minority fatherhood (Coltrane, 1995). Countering traditional wisdom, some researchers have found that African American and Latino fathers with low incomes may in fact be more involved as caregivers than their more affluent counterparts (e.g., Marsiglio, 1991; Mosley & Thomson, 1995). These findings suggest two things: 1) that fathers may differ in their fathering practices according to their economic situations, and 2) that economic hardship can motivate fathers to increase their involvement as caretakers in addition to being financial providers in their children's lives. A good example is furnished in a recent and exciting study of Latino immigrant fathers, which showed that fathers continued to be actively involved in their children's lives even as they struggled with acculturation, and fought to acquire work and a new language (Shimoni, Este, & Clark, 2003). Thus while some of the problems fathers of color face are rooted in economic disparity, other barriers are structural (e.g., institutional racism, or fathers immigrating alone) or cultural (e.g., customs, religious beliefs; Taylor & Behnke, 2005).

Incarceration rates. Ethnic minority fathers face incarceration at rates much higher than those commonly found among non-minority fathers (Welch & Angulo, 2000). For example, Latino and African American men accounted for 63% of the incarcerated population, whereas together they account for only 25% of the national population (Human Rights Watch, 2002). These high rates of imprisonment make separation from their children more likely for fathers, and can frustrate affected fathers' attempts to be involved in their children's lives (Marsiglio et al., 2005; Roy, 2005b).

Incarceration may also have long lasting effects on these fathers' lives. After their release, many fathers face great difficulty regaining the trust of loved ones and confronting financial and social barriers.

Nonresidential fatherhood. Another macrosystem level factor influencing many Latino and African American fathers is the relatively high rate of non-marital births in their communities. In 2003, 45 percent of Latino and 68 percent African American births were out of wedlock (U.S. Census, 2005). While coresidence with their natal partners and children is preferable to non-residence, many fathers end up facing relationship difficulties, financial reasons, or the stress of trying to manage multiple household responsibilities (Danziger & Radin, 1990). In fact non-marital births are one of the most significant factors shaping the paternal experiences of nonresident fatherhood. Thirty percent of Latino children and 59 percent of African American children in the United States lived in households apart from their fathers in 2003 (U.S. Census). Due to concern for children in poverty and children with nonresident fathers, various studies have exclusively focused on fathers in these circumstances (e.g., Danziger & Radin; Mincy & Sorensen, 1998). They have found that although nonresident, many of these fathers attempt to be involved in their children's lives, and in some cases are successful. We acknowledge that while many fathers of color may be physically involved, many struggle to be involved. In turn, some fathers flip in and out of being present and absent.

Separation from their children can become a structural barrier to consistent paternal involvement (Marsiglio et al., 2005). For example, new immigrant fathers often live in the U.S. at great distances (sometimes thousands of miles) from their children who remain in their country of origin. These fathers struggle to be involved with their children from a distance, but for every father that has cut off ties with his children there are many others that try to be involved from a distance (Martínez, 2001). Consequently, some studies have shown that nonresident (especially ethnic minority) dads are more involved than characteristically believed (e.g., Danziger & Radin, 1990; Mincy & Sorensen, 1998). Contrasting with traditional views of non-residential fatherhood, large-scale studies have shown, that many nonresident fathers are very involved, and that when these fathers are effectively involved, their children fair better emotionally, academically, and socially (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999;

Dunn, Cheng, O'Connor, & Bridges, 2004; Mosley & Thomson, 1995). For instance, Dunn and colleagues have shown that child adjustment is consistently related to the quality of the relationship between the nonresident father and child. These and other studies suggest that at least some ethnic minority fathers overcome the barriers common to nonresidence, and are able to be involved and make a positive difference in the lives of their children.

Discrimination and prejudice. On a macro level, racial discrimination comes in the form of prejudgements and biases (e.g., institutional racism) that fathers of color often must encounter in their efforts to be good parents. Social forces such as ethnic bias and class bias – dislike of a person based on their ethnicity or class – are forms of discrimination that are not often recognized in relation to positive father involvement. However, extra-familial ethnic and class bias can negatively affect intra-familial relationships, by adding stress that makes life more difficult for ethnic minority families (Owusu-Bempah, 2001; Santisteban, Muir-Malcolm, Mitrani, & Szapocznik, 2002). Additionally, problems that flow indirectly from these barriers (such as poverty, poor options for education, and the lack of employment opportunities) lead to further stresses (McLoyd et al., 2000). Researchers have shown that fathers struggling with racial prejudice and the accompanying economic hardships that go along with it are at particular risk for physical and emotional problems (i.e., depression; Hoard & Anderson, 2004).

Cultural factors. To be successful in their role as fathers, many of these men must manage conflicting cultural notions of a father's role. In other words, fathers of color must find a balance to their many roles while traversing multiple meanings and culturally formed expectations of fatherhood. For example, fathers from Mexico may immigrate with one set of expectations about their roles as fathers, and be confronted with new expectations of the role of father in their new found country (Taylor & Behnke, 2005). Thus immigrant fathers learn to balance the conflicting expectations of two cultures, and parent the way they feel is the best for their children. For instance, *machismo*—a term

often used to emphasize Latino men’s role as head of household—is equated with male chauvinism and excessive masculinity by some fathers, while others equate it with being nurturing and family oriented (Mirandé, 1997; Taylor & Behnke). Similarly, African American fathers often must battle various negative stereotypes (e.g., “angry men,” invisibility) and balance differing expectations (e.g., “cool pose” vs. family man) in their attempts to be nurturing and involved fathers (Franklin & Boyd-Franklin, 2000; Majors & Billson, 1992). Fathers who find they are able to negotiate a comfortable place for themselves between two contrasting sets of expectations appear to do better in the long run and seem to be able to provide more consistent discipline and nurturance to their children (Marsiglio et al., 2005).

There is great diversity in fathering values and ways in which these men father both among and within ethnic minority groups (McLoyd et al., 2000). For instance, whereas we may more easily think of differences between Latino and other groups such as Asian American fathers, in practice we may find more differences within specific subgroups of fathers from one cultural background (e.g. Latinos from Mexico or El Salvador) than we might expect. Considering the diversity within ethnic groups suggests that even fathers within a specific ethnic group may have different needs. Thus knowing characteristics that may be common among a particular ethnic group may prove helpful at times, but can also lead to false assumptions and hurtful prejudgments of individuals of other cultures.

Key Principals for Assisting Fathers of Color

Faced with barriers such as father’s limited time, monetary and educational resources, and access to information, many professionals struggle to effectively engage fathers of color. We offer some suggestions for making programming to fathers of color more effective.

Cross-cultural competency is the single most important factor in effective interaction with fathers of color (e.g., Constantine & Sue, 2005). Take, for example, paying attention to *personalismo* when recruiting and working with Latino fathers (Falicov, 1998). *Personalismo* is a cultural value in

which interpersonal closeness and connectedness are expected. Overlooking Latino values like *personalismo* and *familismo* (emphasis on extended family relationships) can impair the ability to build sound working relationships with these fathers.

Building trust and personal friendship is vital to helping fathers of color. Many of these fathers bring with them a custom of telling about themselves and developing a relationship before they are willing to commit to a professional relationship. These fathers are more likely to follow the instructions of a friend than an expert who is a stranger, no matter the expert's credentials. This means professionals must first be a friend. Fathers expect professionals to open up to them as well, and share information about their families to create this mutual trust. Another key area where cultural competency is evident is in working with nonresidential African American fathers. To take culturally appropriate actions professionals must truly understand these fathers' contexts (Marsiglio et al., 2005).

Creative approaches to encourage positive fathering. Recently a number of programs have found success with fathers of color by getting creative in their delivery and choice of content (Dumka, Lopez, & Jacobs-Carter, 2002). As a general rule, most thriving programs attempt to provide *culturally sensitive* adult educational programs (e.g., job training and placement, substance abuse counseling, parenting classes, language classes, legal support), which fit the needs of fathers. In fact, some of the most successful programs have incorporated activities that benefit both fathers and children directly. For example, Boston's 25 Head Start centers have created a fatherhood program entitled "Good Guys in Head Start," which runs an annual, citywide father/child basketball and soccer tournament, attended by more than 400 fathers. Other examples of creative activities are the "Father/Child Olympics Day," the father/school involvement days, and the Fatherhood Banquet hosted by Edenton North Carolina's fatherhood group. These types of activities involve fathers and give them a reason for their involvement.

Other creative approaches include fatherhood programs collaborating with community colleges and technical schools for higher-level training (e.g., Nueva Familia, AVANCE). Fathers of color often need help to learn to communicate better to improve their economic situation and their relationship with their child and their child's mother. This is especially critical for immigrant Latino fathers who often struggle with the English language. The AVANCE program in Texas, for example, has helped thousands of Latino parents from predominantly low-income neighborhoods go to classes that help parents and their youth work together to learn parenting, English, and academic skills. Creative program applications such as these build off of the assets fathers possess and meet the needs of both men and their children.

Creating access to jobs. In the last two decades practitioners and policy makers have become increasingly interested in efforts to ameliorate the incongruence in access to jobs faced by fathers of color. The largest barriers these fathers face are a lack of a high school diploma, useful work skills, social preparedness, transportation limitations, criminal records, and substance abuse issues. Where all programs should address these barriers, fatherhood programs should also learn to focus on actual work experience and support on the job, rather than just job training and placement. For example, the Center for Fathers, Families, and Workforce Development (CFWD) in collaboration with STRIVE developed an intensive three-week job training that attempts to mimic the demands of a real job, requiring participants to arrive on time, dressed appropriately, and has them work hard on language and literacy skills and socially appropriate behaviors. CFWD connects fathers with good jobs, and then provides long-term job support and monitoring – a much needed safety net for these men.

Another example of innovation is the Texas Fragile Families Initiative (TFFI), which connects 12 individual fatherhood programs providing to young Latino fathers mediation services, family counseling, site specific job search and training, and English as a Second Language and GED classes.

These unique fatherhood programs do more than just connect fathers with jobs, they provide long-term support and creative solutions to overcoming the specific barriers fathers face.

Creating coalitions. Successful programs also make attempts to network and partner with other organizations that serve similar populations, thus joining to better serve ethnic minority fathers. Even informal partnerships can create opportunities for giving advice, solving problems, coordinating services, and disseminating resources. Such collaborations with organizations and other respected leaders often help educators and professionals become more visible and lead to greater acceptance within ethnically diverse communities. The multifaceted lives of fathers of color often pose significant challenges for professionals, and these collaborations can help to prevent programmatic misdirection and provide invaluable solutions to current dilemmas. As professionals working with fathers of color, opportunities may arise where a father needs an advocate to facilitate their involvement with other organizations, such as schools, the legal system, and other social service organizations. Practitioners should be aware of their personal limitations, and be willing to refer these individuals and their families to other professionals and service agencies. Keeping current a list of referral agencies and professionals can save a lot of headaches and frustration for both the professional and the client.

Community messages. Though the barriers we have discussed can discourage fathers in their involvement, heightened community focus on the assets and resiliency of these fathers can help fathers overcome some of the barriers to positive father involvement. For example, Tennessee's First Thing First has shown that their creative fatherhood public service announcements, billboard ads, and signage on buses have produced lasting impressions on the communities where they have been shown. Another effort in Audubon, Kentucky created a community initiative entitled "Father Factor: Promoting a male friendly environment." This initiative has displayed posters throughout the community depicting fathers in a positive light, created a "Father Factor Fair" (encouraging the community to learn about the positive impacts of fathers), and provided training to city and county

employees to encourage fathers to be meaningfully involved with their children. These types of community level approaches serve as creative tools to encourage responsible fatherhood.

Specialized fathering intervention. Practitioners and educators working with minority audiences should actively seek out ethnic minority fathers as clientele and participants for their programs. Though these populations may appear more difficult to recruit initially, once a program is trusted within a cultural community, these programs generally flourish and meet the needs of many very deserving clients (Dumka et al., 2002). Professionals should focus on the strengths that these fathers possess; thus building on fathers' assets to help them develop skills and new habits that can support healthy family life. As we have said, a thorough understanding of barriers and contextual characteristics that influence a particular group of fathers is needed to construct lasting and impactful programs focused on meeting these needs (Marsiglio et al., 2005). With this understanding, professionals become advocates and help fathers negotiate conflicting pressures and expectations that may interfere with their paternal role. This can grow into various outlets of social support, such as one-on-one counseling, informal or formal mentoring, and formal or informal support groups.

Further public policy implications. Researchers suggest that existing welfare and child support legislation still tends to discourage positive father involvement (especially by nonresident fathers) among ethnic minority fathers (Cabrera & Peters, 2000; Carlson & McLanahan, 2002). For example, many "fragile families" are still in romantic relationships at the time of the child's birth and could benefit from specific support to keep fathers involved in their children's lives (Carlson & McLanahan). Thus, a rethinking of current public policy regarding fathers and families may be in order. Strategies that have been suggested include increased assistance funding for two-parent households (regardless of marital status) in poverty, the reduction of child support orders for cohabiting fathers, and reconsideration of child support enforcement procedures that take into account fathers' circumstances and income (Carlson & McLanahan). Dowd (2000) calls for policy

makers to unite to *redefine fatherhood*, especially nonresidential fatherhood. Announcing, “We should stop supporting the notion that money buys rights to children” (Dowd, p. 175). She suggests: 1) eliminating the difference between marital and nonmarital children; 2) eliminating illegitimacy; 3) define monetary and social support as separate and dually important entities; 4) eliminate legal biases; 5) enforce workforce equality.

We suggest that policymakers increase support to fatherhood programs that target a diverse array of fathers from various ethnic backgrounds. Local communities can develop such programs and also consider funding informal support groups for ethnic minority fathers (e.g., via religious congregations, sport leagues, and other clubs and associations). With the continued growth of non-English speakers in this country, the creation of further opportunities for immigrant parents to learn English and other skills to adequately provide for their families is direly needed. It is important that we are mindful of the contexts and day-to-day hassles that are experienced by fathers (Marsiglio et al., 2005), so that funding can be targeted to meet the particular needs of fathers in specific neighborhoods and specific parts of the country.

Lastly, policymakers and advocates should try to secure living wages and work policies that support family friendly schedules for all Americans regardless of their ethnic background. Greater governmental intervention is needed in workplaces that offer “jobs that no one else will take.” This is especially important for fathers of color who are often the “lowest man on the totem pole” in work in manufacturing, retail, construction, and agricultural jobs with lessened likelihood of union protection.

Needed research. Though research on Latino and African American fathers has increased over the last decade large gaps remain, and in particular how to best serve these fathers (Tamis-LeMonda & Cabrera, 2002). We suggest the creation of a compilation of research from fatherhood programs and other organizations serving minority fathers, to demonstrate best programmatic practices, making sure to include qualitative data to allow fathers to voice what they have found

helpful and engaging. More research is also needed to understand how to welcome fathers of color in environments where they commonly do not participate with their children (e.g., schools).

We would also recommend that future researchers start by developing a greater depth in understanding of minority fatherhood by: 1) conducting research including other father figures (e.g., godfathers/compadres, live in boyfriends, uncles, coworkers) and ethnic groups (e.g., Asian American and East Indian American fathers) that have not received previous attention 2) examining the cultural nature of fatherhood constructions, 3) exploring the patterns of change and continuity in cultural perceptions of fatherhood and fathering, 4) elucidating further the effects of work and the lack thereof on paternal processes, 5) expanding on the importance of intergenerational influences in the formation of fatherhood perceptions, and 6) focusing on father/child relationships in their ecological contexts and as they change over time. Studies with larger sample sizes may also allow us to generalize findings describing the various ways fathers of color work, and the roles they play in their families and in society (for a good example, see Caldera, Fitzpatrick, & Wampler, 2002).

Conclusion

In light of the increasing social and cultural diversity within the United States, it is imperative that we learn to understand and better serve ethnic minority fathers and their families. Research shows that effective father involvement promotes healthy childhood development, regardless of ethnic background (e.g., Amato & Gilbreth, 1999). In this article we have explored various factors that influence the fathering of ethnic minority fathers, including ways in which policy and practice for minority fathers may be enhanced. Indeed, we have discussed ways in which policy and practice for minority fathers may be enhanced. By supporting and encouraging these men in their roles as fathers, the positive impact they have in their children's lives will grow, as well as their value as transformational resources in their communities.

References

- Ahmeduzzaman, M., & Roopnarine, J. (1992). Sociodemographic factors, functioning style, social support and fathers' involvement with preschoolers in African American families. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, *54*, 699-707.
- Allen, W., & Connor, M. (1997). An African American perspective on generative fathering. In A. Hawkins and D. Dollahite (Eds.), *Generative fathering: Beyond deficit perspectives* (pp. 52-70). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Allen, S. M., & Hawkins, A. J. (1999). Maternal gatekeeping: Mothers' beliefs and behaviors that inhibit greater father involvement in family work. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, *61*(1), 199-212.
- Amato, P., & Gilbreth, J. (1999). Nonresident fathers and children's well-being: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, *61*, 557-573.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bubolz, M. M., & Sontag, M. S. (1993). Human ecology theory. In P. G. Boss, W. J. Doherty, R. LaRossa, W. R. Schumm, & S. K., Steinmetz (Eds.), *Sourcebook of family theories and methods: A contextual approach* (pp. 419-448). New York: Plenum Press.
- Cabrera, N. J., & Garcia-Coll, C. (2004). Latino fathers: Uncharted territory in need of much exploration. In M. E. Lamb (Ed.), *The role of father in child development* (4th ed.). New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Cabrera, N. J., & Peters, E. (2000). Public policies and father involvement, *Marriage and Family Review*, *29*, 4, 295-314
- Cabrera, N. J., Tamis-LeMonda, C. S., Bradley, R. H., Hofferth, S., & Lamb, M. E. (2000). Fatherhood in the twenty-first century. *Child Development*, *71*, 127-136.

- Caldera, Y. M., Fitzpatrick, J., & Wampler, K. M. (2002). Coparenting in intact Mexican American families: Mothers' and fathers' perceptions. In J. M Contreras, K. A. Kerns, & A. M. Neal-Barnett (Eds.), *Latino children and families in the United States* (pp. 107-131). Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers.
- Carlson, M. J., & McLanahan, S. S. (2002). Fragile families, father involvement, and public policy. In C. Tamis-LeMonda, & N. Cabrera (Eds.), *Handbook of father involvement: Multidisciplinary perspectives*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Coley, R. L. (2001). (In)visible men: emerging research on low-income, unmarried, and minority fathers. *Psychologist*, 56 (9), 743-753.
- Coltrane, S. (1995). The future of fatherhood: Social, demographic, and economic influences on men's family involvements. In W. Marsiglio (Ed.), *Fatherhood: Contemporary theory, research, and social policy* (pp. 119-147). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Coltrane, S., Melzer, S. A., Vega, E. J., & Parke, R. D. (2005). Mexican American fathering in neighborhood context. In W. Marsiglio, K. Roy, & G. L. Fox (Eds.), *Situated fathering: A focus on physical and social spaces* (pp.163-186). Boulder, CO: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Coltrane, S., Parke, R. D., & Adams, M. (April, 2001). *Shared parenting in Mexican-American and European-American families*. Paper presented at the Biennial meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development, Minneapolis, Minnesota.
- Conger, R. D., Conger, K. J., Elder, G. H., Lorenz, F. O., Simons, F. L., & Whitebeck, L. B. (1992). A family process model of economic hardship and adjustment of early adolescent boys. *Child Development*, 63, 526-541.
- Conger, R. D., Conger, K. J., Elder, G. H., Lorenz, F. O., Simons, R. L., & Whitebeck, L. B. (1993). Family economic stress and adjustment of early adolescent girls. *Developmental Psychology*, 29, 206-219.

Conger, R. D., Wallace, L. E., Sun, Y., Simons, R. L., McLoyd, V. C., & Brody, G. H. (2002).

Economic pressure in African American families: A replication and extension of the family stress model. *Developmental Psychology, 38*, 179-193.

Constantine, M.G., & Sue, D. W. (Eds.) (2005). *Strategies for Building Multicultural Competence in Mental Health and Educational Settings*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley.

Danziger, S., & Radin, N. (1990). Absent does not equal uninvolved: Predictors of fathering in teen mother families. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 52*, 636-641.

del Pinal, J., & Singer, A. (1997). Generations of diversity: Latinos in the United States. *Population Bulletin, 52*, 1-48.

Dowd, N. (2000). *Redefining fatherhood* (Chapters 9-11). New York: NYU Press.

Dumka, L. E., Lopez, V., & Jacobs-Carter, S. (2002). Parenting interventions adapted for Latino families: Progress and prospects. In J. M. Contreras, K. A. Kerns, & A. M. Neal-Barnett (Eds.), *Latino children and families in the United States* (pp. 203-231). Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

Dunn, J., Cheng, H., O'Connor, T. G., & Bridges, L. (2004). Children's perspectives on their relationships with their nonresident fathers: Influences, outcomes and implications. *Journal of Child Psychology & Psychiatry, 45*(3), 553-566.

Dunst, C. J., Trivette, C. M., & Deal, A. G. (Eds.) (1994). *Supporting and strengthening families: Methods, strategies and practices*. Cambridge, MA: Brookline Books.

Englar-Carlson, M., & Stevens, M. A. (Eds.) (2006). *In the room with men: A casebook of therapeutic change*. Washington, D.C. : American Psychological Association.

Falicov, C. J. (1998). *Latino Families in Therapy*. New York: The Guilford Press.

- Fitzpatrick, J., Caldera, Y.M., Pursley, M., & Wampler, K. (1999). Hispanic mother and father perceptions of fathering: A qualitative analysis. *Family and Consumer Sciences Research Journal*, 28, 133-166.
- Franklin, A. J., & Boyd-Franklin, N. (2000). Invisibility syndrome: A clinical model of the effects of racism on African-American males. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 70, 33-41.
- Garbarino, J. (1995). Growing up in a socially toxic environment: Life for children and families in the 1990s. In Gary B. Melton (Ed.) *Nebraska Symposium on Motivation* (Vol. 42). Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Gephard, M. A., & Brooks-Gunn, J. (1997). Introduction. In J. Brooks-Gunn, G. J. Duncan, & J. L. Aber (Eds.), *Neighborhood poverty: Vol. 2. Policy implications in studying neighborhoods* (pp. xiii-xxii). New York: Sage.
- Gephard, M. A. (1997). Neighborhoods and communities as context for development. In J. Brooks-Gunn, G. J. Duncan, & J. L. Aber (Eds.), *Neighborhood poverty: Vol. 1. Context and consequences for children* (pp. 1-43). New York: Sage.
- Gomel, J. N., Tinsley, B. J., Parke, R. D. & Clark, K. (1998). The effects of economic hardship on family functioning: A multi-ethnic perspective. *Journal of Family Issues*, 19, 436-467.
- Hamer, J. F. (2005). "Gotta protect my own": Men parenting children in an abandoned city. In W. Marsiglio, K. Roy, & G. L. Fox (Eds.), *Situated fathering: A focus on physical and social spaces* (pp.255-275). Boulder, CO: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Hecker, D. (2004). *Occupational Employment Projections to 2012*, U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Monthly Labor Review. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.
- Hoard, L. R., & Anderson, E. A. (2004). Factors related to depression in rural and urban noncustodial, low-income fathers. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 32(1), 103-119.

- Hofferth, S. L. (2003). Race/ethnic differences in father involvement in two-parent families: Culture, context, or economy? *Journal of Family Issues*, 24 (2), 185-216.
- Hondagneu-Sotelo, P. (1994). *Gendered transitions: Mexican experiences of Immigration*. Berkley, CA: University of California Press.
- Human Rights Watch. (2002). Race and Incarceration in the United States. *Human Rights Watch Report*, 14 (1). Available at <http://www.hrw.org/background/usa/race/>.
- Jarrett, R. L., Jefferson, S., & Roach, A. (2000, June). *Family and parenting strategies in high risk African American neighborhoods*. Paper presented at the National Head Start Association Annual Meeting, Washington, DC.
- Jarrett, R. L., Roy, K. M., & Burton, L. M. (2002). Fathers in the “hood”: Insights from qualitative research on low-income African-American men. In C. Tamis-LeMonda, & N. Cabrera (Eds.), *Handbook of father involvement: Multidisciplinary perspectives*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Majors, R., & Billson, J. (1992) *Cool Pose*. New York: Touchstone Publishers.
- Marsiglio, W. (1991). Paternal engagement activities with minor children. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 53, 973-986. Paternal engagement activities with minor children. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 53, 973-986.
- Marsiglio, W., Amato, P., Day, R. D., & Lamb, M. E. (2000). Scholarship on fatherhood in the 1990s and beyond. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 62, 1173-1191.
- Marsiglio, W., Roy, K., & Fox, G.L. (2005). *Situated fathering: A focus on physical and social spaces*. Boulder, CO: Rowan & Littlefield.
- Martínez, R. (2001). *Crossing over: A Mexican family on the migrant trail*. New York: Metropolitan Books.

- McLoyd, V.C. (1989). Socialization and development in a changing economy: The effects of paternal job and income loss on children. *American Psychologist*, *44*, 293-302.
- McLoyd, V.C. (1990). The impact of economic hardship on Black families and children: Psychological distress, parenting, and socioemotional development. *Child Development*, *61*, 311-346.
- McLoyd, V. C., Cauce, A. M., Takeuchi, D., & Wilson, L. (2000). Marital processes and parental socialization in families of color: A decade review of research. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, *62* (4), 1070-1093.
- Mincy, R., & Sorensen, E. (1998). Deadbeats and turnips in child support reform. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, *17*, 44-51.
- Mirandé, A. (1997). *Hombres y machos: Masculinity and Latino culture*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Mosley, J., & Thomson, E. (1995). Fathering behavior and child outcomes: The role of race and poverty. In W. Marsiglio (Ed.), *Fatherhood: Contemporary theory, research and social policy* (pp. 148-165). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Nelson, T. J. (2004). Low-income fathers. *Annual Review of Sociology*, *30*, 427-451.
- Nord, C.W, Brimhall, D., & West, J. (1997). *Fathers' involvement in their children's schools* (NCES 98-091). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.
Accessed at: <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs98/98091.pdf>
- O'Neil, R., Parke, R.D., & McDowell, D.J. (2001). Objective and subjective features of children's neighborhoods: Relations to parental regulatory strategies and children's social competence. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, *22*, 135-155.
- Owusu-Bempah, K. (2001). Racism: An important factor in practice with ethnic minority children and families. In P. Foley, & J. Roche (Eds.), *Children in society: Contemporary theory, policy and practice* (pp. 42-51). Buckingham, England: Open University Press.

- Ortiz, R. W. (2004). Hispanic/Latino fathers and children's literacy development: Examining involvement practices from a sociocultural context, *Journal of Latinos and Education*, 3 (3), 165-180.
- Parke, R. D., Coltrane, S., Duffy, S., Buriel, R., Dennis, J., Powers, J., French, S., & Widaman, K. F. (2004). Economic stress, parenting, and child adjustment in Mexican American and European American families. *Child Development*, 75 (6), 1-25.
- Peterson, G. W., Steinmetz, S. K., & Wilson, S. M. (Eds.). (2004). *Parent-youth relations: Cultural and cross-cultural perspectives*. Binghamton, NY: Haworth Press.
- Roy, K. (2005a). Transitions on the Margins of Work and Family for Low-Income African American Fathers, *Journal of Family and Economic Issues*, 26, 77-100
- Roy, K. (2005b). Nobody can be a father in here: Identity construction and institutional constraints on incarcerated fatherhood. In W. Marsiglio, K. Roy, & G.L. Fox (Eds.), *Situated fathering: A focus on physical and social spaces* (pp.163-186). Boulder, CO: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Roy, K. (2006). Father stories: A life course examination of paternal identity among low-income African American men. *Journal of Family Issues*, 27, 31-54.
- Santisteban, D. A., Muir-Malcolm, J. A., Mitrani, V. B., & Szapocznik, J. (2002). Integrating the study of ethnic culture and family psychology intervention science. In H. A. Liddle, D. A. Santisteban, et al. (Eds.), *Family psychology: Science-based interventions*. (pp. 331-351). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Shimoni, R., Este, D., Clark, D. (2003). Paternal engagement in immigrant and refugee families. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 34(4), 555-568.
- Shock, A., Behnke, A. O., & Plunkett, S. (in press). Latino parental involvement in their adolescents' education. *Family Relations*.

- Simons, R., & Johnson, C. (1996). Mother's parenting. In B. Adams & D. Klein (Eds.), *Understanding the differences between divorced and intact families: Stress, interaction, and child outcome*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Simons, R., Whitbeck, L., Conger, R., & Melby, J. (1990). Husband and wife differences in determinants of parenting: A social learning model of parental behavior. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 52, 375-392.
- Stier, H. & Tienda, M. (1993). Are men marginal to the family? Insights from Chicago's inner city. In J. Hood (Ed.), *Men, work and family* (pp. 23-44). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Summers, J. A., Boller, K., & Raikes, H. H. (2004). Preferences and perceptions about getting support expressed by low-income fathers. *Fathering: A Journal of Theory, Research, and Practice about Men as Fathers*, 2 (1), 61-82.
- Tamis-LeMonda, C. S., & Cabrera, N. (2002). Cross-disciplinary challenges to the study of father involvement. In C. Tamis-LeMonda, & N. Cabrera (Eds.), *Handbook of father involvement: Multidisciplinary perspectives*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Taylor, B., & Behnke, A.O. (2005). Fathering across the border: Latino fathers in Mexico and the United States. *Fathering: A Journal of Theory, Research, and Practice about Men as Fathers*, 3 (2), 99-120.
- Taylor, R.J., Leashore, B.R., & Toliver, S. (1988). An assessment of the provider role as perceived by Black males. *Family Relations*, 27, 426-31.
- Toth, J. F., Jr., & Xu, X. (1999). Ethnic and cultural diversity in fathers' involvement: A racial/ethnic comparison of African American, Hispanic, and white fathers. *Youth and Society*, 31, 76-77.
- Umaña-Taylor, A. J., & Fine, M. A. (2001). Methodological implications of grouping Latino adolescents into one collective ethnic group. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, 23, 347-362.

U.S. Bureau of the Census. (2000). *Our Diverse Population: Race, and Hispanic Origin, 2000*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.

U.S. Bureau of the Census. (2005). *Current Population Survey*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.

Vélez-Ibáñez, C. G. (1996). *Border visions: Mexican cultures of the southwest United States*. Tuscon: University of Arizona Press.

Waterman, J. M., & Zellman, G. L. (1998). Understanding the Impact of Parent School Involvement on Children's Educational Outcomes, *The Journal of Educational Research*, 91, 132-146.

Welch, R. H., & Angulo, C. T. (2000). *Justice on Trial: Racial Disparities in the American Criminal Justice System*. Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, Washington, D.C.

Wilson, W. J. (1999). When work disappears: New implications for race and urban poverty in the global economy. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 22 (3), 479-499.