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Exploration of Factors Affecting Single Black Mothers' Facilitation of Father-Child Relationships

Shawn'ta Gardner

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Exploration of factors affecting single black mothers' facilitation of father-child relationships.

By

Shawn'ta Gardner

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Faculty of
Mississippi State University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in Agriculture Science Extension Education
in the School of Human Sciences

Mississippi State, Mississippi

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2018

Exploration of factors affecting single black mothers' facilitation of father-child
relationships.

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Literature shows when fathers are involved in their children's lives, their children have better outcomes. However, father involvement is often limited in situations where the father is a non-residential parent. Previous research has indicated there are several factors that may influence a custodial mother's facilitation of the father-child relationship. These factors may include the existing co-parenting relationship between mother and father and the mother's perception of the father's appreciation of her mothering of the child. Particularly in low-income families, the struggle to simply meet economic demands overrides a custodial parent's desire to facilitate the relationship.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the perspective of single, never-married, low-income, custodial Black mothers related to their facilitation of the father-child relationship when the father does not reside in the home with the mother and child. The Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) was employed as the conceptual framework of this study. This theory is used to help understand how a mother's intent to facilitate the father-child relationship is partly influenced by her capacity to do so.

Using purposive sampling, I interviewed 10 participants who identified as Black mothers with children between the ages of 5 and 11 whose father identified as Black and did not reside in the home. The participants also all self-reported as low-income.

Four themes emerged through the coding and analysis of the interview transcripts. The first was that mothers felt that their efforts to facilitate the father-child relationship went unappreciated. The second theme was that mothers perceived that fathers were not taking responsibility for their lives and helping themselves. The third theme was that mothers had an expiration of time with which to work with the fathers. When they felt their effort to facilitate the father-child relationship was not increasing the father's involvement, the mothers halted their efforts altogether. The fourth theme was that mothers drew upon a variety of support sources beyond working with the father. The findings of this descriptive study can be used to influence development of co-parenting curricula, to improve family-court mediation, and to support healthy relationships among unwed and fragile families.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my late mother Sharon Gardner.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Many fathers and fatherhood practitioners argue that family courts are biased in favor of mothers (Baskerville, 2008). One reason for this assertion is the tender years doctrine. Klaff (1982) argued courts should consider the tender years doctrine when awarding custody to parents in custody disputes. That doctrine suggests that mothers are the best providers for children, especially in the early years of their development (Klaff, 1982). In the late 1990s and early 2000s, in an effort to counter the ongoing narrative that fathers were deadbeats and not as important as mothers, momentum began to shift toward increasing the involvement of non-custodial fathers (Acs, Braswell, Sorenson, & Turner, 2013; Fagan & Barnett, 2003; Roberts, Coakley, Washington, & Kelley, 2014). The effort to increase paternal participation included raising awareness of how absent fathers affect child development (Allen & Hawkins, 1999; Roberts et al., 2014), assessing the possible causes and barriers of absentee fathers (Perry & Bright, 2012; Roberts et al., 2014), and examining strategies to increase father involvement (Perry & Bright; 2012; Turner, 2014). These efforts sought to reduce risk factors such as teenage parenting, juvenile delinquency, and poor academic achievement, that jeopardize child development when fathers are absent (Acs et al., 2013; Roberts et al., 2014). By current estimates, these risk factors affect twenty-four million children (Acs et al., 2013).

Some of the barriers that negatively affect father participation are criminal justice involvement, chronic unemployment, maternal gatekeeping, and race (Fagan & Barnett, 2003; Perry & Bright 2012; Roberts et al., 2014). Involvement with the criminal justice system limits a father's ability to participate in his children's lives e.g., being physically unavailable to spend time with his child due to the father's incarceration (Perry & Bright, 2012). Another cause of limited father involvement is the added financial burden to the families he leaves because of his inability to financially contribute to their commissary needs (Western & Wildeman, 2009).

Chronic unemployment increases the difficulty for fathers to contribute financially to the well-being of his children (Perry & Bright, 2012), a problem amplified when the father no longer lives with his family (Lerman, 2010). Unemployment reduces a father's ability to provide financial child support as he struggles to cover housing, transportation, and food costs. Often, fathers are expected to find and hold a second job, which limits the time fathers can spend with their children and decreases the emotional and physical development of the child (Sylvester & Reich, 2000).

Maternal gatekeeping may affect a father's involvement with his child, based on the mother's perception of the father that influences whether she is willing to impede or facilitate the father-child relationship (Allen & Hawkins, 1999; Fagan & Barnett, 2003). Her gatekeeping reinforces social norms, i.e., her primary custodial responsibilities of the child should increase the father's effort to provide financial support for the child (Sano, Richards, & Zvonkovic, 2008). These aspects of maternal gatekeeping may become barriers to father involvement.

Race polarizes both the over-representation of Black men in the criminal justice system and their chronic unemployment (Acs et al., 2013). Statistics show that one in three Black men, as opposed to one in ten White men, will face incarceration or otherwise experience some involvement with the criminal justice system in their lifetime (Acs et al., 2013; Hattery & Smith, 2012). Unemployment rates for Black men tend to be double that of their White counterparts (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). Social norms labeling Black fathers as deadbeat dads challenge many Black mothers to acknowledge that race heightens the barriers facing father involvement (Acs et al., 2013). To highlight the relevance of this combined barrier, a criminal record, and unemployment show nearly a 30 percent reduction in pay for fathers who have been incarcerated (Lerman, 2010). In general, incarceration affects the type of employment a father can obtain, which in turn reduces the amount of money he earns, thereby adversely affecting the amount he can afford to pay in court-ordered child support.

Phrased another way, because a higher percentage of Black men than White men will be incarcerated during their lifetime, more Black fathers who were incarcerated will earn less money than their white counterparts.

Barriers to paternal participation in their children's lives, especially for Black fathers, along with maternal gatekeeping factors may result in the failure of the children's mother and father to have a healthy co-parenting relationship (Roberts et al., 2014). To some degree race, incarceration, and the father's job status influence the maternal gatekeeping behavior of the mother (Fagan & Cherson, 2015; Roberts et al., 2014). As a result of these challenges, research is needed to understand factors that contribute to the

decision of a mother to encourage and promote the father-child relationship (Fagan & Cherson, 2015; Pruett, Arthur, & Ebling, 2007; Puhlman & Pasley, 2013).

The current literature explains that fathers tend to be more involved when they feel mothers welcome their efforts (Allen & Hawkins, 1999; Fagan & Barnett, 2003; Perry & Bright, 2012). As such, a mother's facilitation of the father-child relationship has the potential to enhance a father's involvement and reduce the risks that jeopardize the safety and well-being of children (Roberts et al., 2014). Exploring the mother's perspective on father-child relationships may provide insight into her willingness to facilitate that relationship.

Statement of the Problem

Never married and divorced mothers often become the custodial parent as well as the maternal gatekeeper by default (Marczak, Becher, Hardman, Galos & Ruhland, 2015). A mother who does not recognize her role as maternal gatekeeper limits her own ability to facilitate the father-child relationship with the father of her child (Fagan & Barnett, 2013). Her failure to facilitate the father-child relationship in turn jeopardizes the child's positive development (Perry, & Bright, 2010; Roberts et al., 2014). Studies about maternal gatekeeping and co-parenting indicate that mothers believe fathers are essential for the development of children (Marczak et al., 2015; Puhlman & Pasley, 2013) and are capable of being caretakers for those children (Puhlman & Pasley, 2013). However, mothers do not always recognize their role as maternal gatekeepers and how it might affect a father's involvement with his child (Allen & Hawkins 1999; Fagan & Barnett, 2003; Perry & Langley, 2013; Marczak et al., 2015; Turner, 2014), placing the children at

risk academically and mentally (Perry & Bright, 2012; Roberts et al., 2014). This research study will raise awareness of maternal gatekeeping behavior, and how mothers are influenced to facilitate the father-child relationship.

Definition of Terms

Specific terms related to this research are defined to assist in understanding the context of the research. Definitions are grounded in the literature and include the following:

Co-parenting – The interactions of parents regarding their children. Co-parenting does not refer to “the romantic, sexual, companionate, emotional, financial and legal aspects of the adults” (Sullivan, 2008, p.7).

Father Involvement - The time a father spends with his child and the activities he does with his child that influences the child’s development (Buckley & Schoppe-Sullivan, 2010).

Father Engagement - The quality of father involvement associated with positive interactions and in-depth time a father spends with his child.

Maternal Gatekeeping – The accessibility a mother allows a father to have with his child (Allen & Hawkins, 1999).

Background

It is estimated 24 million children in America live without their father (Roberts et al., 2014), and the research has identified why this is a problem. In many cases, children living absent their father are at risk for poor school performance (Hattery & Smith, 2012), poor psychological development (Acs et al., 2013), juvenile delinquency (Roberts et al.,

2014), and teenage pregnancy (Hattery & Smith, 2012). These risk factors associated with children residing in homes absent their father pose a dilemma for a society in need of strategies that will improve a father's involvement with his child.

Father Involvement and Race

Children living without their father is a nationwide issue, aggravated by the high rates of incarceration and chronic unemployment that disproportionately affect the Black community (Hattery & Smith, 2012). This is not a new phenomenon. In 1965, Daniel Patrick Moynihan reported that the Black intact family was in peril, mainly due to the absence of Black fathers (Moynihan, 1965). The validity of his conclusion is widely debated and disregarded by some because it has been considered a patriarchally-biased article condemning Black mothers and blaming them for dysfunctional families in their community. Many critics argue that the report places blame solely on mothers without holding fathers responsible (Alexander, 2010). While this report has been the source of contentious debate, it remains relevant because of the issues that since 1965, such as chronic unemployment, incarceration, low academic achievement, and absent Black fathers, are still concerns today (Acs et al., 2013).

After Moynihan's report was released, one of the first responses to the fatherhood issue was to wage war against absent fathers by arguing that fathers were neglecting their responsibilities (Puhlman & Pasley, 2013; Roberts et al., 2014). An aggressive child support campaign to force payment from fathers ensued. (Baskerville, 2008). Part of the child support campaign consisted of arresting fathers and placing them behind bars for financial non-support (Baskerville, 2008). As the campaign continued, penalties for

failure to pay child support included a short period of incarceration or the loss of a driver's license. In the most severe cases, some fathers were arrested for flagrant non-child support (Baskerville, 2008; Perry & Bright, 2012; Turner, 2014). Any period of incarceration put fathers in a bad predicament, but a felony conviction remains with fathers for the entirety of their lives and makes steady employment with a good living wage nearly impossible (Western & Wildeman, 2009).

Efforts to increase father involvement did not appear to improve the situation (Acs et al., 2013). Some emphasized that the war on absent fathers waged by the community's assumption that all fathers living apart from their children and/or being behind on child support as deadbeat dads was incorrect (Perry & Langley, 2013; Sylvester & Reich, 2000). The term "Deadbeat Dads" is used to label fathers that choose not to be involved in the lives of their children (Baskerville, 2008). However, according to Sylvester and Reich (2000), this label was inaccurate. To the contrary, many of those who were labeled as deadbeat dads had limited funds and could not afford to pay the court-ordered child support, despite the desire to do so (Perry, & Langley, 2013; Turner, 2014). Research revealed that fathers who were involved with their children were more likely to pay child support (Marczak et al., 2015; Sylvester & Reich, 2001). Therefore, the challenge is to identify the other barriers to father involvement (Roberts et al., 2014), and address or remove them.

Maternal Gatekeeping

Some researchers have shifted their focus to the maternal parent (Fagan & Barnett, 2003; Puhlman & Pasley, 2013). This research addresses a mother's perception

and the role she plays in regards to interacting with the non-residential father (Allen & Hawkins, 1999; Fagan & Barnett, 2003; Puhlman & Pasley, 2013; Roberts et al., 2014). This perspective addresses the matter of maternal gatekeeping, which was first introduced and defined as a mother's perceptions and beliefs about fathers (Allen & Hawkins, 1999). The first studies were with married mothers (Allen & Hawkins, 1999), but over the years the research broadened to include divorced and never-married mothers (Fagan & Barnett, 2003). Eventually it was concluded that the same dynamics apply to all mothers (Fagan & Barnett, 2003).

Maternal gatekeeping suggests that mothers control the amount of accessibility fathers have to their children (Allen & Hawkins, 1999). Maternal gatekeeping also suggests that mothers play a role that either facilitates or impedes the relationship between the father and child (Fagan & Barnett, 2003). Puhlman and Paisley (2013) argued that maternal gatekeeping is important in understanding why and how a mother maintains control over the accessibility a father has to his child. These authors redefined maternal gatekeeping as “a set of complex behavioral interactions between parents, where mothers influence father involvement through their use of controlling, facilitative, and restrictive behaviors directed at a father's child-rearing and interaction with children on a regular and consistent basis” (p. 176).

Maternal gatekeeping research emphasizes several areas of importance. First, maternal gatekeeping was not an intentionally negative construct (Fagan & Cherson, 2015). In other words, mothers were not maliciously preventing fathers from being involved with their child. However, when a mother perceived that the father of her child did not think she was competent as a mother, she unintentionally restricted access (Allen

& Hawkins, 1999; Puhlman & Pasley, 2013). The literature also indicated that mothers believe fathers are essential for the development of their children (Allen & Hawkins, 1999; Fagan & Barnett, 2003) and recognize that fathers are effective at caretaking for their children (Allen & Hawkins, 1999). However, the disconnect found in the maternal gatekeeping literature is that many mothers do not recognize their role as gatekeepers and how they can either positively or negatively influence the father-child relationship (Fagan & Cherson, 2015). Some examples of maternal facilitation of the father-child relationship include what Puhlman and Paisley (2013) refer to as “encouraging behaviors, which are compliments to a father’s parenting attempts, invitations to fathers to be part of parenting process with the mother, soliciting parenting perspectives from fathers, and encouraging fathers to spend individual time with children” (p. 181). Maternal facilitation of father-child relationships can also include a mother recognizing and acknowledging a father’s contribution regardless of how irrelevant she perceives it to be (Hilgendorf, 2012). As the literature suggests, some mothers facilitate the father-child relationship, while others do not (Puhlman & Paisley, 2013).

The disconnect between a mother’s acknowledgment of a father’s importance in the lives of their children and the mother’s failure to recognize the role she plays in facilitating these occurrences is problematic (Fagan & Barnett, 2003). A series of questions could be asked to ascertain if mothers are facilitating the father-child relationship: Are mothers informing fathers when their children have an upcoming event or activity? Are mothers encouraging their children to contact their father? Are mothers making certain fathers have access to their children through routine visitation (Pruett, Arthur, & Ebling, 2007; Roberts et al., 2014)? If the mother is not engaging in these

behaviors, her role is impeding and not facilitating, and more importantly, she is hindering her opportunity to effectively co-parent with the father for the welfare of their child (Pruett, et al., 2007; Roberts et al., 2014).

In addition the strategies identified above, educating mothers on the maternal facilitation of father-child relationship is also a strategy that could increase father involvement (Turner, 2014). Fagan and Cherson (2015) noted “there is a need for better conceptualization of the facilitation construct, and that qualitative research may prove helpful in developing a deeper understanding of maternal facilitation” (p. 17), which suggests that there is an opportunity to expand on this concept and vastly improve the father-child relationship facilitated by the mother.

There still exists the perspective that fathers who want to be involved in their child’s life will be involved regardless of their relationship with the mother, their financial situation, residential stability, and academic status (Perry & Bright, 2012; Roberts, Coakley, Washington, & Kelley, 2014; Turner, 2014). Perry and Bright (2012) suggested it is not enough to look at the intent of a father to participate in his children’s lives, but it is also relevant to examine a father’s ability to follow through with those intentions. This position is supported by the theory of planned behavior, which suggests that intent is not enough when it comes to carrying out those intentions, but also a person’s ability to follow through with those intentions (Hasbullah, Mahajar, & Salleh, 2014; Perry & Bright, 2012). While individuals may want to perform a particular behavior, they may not have the resources, the capacity, or the ability to follow through with that intent (Ajzen, 1991). Perry and Bright (2012) argue that future research should address a father’s capacity to follow through with intent.

This study addressed the gap in the maternal gatekeeping research that suggests mothers understand fathers are important to the development of children and can nurture them (Allen & Hawkins, 1999) but sometimes fail to recognize their role in facilitating the father-child relationship (Fagan & Barnett, 2003). The results may inform efforts to satisfy a mother's need to feel competent as a parent by the father and satisfy a father's need to feel welcomed to be involved by the mother (Allen & Hawkins, 1999). Addressing those needs will increase the chance of a healthy co-parenting relationship between the mother and the father (Marczak et al., 2015). Most importantly, there is the potential to increase involvement between fathers and their children.

Theory of Planned Behavior

The guiding theoretical framework for this study is the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Prior to this theory was the theory of reasoned action that explained what led people to action. The problem however is that previous theory did not address situations beyond the person's control that interfered with their attempt to act. The theory of planned behavior is an extension of the theory of reasoned action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), made necessary by the original model's limitations in dealing with behaviors over which people have incomplete volitional control.

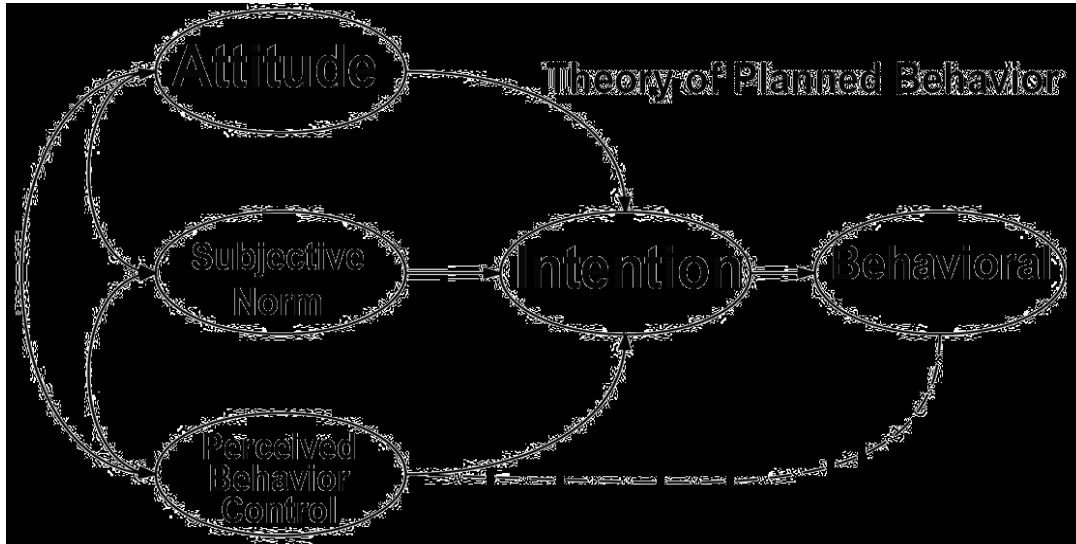


Figure 1 Theory of Planned Behavior

The theory of planned behavior suggests that behavior is predicted by three independent determinants of intention: (a) the attitude toward the behavior; (b) the subjective norm; and (c) the degree of perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991). These determinants have similarities found in the three-dimensional model of maternal gatekeeping as introduced by Allen and Hawkins (1999). The following will explain the connection between the theory of planned behavior and the determinants of standards and responsibility, maternal identity confirmation, and differentiated family roles that are the foundation of maternal gatekeeping. This theory is used to help understand how a mother’s intent to facilitate the father-child relationship is partly influenced by her capacity to do so.

The attitude toward the behavior defined by Ajzen (1991) “refers to the degree to which a person has a favorable or unfavorable evaluation or appraisal of the behavior in question” (p. 188). As it relates to maternal gatekeeping, this determinant associates a

mother's attitude toward maternal gatekeeping with the role she plays in the family (Allen & Hawkins, 1999). In marriage, mothers often assume the domestic chores with little help from the father; when mothers parent alone they have no option but to assume the domestic responsibilities (Allen & Hawkins, 1999). In many cases, their counterparts are facing adversity associated with Black men such as incarceration, unemployment, and limited resources that make fatherhood a challenge for most Black fathers (Acs et al., 2013). These challenges might cause mothers to have an unfavorable appraisal of the efforts of fathers to be involved and make them less willing to facilitate the father-child relationship with the fathers.

The subjective norm “refers to the perceived social pressure to perform or not to perform the behavior” (Ajzen, 1999, p. 188). Changing the narrative of fatherhood from negative perceptions of fathers to positive perceptions may influence social pressure affecting the mother's decision. The negative image of fatherhood often negates any societal pressure mothers feel to facilitate the father-child relationship.

The perceived behavioral control refers to the “perceived ease or difficulty of performing the behavior, and it is assumed to reflect past experiences as well as anticipated impediments and obstacles” (Ajzen, 1991, p.188). This determinant can reflect frustrations and past bad experiences mothers have with fathers that prevent facilitating father-child relationships (Gaunt, 2008). This determinant also contradicts the standards and responsibilities mothers inherit as the matriarchal parent who creates the perception they have less control of the domestic domain (Allen & Hawkins, 1999).

This theoretical framework defines factors that influence one person to do something and another person to do something different (Ajzen, 1991). In other words, if a mother wants to facilitate the father-child relationship, she also needs the capacity to follow through on that desire. If her capacity to follow through does not match her intent, she cannot facilitate the father-child relationship.

Purpose of the Study

Research on maternal gatekeeping demonstrates that mothers control the amount of access a father has with his child (Allen & Hawkins, 1999) by either facilitating or impeding the father-child relationship (Fagan & Barnett, 2003). The purpose of this qualitative research study was to understand the factors affecting maternal facilitation of father involvement in maternal gatekeeping research, raise awareness to the maternal facilitation of father-child relationships, and lay the foundation for future research in effective co-parenting strategies and healthy relationship practices.

Guiding Research Questions

This research seeks to understand the reasons mothers will or will not facilitate the father-child relationship in Black families by exploring a Black mother's perceptions of her role as a gatekeeper, the father's intent and ability to be involved with his child, and the factors affecting a mother's facilitation of the father-child relationship. The guiding questions are generated from an understanding of the theory of planned behavior, the determinants of maternal gatekeeping, and the negative perspective that Black fathers are absent from the lives of their children because they do not want to be involved.

Guiding Question 1: *What is a mother's perception of her role in the facilitation of the father-child relationship?* This question links the theory of planned behavior's subjective norms and the maternal gatekeeping construct of differential family roles. Subjective norm is defined as when mothers are concerned about others around them approving or disapproving of decisions they make -- in this case, the decision to facilitate father-child relationships. Ajzen (1991) states "personal considerations tended to overshadow the influence of perceived social pressure" (p. 189), meaning mothers make decisions based more on their personal beliefs than social pressure. Differential family roles are defined as "mothers who think family work is only for women" and as such "may hesitate to encourage paternal involvement and may increase the likelihood that they will monitor and manage a father's involvement" (Allen & Hawkins, 1999, p. 205). If mothers feel they have specific roles associated with motherhood, then there is no pressure to do differently.

Guiding Question 2: *What is a mother's perception of a father's intent and ability to follow through on his intentions to be involved with his child?* This question links the theory of planned behavior's attitude toward behavior and the construct of maternal gatekeeping of maternal identity confirmation. Allen and Hawkins (1999) identify maternal identity confirmation as "a desire for the external validation of the maternal role, which allows a woman to affirm to herself and others that she is a good homemaker because of the caring and nurturing family work she does" (p. 204-205), meaning a mother attaches her identity to her role as a mother and therefore becomes conflicted when fathers cross into this role through their involvement with the children. The attitude toward the behavior means people "favor behaviors we believe have largely desirable

consequences and we form unfavorable attitudes toward behaviors we associate with mostly undesirable consequences” (Ajzen, 1991, p. 191). Mothers may not have a favorable attitude toward a father’s involvement because of their belief it threatens their maternal identity.

Guiding Question 3: *What are the factors that contribute to a mother’s ability to facilitate father-child relationships?* This question links the Theory of Planned Behavior’s perceived behavior control with the maternal gatekeeping determinant of standards and responsibility. The perceived behavior control, together with behavioral intention, can be used directly to predict behavioral achievement (Ajzen, 1991). The maternal gatekeeping determinant of standards and responsibility reflects a mother’s reluctance to not assume all the responsibility “by taking charge of tasks, doing chores herself, redoing tasks to a higher standard, or organizing, delegating, planning, and scheduling – all processes that require her partner to conform to her way of doing family work” (Allen & Hawkins, 1999, p. 204). The amount of control mothers believe they have over domestic chores -- in this case, parenting -- may influence if they will facilitate the father-child relationship.

Significance of the Study

The literature currently describes maternal gatekeeping as a set of behaviors that affect father involvement (Allen & Hawkins, 1991; Fagan & Barnett, 2001). These behaviors either impede or facilitate the father-child relationship. This research contributes to the maternal gatekeeping construct by investigating perceptions and barriers to a mother’s facilitation of the father-child relationship.

This contribution relies on an understanding of the maternal facilitation of the father-child relationship. Program developers and family life practitioners will have additional information to assist their efforts to create co-parenting training and improve opportunities to provide co-parenting strategies to one parent in situations where both parents love the child and know why they should co-parent, but only one is willing to learn how to do it. Family court mediators will have information to assist with their mediation efforts between parents. This knowledge will strengthen parenting, and visitation plans agreed to by parents. Understanding why a mother will or will not facilitate the father-child relationship will assist the negotiation process.

Assumptions

Through participation in this study, mothers will be empowered to share their experiences of co-parenting with the father of their child. It is an assumption that the recruitment of the participants through purposive sampling will provide the study with participants who can provide substance from their lived experience that contributes to the research. It is an assumption that the researcher with his background in families, particularly father involvement, will keep his bias to a minimum. A final assumption is that the participants will be honest in their responses during the interview.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The research shows that mothers believe fathers are important for the development of children (Marczak et al., 2015; Puhlman & Pasley, 2013), and that mothers believe that fathers have the capacity to be caretakers (Puhlman & Pasley, 2013). The disconnect in most cases is that a mother's recognition of her role as gatekeeper influences how much the father sees his child (Allen & Hawkins 1999; Fagan & Barnett, 2003; Perry & Langley, 2013; Turner, 2014), placing the children at risk academically and developmentally (Perry & Bright, 2012; Roberts et al., 2014). This research will raise awareness of maternal gatekeeping behavior and identify the factors that contribute to the decision of mothers to facilitate the father-child relationship.

The maternal gatekeeping literature states mothers believe fathers can nurture children and believe fathers are good for the development of children (Fagan & Barnett, 2003). However, often mothers do not recognize their ability to positively or negatively influence father-child relationships (Allen & Hawkins, 1999; Fagan & Barnett, 2003). This literature review examines the initial problem of children growing up without their fathers, the advent of maternal gatekeeping research, aspects of maternal gatekeeping, the theoretical framework underpinning and guiding the methodology of this research, and an understanding of the maternal facilitation of father-child relationships.

Initial Concern

Drawing from the conclusions of the 1965 Negro Report (Moynihan, 1965), Acs et al. (2013) compared the situation of the Black family in 1965 to Black families in 2013. The comparison of the reports highlights that Black men are chronically unemployed, underrepresented in college, and over-represented in the criminal justice system (Acs et al., 2013). These statistics are important, because if Black men are not doing well in society academically or financially and are entangled in the criminal justice system, this could lead to a negative perception that Black women (mothers) have about Black men (fathers) that in turn impedes facilitation of the father-child relationship. This comparison also emphasizes the relevance attributed to the Moynihan report and how the information about fathers was accurate because the situation is worse today, 50 years later, as reported in “Moynihan Revisited” (Acs et. al., 2013). These families tend to have limited resources, and in most cases these fragile families consist of parents that do not communicate well with each other (McLanahan, Garfinkel, Mincy, & Donahue, 2010).

Fragile Families

One of the most significant studies to date as it relates to unmarried families is the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study, conducted from February 1, 1998 to December 31, 2011 (Brown, 2014). This study interviewed the parents of 5,000 children from 20 U.S. cities. These families were tracked through follow-up interviews of the children at one, three, five, and nine years of age.

The Fragile Families research is relevant to this study because the co-parents consisted of unwed parents. It is also the largest data set on unwed fathers to date (Brown, 2014). This large data set on fathers is important because, while this current

study is on the maternal facilitation of father-child relationships, it is still grounded in fatherhood research. The study is also relevant because it is the primary source of hundreds of references including peer-reviewed journals, books, and dissertations.

The Fragile Families study also produces a significant observation about mother-father relationships after birth; for example, one baseline study indicated that, of 248 mothers, 92 percent acknowledged they “want father involved” (McLanahan et al., 1999). This dissertation research takes into consideration the high percentage of mothers acknowledging that they want fathers involved from the birth of the child, and how later in the child’s life attitudes and relationships between mother and father change. This research, consisting of a high number of non-custodial fathers, can provide insight to the fatherhood and co-parenting fields because the research is limited about fathers who have children outside marriage, and even more limited about their relationship with their children and the children’s mother (McLanahan & Garfinkel, 2000).

Co-Parenting

Co-parenting plays a major role in maternal facilitation of father-child relationships (Roberts et. al., 2014; Pruett et al, 2007). Marczak et al (2015), created the Co-Parent Court program to work with families in family court on the paternity calendar. The need for this program is consistent with the growing literature explaining the challenge of parents co-parenting (Perry & Bright, 2012; Pruett et al., 2007; Roberts et al., 2014). Parents who are parenting alone face a number of challenges. For example, “if parents are unmarried, even if a father’s name is on the birth certificate, a mother has sole custody until a court issues a custody order” (Marczak et al., 2015, p.1). The custody issue can be a concern for fathers wanting parental rights to the child and to the mother

who want to show the father is the child. The challenges facing this demographic make programs such as Co-parent Court a necessity for “unmarried parents and fragile families” (Marczak et al., 2015, p.3). It allows them an opportunity to have a structured facilitation of their differences.

The Co-Parent Court program enrolled 709 participants, mothers, and fathers. To be eligible for the program, participants did not require a translator nor did they have any active protection orders. The participants had a case on the paternity calendar and the primary focus on establishing child support and reasonable visitation time (Marczak et al., 2015). Pre and post parenting and co-parenting measures assessed 1) attitudes toward fatherhood, 2) father involvement, and 3) and the co-parenting relationship.

Co-parenting plays a major role in the maternal facilitation of father-child relationships in fragile families (Pruett et al., 2007; Roberts et al., 2014). Marczak et al. (2015) discussed the complexity of custody issues within fragile families, and how critical it is for parents to work together. What is essential to this research is the joint parenting plan between the mothers and fathers in the Co-parent Court program. To create a parenting plan, parents have to be willing to work together, and this means mothers, collaborating with fathers to do so, is a facilitative aspect of maternal gatekeeping (Puhlman & Paisley, 2013). While the Co-Parent Court program was mandated, ascertaining what makes some parents willingly participate in a co-parenting program while others choose not to may provide direction to understanding why some mothers will facilitate the father-child relationship and others will not.

Another co-parenting process designed for working with families in family court is called Parenting Coordination (PC). Sullivan (2008) emphasized the roles of co-parents

participating in the PC program. The PC program focused on divorced parents; however, like other literature on co-parenting examining divorced parents (Allen & Hawkins, 1999), literature has noted most aspects of co-parenting in the divorce literature can apply for single, never married parents (Fagan & Barnett, 2003). Two important points from Sullivan's research are relevant to this study: the time it takes to resume a co-parenting routine after divorce and the placement of co-parenting into four categories.

Co-Parenting Categories

The first aspect of Sullivan's (2008) research that is relevant to this study is the acknowledgment that it takes between two to three years to resume adequate co-parenting after divorce. However, the various transitions of co-parenting in the family life cycle such as the birth of the child, change in work, and child development requires co-parents to adjust. These two aspects together mean divorce requires an additional adjustment to the family life cycle, and more importantly, an assumption can be made that for single, never married parents this is even more of a challenge since the baseline of the marital partnership was never established.

Second, four categories comprise the way in which co-parents work together after divorce. The four categories are cooperative, conflicted, mixed, and parallel (Sullivan, 2008). These roles are not absolute but provide an understanding of the dynamic of co-parenting after divorce. Figure 2 presents these four categories and the percentages of parents that fall into each.

	Levels of Conflict	
Levels of Engagement	Parallel (low/low) (40%)	Mixed (high/ low) (20%)
	Cooperative (low/ high) (25%)	Conflicted (high/ high) (15%)

Figure 2 Co-parenting after Divorce (Sullivan 2008)

The cooperative category is comprised of co-parents with a high level of involvement and low level of conflict. Cooperative co-parents require very minimal, if any assistance, from parenting programs and family court. They can make agreements on their own. Cooperative co-parents have a good perception of who they are and high parenting self-efficacy.

The conflicted category is made up of co-parents with a high level of involvement and a high level of conflict. Conflicted co-parents have an unclear perception of who they are, the other co-parent and their children. These parents are often angry, do not communicate well with each other, and have a difficult time making joint decisions about their child.

The third category, mixed, are co-parents with a low level of involvement and high levels of conflict. Mixed co-parents, like conflicted co-parents, are often angry but display it openly. This angry disposition makes communication between them volatile and hostile. They typically want all or nothing and, in most cases each seeks sole custody.

The final category, parallel, are co-parents with a low level of involvement and low level of conflict. Parallel co-parents have low levels of conflict because they avoid interaction with each other. These parents often believe they do not have to communicate directly with the other parent if the child is old enough to communicate with the other parent with no assistance from them. The situation often leads to their children manipulating situations as a result of their limited or lack of interaction.

Understanding Maternal Gatekeeping

Before 1999, the research on father involvement concentrated mostly on the father's responsibility (Sylvester & Reich, 2000). In 1999 attention was redirected to the role mothers play in father involvement under a term called maternal gatekeeping (Allen & Hawkins, 1999). Allen and Hawkins (1999) define maternal gatekeeping as “a collection of beliefs and behaviors that ultimately inhibit a collaborative effort between men and women in family work by limiting men's opportunities for learning and growing through caring for home and children” (p. 200). While Allen and Hawkins' (1999) research targeted married couples, research has shown this concept applies to divorced and never-married mothers as well (Fagan & Barnett, 2003).

In recognizing the role mothers play in father-child relationships, Allen and Hawkins (1999) introduced a three-dimensional model for identifying reasons mothers do not want fathers helping with domestic chores around the home. This three-dimensional model of maternal gatekeeping includes standards and responsibility, maternal identity confirmation, and differentiated family roles (Allen & Hawkins, 1999). Standards and responsibilities refer to a mother's apprehension about allowing a father to do work around the house (Allen & Hawkins, 1999). This apprehension manifests when a father

is doing a chore around the house, and no matter how well he does it, the wife feels as though he did not do it well. Maternal identity confirmation suggests that mothers feel inferior when fathers help around the house (Allen & Hawkins, 1999). The mother's belief in traditional roles that say mothers are in charge of the domestic aspect of family leaves them to feel devalued when fathers assist in the domestic aspect of the family and lessens who they are as a mother (Allen & Hawkins, 1999). What this means is mothers attach how well they do as mothers to the amount of work they do around the house. Additionally, a father assisting in the chores can be seen by the mother as implying she is not doing a good job. Differentiated family roles are based on the mother's belief of what family roles are important and take precedence over paternal beliefs. Mothers use this to monitor and manage a father's involvement (Allen & Hawkins, 1999). Additionally, a father can assist with a specific chore and regardless of how well he performs he will be negatively critiqued by the mother.

Expounding on Allen and Hawkins' (1999) research, Fagan and Barnett (2003) found that mothers know the importance of fathers, and mothers recognize fathers are relevant to the development of their children (Fagan & Barnett, 2003). However, mothers do not recognize their role as a maternal gatekeeper and how it can affect the father-child relationship (Fagan & Barnett, 2003).

Understanding that mothers recognize fathers are capable of nurturing children effectively means many mothers understand that fathers possess the ability to care for children. However, this same understanding adds to the confusion as to why mothers can behave as potential barriers to father involvement (Fagan & Barnett, 2003). This behavior contradicts the position that mothers impede to protect the child (Gaunt, 2008). If fathers

are caretakers, and children benefit from having a father involved, then a mother not facilitating the father-child relationship is not a layer of protection for the child. Additionally, this ideology adds to the confusion because this awareness adds to the perception that if a father intends to care for his child, he will do so without taking into consideration potential barriers that complicate his ability to do so (Gaunt, 2008). As suggested by Perry (2013), when measuring the involvement of fathers, the measurement should also include the father's capacity to follow through.

Fagan and Barnett (2003) discuss the perceptions of mothers that begins to show the gap in the maternal gatekeeping literature. Sano, Richards, and Zvonkovic (2008) share a different perspective in regards to maternal gatekeeping. This qualitative research of 83 custodial mothers in a low-income rural community examined the association between maternal gatekeeping and father involvement. Sano et al. (2008) concluded "mother's evaluations of the father stemmed from actions initiated by the fathers, and not father's intentions" (p. 719). In other words, it is not the father's ability to follow through with intent that mothers take into consideration but rather the behaviors of the fathers.

Sano et al. (2008) acknowledged "Mothers rarely recognized that father's parenting styles may be different yet equally competent or that fathers perhaps were not able to develop appropriate parenting styles because they did not interact with their children on a daily basis" (p. 1720). Mothers may equate the different parenting styles of the fathers with incompetence. The perception of some of the mothers in the study who rarely recognize fathers as "equally competent" may be a contributing factor to their response to a father's actions.

Because mothers recognized a shortcoming in the father's ability to provide child support, they developed coping strategies to deal with the few, if any, child support payments they did receive (Sano et. al., 2008). This is important because the mothers recognized there were limited opportunities for employment in their community (Sano et. al., 2008). They recognized the capacity of the fathers to pay child support did not connect with their intent to pay (Hasbullah et. al., 2014; Perry & Langley, 2012). However, mothers considered the status of fathers and worked with them accordingly. This "coping strategy" could lead to an understanding of whether mothers will facilitate the father-child relationship with the father of their child. At a minimum, working with a father in regards to child support is a type of facilitation of father-child relationship (Pruett et al., 2007).

However, there are other situations where a mother's flexibility has an expiration date. Roy, Buckmiller and McDowell (2008):

Taylor, a 23-year old father in Indianapolis, repeated the mantra of I want to get a job each year but found himself losing everything, slowly vanishing, just like Monopoly. The mother of his 3-year-old son told him six years, and I'm done. I'm not going through this anymore – get yourself together (p. 206).

This exchange shows how a mother's attitude about the behavior can influence her decision to work with the father. It also shows how some mothers are influenced by a father's employment status (Roy, Buckmiller, & McDowell, 2008)

Cannon, Schoppe-Sullivan, Mangelsdorf, Brown, and Sokolowski (2008) explained that maternal gatekeeping may not be a direct result of the mother's belief of father roles. This concept echoed by Sano, Richards, and Zvonkovic (2008) suggests that

maternal gatekeeping may be more than mothers responding to intent. This research reaffirms that, regardless of how maternal gatekeeping is presented, it still exists (Cannon et al., 2008).

Hilgendorf (2012) researched young Black males and their support systems and concluded a father's contribution sometimes goes unnoticed by the mother. The case study followed three boys and gathered data from interviewing the boys, their mothers, their teachers, and anyone connected in their lives to explain their support system. What is significant is the narrative of one of the boys in the study who had a different perspective of support than his mother. In the study, the father of the boy lived in a different state but talked with his son over the phone to assist with his homework. The boy also received support from a male mentor at a youth center. When researchers interviewed the mother, she did not recognize any support from the father or the male mentor at the youth center (Hilgendorf, 2012). This research suggests a need to gain a better understanding of the association between father involvement and maternal perception. Hilgendorf's research on young Black males shows how a non-custodial father's involvement with his child can go unnoticed (Hilgendorf, 2012).

Gaunt (2008) suggested that maternal gatekeeping is not a deliberate and intentional set of actions, but rather unintentional efforts to protect children. A reflection that mothers viewed the different parenting style of fathers as a father's inability to parent correctly or that a father is incompetent as a parent (Allen & Hawkins, 1999; Sano et al., 2008). The findings also suggest that mothers are often unaware of the negative consequences of maternal gatekeeping (Gaunt, 2008). The study concluded, "the stronger the mother's feminine orientation and the more prominent her maternal identity, the

stronger were her tendencies for gatekeeping in general and for maternal identity confirmation in particular” (Gaunt, 2008, p. 385). Determining the source of a mother’s inability to recognize an involved father’s effort may help understand her proclivity to engage in non-facilitative behaviors.

Puhlman and Paisley (2013) expounded on the previous research of Allen and Hawkins (1999) and Fagan and Barnett (2003) by using family systems theory and feminist theory to redefine maternal gatekeeping. This model of maternal gatekeeping expands the differential family roles construct of maternal identity and subjective norms as explained by Allen and Hawkins (1999). Puhlman and Paisley (2013) introduce a three-dimensional model that reflects two broad types of maternal gatekeeping which include encouraging and discouraging behaviors. The three dimensions consist of control, encouragement, and discouragement. The dimension of control refers to the distribution of power and cultural gender roles within the family system (Puhlman & Paisley, 2013). However, the defining element of control is behavior that manages pertinent information, resources, and their network (Puhlman & Paisley, 2013). The encouragement dimension indicates that mothers provide positive feedback, invite cooperative parenting interactions, and behave in ways that suggest that fathers are important (Puhlman & Paisley, 2013). The final dimension, discouragement, is the degree to which mothers are discouraging and critical of fathers and their involvement with children. Puhlman and Paisley (2013) suggested that maternal gatekeeping is a symbiotic relationship where the maternal behavior is contingent on the paternal behavior and not solely contingent on maternal beliefs of fatherhood. This concept is similar to other research suggesting

maternal gatekeeping is about the actions of fathers and not their intent (Sano et al., 2008).

In addition to understanding maternal gatekeeping, equally imperative to note is what constitutes facilitation of father-child relationships. Pruett et al. (2007) outlined examples of facilitation of father-child relationships in their research. The research included 161 families in the Collaborative Divorce Project (CDP), and follow-up data from 142 of the families. Families were recruited from two court districts upon filing for divorce and sent introductory letters and then follow up with a CDP project manager for recruitment into the program. The intervention consisted of seven components: 1) co-parenting counselors and case management, 2) divorce orientation, 3) parenting classes, 4) feedback session, 5) mediations, 6) status/ settlement conference, and 7) follow-up. Testing the theory, a gatekeeping questionnaire was designed.

The following are examples suggested by Pruett et al. (2007) of the facilitation of father-child relationships. One example, “being flexible with visitation,” allows fathers to have trade days when something comes up on their schedule they cannot control. A trading day is an agreement with the mother to switch days when the father has a conflict in his schedule and cannot make his scheduled visitation time. This type of facilitation has shown to be an effective method even by mother’s accounts (Gaunt, 2008). Another example, “encourage telephone communication,” is when the mother encourages her child to speak over the telephone with his/her father (Pruett et al, 2007). In the case study conducted by Hilgendorf (2012), the following is an example of how the father-child interaction happened but could have been better with the mother’s encouragement.

Raising awareness to this type of involvement can be an effective tool for facilitating the

father-child relationship even when mothers do not recognize it as father involvement (Hilgendorf, 2012). An additional example “prompt child to spend time with father,” in cases where the child does not want to spend time with the father is to encourage the child to do so (Pruett et al, 2007). This example is echoed in parenting plans of Co-parent Court (Marczak et al., 2015). Another example is “keep father updated” when the child has an event (Pruett, Arthur, & Ebling, 2007). Lastly, “do not speak poorly of the father,” and as turbulent as the relationship between the mother and father is, never speak ill of the father in the presence of their child. This is consistent with divorce education which encourages parents to avoid putting their children in the middle.

One approach to gaining insight into the maternal facilitation of father-child relationships is to determine why a mother facilitates the father-child relationship. Does the mother perform facilitative behavior based on trying to help the father achieve his parenting goals or as an attempt to increase the father’s involvement with the child based on her goals, or those she perceives to be right for the child (Fagan & Cherson, 2015)? In other words, are the mothers performing facilitative behavior doing so to support fathers to be involved or to promote involvement as deemed by her beliefs?

Fagan and Cherson (2015) suggest that qualitative research may provide a deeper context of how facilitation differs from gatekeeping. Existing literature calling for further examination of the maternal gatekeeping concept supports this research about maternal gatekeepers. Fagan and colleagues have contributed much to the maternal gatekeeping literature (Fagan & Barnett, 2003; Fagan & Cherson, 2015; Fagan & Iglesias, 1999) and his suggestion to provide co-parenting training that helps mothers understand the fathers of their children to improve maternal facilitation is the direction of this research. While

Fagan and Cherson (2015) explain the benefits of qualitative research, another perspective is shared by Gowan, Cowan, and Knox (2010) that “unwed couples in fragile families can benefit from father-involvement, interventions, especially those that pay attention to the relationship between the father and the mother of the child” (p. 214). An assumption made by these researchers is that qualitative research exploring father-mother interaction will contribute to new approaches to strengthen families.

Theory of Planned Behavior Research

Ajzen (1991) posited that behavior can be predicted by three independent determinants of intention. These three determinants are the attitude toward the behavior, subjective norm, and the perceived behavioral control. The determinant, attitude toward the behavior, is the positive or negative perspective of the behavior in question The determinant, social norm, is the influence of societal pressure to do a behavior. The determinant of perceived behavioral control is the ease or difficulty to perform a behavior. Other researchers have expanded these three determinates to increase the ability to predict behavior.

Conners and Armitage (1998) expand the theory of planned behavior by adding six additional determinants. These include “belief salience, past behavior/habit, perceived behavioral control versus self-efficacy, moral norms, self-identity, and affective beliefs” (Conner & Armitage, 1998, p. 1433). Most of these additions explained by Conners and Armitage (1998), can be applied to this research. The following is an example of how two of the additions apply.

A person’s past behavior can determine future behavior (Conner & Armitage, 1998). What this means is that mothers who have not facilitated the father-child

relationship in the past are less likely to do so in the future (Gaunt, 2008). The mother's recollection of a father's past behavior acts as a source of information (Conner & Armitage, 1998), such that if mothers believe a father's uninvolved actions will not change, they do not facilitate the father-child relationship (Sano et al, 2008). It is important to note the difficulty in this area is that a mother's assertion a father is uninvolved sometimes could be the failure of a mother to recognize fathers and mothers parent differently (Fagan & Barnett, 2003).

The theory of planned behavior's subjective norms addresses how peer pressure and other support can influence intention (Ajzen, 1991), so there exists a correlation with the expanded determinant of moral norms. Conner and Armitage (1998) define moral norms as "one's socially determined and socially validated values attached to a particular behavior" (p. 188). The moral norms may add a layer of pressure for mothers (Conner & Armitage, 1998) and may make it difficult for mothers to facilitate the father-child relationship with the father because it does not align with ideology of her social networks (Allen & Hawkins, 1999).

This literature adds support to Conner and Armitage's (1998) expansion of determinants to the theory of planned behavior. From a general view, however, application of the theory of planned behavior to a particular area of interest can cover many different social issues and provide information to help understand these behaviors (Hasbullah et al, 2014). "Intention, perception of behavioral control, attitude toward the behavior, and subjective norm each reveals a different aspect of the behavior, and each can serve as a point of attack in attempts to change it" (Hasbullah et al, 2014, p.??). If this is true with mothers who do not facilitate the father-child relationship, this approach

could provide an opportunity to work with those mothers by understanding the issue and addressing the causes.

Some research links the theory of planned behavior and a father's intention with the capacity to follow through with his intentions (Perry & Bright, 2012). This research is critical because it positively changes the narrative about fathers (Baskerville, 2008), which should increase father involvement through policy change and education that teaches mothers and father how to co-parent (Acs et al., 2013; Sylvester & Reich, 2000). It can also address the maternal perception of a father's intentions and their ability to follow through with those intentions which may ascertain whether mothers will facilitate the father-child relationship (Roberts et al., 2014; Sano et al, 2008).

As explained by Perry and Langley (2013), "if 1) the quality of the co-parenting relationship between the mother and father is good, 2) the father believes the mother wants him involved in parenting matters with his child, and 3) the paternal residence is stable," (p. 186) then there should be an increase in father involvement. When a positive co-parenting relationship exists with the mother and when fathers have stable living conditions, we would expect to see that father involvement increases. The fact that a father's involvement increases when they believe the mother of the child wants them involved emphasizes the influence the mother has in promoting father involvement (Allen & Hawkins, 1999; Perry & Langley, 2013).

Conclusion

The literature reflects that mothers are often the primary gatekeepers when families separate (Klaff, 1982). The situation exists that parents do not work together (Marczak et al., 2015; Sylvester & Reich, 2001). Often there is a train of thought by

society and mothers that claim if fathers are interested in being present for their children they will do anything possible to be there (Perry & Langley, 2013). This reasoning does not take into account the challenges of life that exist and can serve as potential barrier to father involvement (Acs et al., 2013; Perry & Langley, 2013; Roberts et al., 2014). The theory of planned behavior provides context to this flawed assertion that intent without the capacity to follow through is unrealistic (Perry & Langley, 2012). Interestingly, one of the potential barriers making father involvement a reality for many fathers is the non-existent or limited co-parenting relationship with the mother (Marczak et al., 2015).

The researcher asserts from this literature review that a mother's intent to co-parent with the father is similar to a father's intent to be involved with his children. In other words, a mother may want to facilitate the father-child relationship, but the challenge for her to do so should not equate to being uncooperative only that she does not have the capacity to do so. This is the fundamental premise of the theory of planned behavior: does an individual have the capacity to follow through with their intent (Ajzen, 1991)? A mother's limited capacity could be the difference between the reasons a mother will or will not facilitate the father-child relationship and the reasons a mother might impede the father-child relationship.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative research study is to understand the factors affecting maternal facilitation of father involvement and lay the foundation for future research in effective co-parenting strategies and healthy relationships practices.

There were three guiding questions for this research study:

1. What is a mother's perception of her role in the facilitation of the father-child relationship?
2. What is a mother's perception of a father's intent and ability to follow through on his intentions to be involved with his child?
3. What are the factors that contribute to a mother's ability to facilitate father-child relationships?

This research design is qualitative, incorporating the constructivist paradigm. The goal of this research is "to rely as much as possible on the participants' views of the situation" (Creswell, 2013, p. 25). Primary data collection consisted of in-person interviews, archival data collection, and observation. This methodology puts in perspective the thoughts of mothers as they relate to facilitating the father-child relationship with the father of their child. This chapter outlines the methodology guiding

this study, the population of the research, description of the instruments, data collection procedures, and the analytical approach.

Qualitative research consists of a set of processes to help guide the work of the researcher. The philosophy guiding this research is constructivism. This approach recognizes the shared experiences and relationships of both data and analysis with participants and other sources of data (Charmaz, 2006; Mills, Bonner, & Francis, 2006). Data collection from mothers about their interaction with the father of their children can provide insight into their facilitation behavior. As Charmaz (2006) points out, “constructivists study how – and sometimes why – participants construct meanings and actions in specific situations” (p. 130).

As a constructivist, the researcher has a critical task of ascertaining when data is relevant, and when the data is packaged into the larger situations and relationships (Charmaz, 2006). In this research, the data derived from the mothers were analyzed to understand how to weave together the information from their lived experiences. Deep analysis or translating what mothers said captured all of the data from the mothers which is relevant because as Charmaz (2006) emphasizes, “not everyone we talk to is equally adept at describing themselves or of linking their actions to meanings” (p. 147). To successfully build upon the foundation laid by the data shared by the mothers in the study, the researcher had to develop their narratives. From these narratives, themes emerged to emphasize the voice of the participants. The strategy for putting together the narrative from the participants is the use of categories; they are not the core variable of a constructivist but a good method to show relationships in the data (Charmaz, 2006).

Recruitment and Study Population

The selected sampling methodology for this research was purposive sampling. This method was appropriate for this research because purposive sampling is tied to the objectives of the research (Palys, 2008), by allowing the researcher to gain insight from participants knowledgeable about this subject area. Participants recruited as a result of purposive sampling can provide information about the subject the researcher is seeking. As Palys (2008) explained “research participants are not always created equal – one well-placed articulate informant will often advance the research far better than any randomly chosen sample of 50 – and researchers need to take this into account in choosing a sample” (p. 697).

The objective of the researcher selecting the purposive sampling method was to recruit the participants with the lived experiences to address the research. The IRB application was submitted to meet the approval of the compliance office. Shortly after getting the Internal Review Board approval required to conduct this study from the Mississippi State University compliance office, the researcher sent a letter in July 2017 describing the purpose of this study to child care centers and community centers in a part of Louisville, Kentucky, west of what is commonly referred to as the Ninth Street Corridor. The researcher chose this area because it is a predominately Black community and would likely increase the successful recruitment of the target population. The researcher has worked in this urban community for over 15 years as the director of a nonprofit organization, and this provided the researcher access to organization directors, community leaders, and parents that are or interact with the target population. The researcher leveraged his network with these entities, requesting they distribute a research flyer and information in their locations and to the communities they serve. One of the

challenges associated with working with this demographic is that mothers may be difficult to recruit for the interview because they are apprehensive about participating in research studies or trust the interviewer (Robin & Robin, 2013). Leveraging the social capital of the researcher addressed this challenge.

To successfully recruit for the research, flyers inviting mothers to participate were posted at child care facilities and community centers where mothers go. The flyer explained the study and gave potential participants information to help in their decision to join the study. The flyer directly addressed the mother (see Appendix A - Research Flyer). All the study participants connected with the researcher through exposure of the research flyers. The research flyer requested mothers interested in participating in the study to contact the researcher for more information. When mothers in the community called for additional information about the research opportunity they spoke with the researcher, who provided study details.

The selection criteria for the participants were: (a) never married; (b) identify as a Black woman; (c) have a child fathered by a man who identifies as Black; (d) have a child between 5 and 11 years of age; (e) is the primary custodian of the child; and (f) identify as being low-income. These criteria were included in a prescreening questionnaire.

The sampling strategy for this research study was purposive sampling, in that some of the participants shared their experience with other mothers, who themselves later participated. The target population for this study is challenging to access due to trust issues (Sylvester & Reich, 2001). The researcher did not have a ready source of mothers from which to recruit. The researcher, through purposive sampling, sought the mothers at

community centers and child care centers that catered to his target demographic. Successful snowballing recruitment led to all the participants in the study; one participant recruited three mothers. This aspect of the study may have allowed the researcher to recruit participants who felt more comfortable participating because the person who is referring them to the researcher is also vouching for the researcher (Berg & Lune, 2012). When the researcher was able to speak with the mothers, provide more information about the study, and have participants complete the prescreening tool, a scheduled date, time, and location were set for the interview. The researcher informed the mothers that their participation in the study was completely voluntary, and they could change their mind and withdraw at any time.

The researcher's rationale behind conducting the interviews in Louisville, Kentucky was based on the researcher's status as a leader in this community. The researcher's ability to connect with people and make them feel comfortable during the research process helped the researcher build a rapport with the participants. As Rubin and Rubin (2012) suggested, if you are always inquiring with your friends as if you are interviewing them, then you are a social scientist. This demeanor is who the researcher is, and as a result, the researcher had several positive interviews that were captured with thick description. All the interviews seemed to provide more insight than the researcher initially expected. However, there were times when the interview was so engrossing it was a challenge for the researcher to maintain his role as a researcher and not attempt to counsel the participants. This restraint took immense discipline on the researcher's part, but the researcher believes he achieved the task of maintaining objectivity during the interview process.

Instrumentation and Data Collection Procedures

Creswell (2013) stated “observation is one of the key tools for collecting data in qualitative research” (p. 166). An observation protocol provided a list of what to look for during the interview. The observation protocol was important to this research because “researchers must determine exactly what they want to learn about at various points in the research and focus their attention accordingly” (Berg & Lune, 2012, p. 224).

Data collection for this research consisted of ten, in-person semi-structured interviews. The observation included the discussion between the moderator and the participants, subtle differences, interaction with other people who were in the participant’s home, and in some cases the condition of the home itself. Observations were a good method for collecting data aspects of the study that cannot be captured with the words from the interview but a visual of the environment (Berg & Lune, 2012). A locked desk drawer in a locked office is where all the confidential data was stored. Electronic data such as the interview recordings were stored on a password-protected computer in the researcher’s office. Only the researcher and his advisor had access to the data.

Consent Process

Gathering the data needed for the research was predicated on the trust of participants. When participants shared their data, they were informed that none of their identifying personal information would be used. In the event that they shared information such as court documents, all identifying information would be redacted. After participants were informed of all reasonable procedures to maintain confidentiality, they were provided the consent document (see Appendix B – Consent Form).

Interviews

The interview protocol (see Appendix C), was created after the field work required for course work completion. This field work consisted of ten interviews with participants over the phone, and two focus groups in Starkville, Mississippi. The data analysis from the interviews and focus groups was used to generate the interview protocol.

The interview process posed the questions in a structured, pre-ordered format (see Appendix C). However, in qualitative research, it is common to practice flexibility in asking questions to help acquire more data from the participant (Merriam, 1998). For that purpose, the interviews were semi-structured by allowing for follow-up questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Some structured questions were used, but the interviewer maintained the latitude to ask additional probing questions that were formulated by the answers provided by the participants. Probing questions consisted of steering probes, confirmation probes, continuation probes and clarification probes (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). A digital voice recorder was used to record the interviews. During the interviews, coding of the names of the participants maintained participant confidentiality. The coding process consisted of their first, middle, and last initials with the date. These pseudonyms were later changed to MO1, MO2, and so on, for final reporting of the data in Chapter Four. All interviews were in-person, allowing the researcher an opportunity to observe both verbal and non-verbal communication. Each participant was interviewed once with the length of interviews ranging from one hour to two-and-a-half hours.

This data collection method was selected because interviews allow for the lived experiences of participants to be captured (Robin & Robin, 2013). One interview per

participant was scheduled, with participants agreeing to a second if additional information was needed. After a preliminary analysis of the data six mothers were called back to capture age demographics. The participants did not have access to the interview questions before the interviews and were assured the interviews would remain confidential. The researcher informed the participants that the purpose of the data collected was for his dissertation and a potential publication.

Archival Data

At the time of the initial discussion about the study, interviews, and scheduling, participants were asked to share any documents they thought explained their situation. One of the best accounts that speak truthfully to a person's life in tandem with their words is the trace they leave behind (Berg & Lune, 2012). Documents such as court papers, videos, school documents, or police reports may provide more insight into the participant's situation, such as her co-parenting experiences with the father of her child. Archival data is known as an unobtrusive research measure. The data collected is independent of the process that produced it (Berg & Lune, 2012). Collecting unusual forms of qualitative data such as sounds, visual materials, or digital text messages is a preferred method of some qualitative researchers to gain more insight into the situation (Creswell, 2013). However, collecting archival data may not be appropriate for all research and should be used in conjunction with other data collection methods (Berg & Lune, 2012).

Interview Observations

An observation protocol used during the interviews focused on three questions that provided an opportunity to describe the environment of the interviews. The

researcher believes these questions can provide more insight into the support and situation of the mother.

1. Where did the interview take place, and if at a participant's residence, what were the conditions?
2. If children were present during the interview, how was their behavior?
3. Was anyone else present during the interview?

Ideally, data analysis should take place simultaneously with data collection (Merriam, 1998). During the data collection, the information was analyzed as soon as possible. One method to collect data simultaneously is the use of matrices during the transcription of the interviews and archival data to gather information after it is recently gathered. The matrices allow the researcher to jot down thoughts, questions, and concerns and the data is collected. The matrices were a good addition to collecting the data because it allowed the researcher to revisit thoughts and concepts that may have come to mind at the time of the collection.

The first observation question asks for the location of the interview, which consisted of three categories. The categories were generated during the analysis of participant interviews. The three categories generated were home, library, and other. The home category consisted of the participant's home or the participant's relative's home. The other category was interview locations that were not at a participant's home or participant's relative's home. Participants MO1, MO2, MO3, MO5, and MO7 were in the home category. Out of those five participants, only MO3 and MO7 were at their place of residence. Interviews with participants MO5 and MO7 took place at their mother's home. MO1'S interview was at her sister's home.

The public library main branch was the interview location for MO6 and MO10. MO4, MO8, and MO9's interviews took place at the "other" location. MO4's interview would have been at a library location, but the time the researcher and participant agreed to meet the library was closed for renovation. Because the library was closed, the researcher and participant walked across the street to the YMCA. The YMCA is also one of the organizations the researcher reached out to for recruitment.

The interview for participant MO8 took place at a cafeteria and was probably the worst location for the interview because of the noise and no access to the internet. The internet became important because the backup recording device worked only if there was an internet connection. All other locations, except for that of MO9, had internet access to which the researcher was able to connect. MO9's place of business was the location for her interview. She was the owner of a hair salon she inherited through the passing of her aunt.

For the participants whose interview was at their home or relative's home, the condition of the home was categorized as either tidy, lived in, or very lived in. "Tidy" referred to the residence being very clean, with everything put away and in its place. "Lived in" indicated some items out of place or not clean, such as food or dishes. "Very lived in" meant there was noticeable clutter, dirty dishes, and food left out in the open. Of the five participants interviewed at their home or a family member's home, MO3, MO4, and MO5 were tidy, MO2 was lived in, and MO7 was very lived in. To get to the room for the interview with MO2 the researcher was guided through the living room, which was connected to the dining area. This path led to a hallway with bedrooms to the left and right. Directly in front of the researcher was the entrance to the basement. To the right of

the basement was the bathroom. The basement was the younger brother's room and the site of the interview. There were bullets and alcohol bottles on the table in front of the researcher. There were clothes on the floor and the sofa, and there was what looked like tobacco remains on the table.

The home of MO7 was very lived in and probably the one time the researcher did not feel comfortable with the environment. The interview took place at the kitchen table. To get to the kitchen, the researcher was guided through the living room to an adjoining dining room. There was food on the tables in both the living room and kitchen. There was noticeable clutter on the floor, and on a few occasions during the interview, a bug would walk across the kitchen table.

The second question of the observation protocol asks if the participant's children were present and if so, what their behavior was. Of the ten interviewees, four had children present. MO1 and MO7 were at their home or a family member's home with their children. Participants MO6 and MO10 both had their children with them at both interviews that took place at the library. MO6's interview took place on the second floor of the back section of the library. This location was chosen because of the proximity to the children's library which was at the bottom of the stairs that led up to the second floor. MO6's child interrupted the interview a few times to talk to her mother. Participant MO10's interview was in the basement of the back entrance of the library next to the teen center. This location in the library was chosen because it was near the children's library directly at the top of the stairs that led down to the basement. MO10's child interrupted the interview a few times. Neither child was a major distraction during the interview.

In some cases, family members were present, which answers the third question on the observation protocol. For instance, MO1, MO2, and MO5 had their mother present. MO1 is the only participant to have both her children and her mother present. MO1 also had her sister present. Four of the interviews took place around strangers, those locations being the library, cafeteria, and YMCA. Only one participant had a visible pet, and that was MO2 who was at her mother's house and was very comfortable with the family pet, a pit-bull with a blue coat that weighed about 60 pounds. MO9, while at her place of business after hours, had two visitors stop by during the interview. One visitor came in and emptied the trash; the other visitor was a barber from one of the surrounding barber shops. The interruptions with MO9 from the visitors added approximately thirty-five minutes to the interview time.

Data Analysis

In qualitative research, unlike quantitative research, the researcher's intertwined presence throughout the process makes the researcher an essential instrument needed for the research (Creswell, 2013). The researcher's dual capacity as the researcher and the research instrument causes the researcher not only to focus on the research itself but his subjectivity during the data collection and analysis. Throughout this study, the researcher was intentional about keeping his biases and judgments in perspective to avoid subjectively influencing this research (Creswell, 2013). The researcher was able to journal a lot of his experiences and thoughts regarding this process, which proved advantageous during the research.

An example to illustrate how the researcher's journaling assisted in the research process comes from entry log 10.01.16 "Doing research and reflecting on the

conversation with Dr. Leach about providing information during the mock interview. She said I cannot give advice, specifically on non-evidenced based approaches. Does information about maternal facilitation strategies (Puhlman, & Pasley, 2013) provide information I can share if prompted like in the mock interview?" This passage is probably one of the researcher's most important because it guided him through the process of not counseling the participants during the interview process and remaining objective as they shared their experiences.

. Verbatim transcriptions of the sessions were created after each interview, at which time the researcher reflected on each interview and his interaction with the participant. These reflections provided additional context to the interview. The interview files were retrieved and transcribed verbatim by the researcher.

As stated by Hilal and Alabri (2013) "given the innovation in software technology, electronic techniques of data coding are gradually being more employed to obtain rigor in dealing with such data" (p. 181). Capitalizing from the qualitative software that exists today, NVIVO 11 was used to organize the data into themes. The interview transcriptions, observational protocols, researcher reflections, and archival data were uploaded in NVIVO and analyzed in tandem with each other. NVIVO, through the creation of nodes, separated themes and helped identify new themes as they emerged. The software helped identify themes not considered by the researcher through the various queries and graphics.

Researcher as a Measurement Tool

The researcher becoming part of the research had to be mindful of the bias connected to his interest in the subject (Charmaz, 2006). The researcher's bias is part

personal and part professional. Personally, the researcher is a divorced father of four children. Professionally, the researchers works with families but is intentional about advocating for fathers and establishing opportunities for mothers and fathers with children together to be able to co-parent. The researcher is a certified court mediator who has volunteered mediation services to family court. The researcher's research interest is patriarchal in nature. These personal and professional experiences lead to assumptions on the part of the researcher that mothers might be malicious at times when impeding the father-child relationships.

In conducting the research and gathering the data, the researcher did not allow his passion for the subject to blind him to particular aspects of the data (Mills, Bonner, & Francis, 2006). Examining why a mother will or will not facilitate the father-child relationships is a sensitive and complicated matter, and gathering all the data is the goal. A researcher needs to check not only for bias, but also to make sure he is capturing the voices of the participants, in this case, the mothers. This included maintaining the presence of the participants by keeping their words intact through the process of analysis (Mills, Bonner, & Francis, 2006). During the interviews, the researcher asked probing questions that allowed the participants to provide clarity on their feedback. The researcher shared the data and findings with other researchers.

Participant is the label used to identify participants in this study, a term commonly used in research (Merriam, 1998). To address interviewer bias, data triangulation was employed through interviews, archival data, and observations (Berg, 2012). "For many researchers, triangulation is restricted to the use of multiple data-gathering techniques (usually three) to investigate the same phenomenon. Triangulation is interpreted as a

means of mutual confirmation of measures and validation of findings” (Berg, 2012, p. 6). The three data collection methods provided insight to the feedback provided by the participants. Creswell (2013) suggests triangulation is an important, early step in analyzing qualitative data. The researcher consistently compared his research findings with that of other researchers in the field. The researcher found that his research participants expressed similar sentiments as participants in other studies (Puhlman & Paisley, 2013; Roberts, Coakley, Washington, & Kelley, 2014). The researcher, through the process of immersing himself in reading and the re-reading of his notes and reflecting about the information shared by the participants was able to gather the experiences of the participants. Additionally, emergent patterns and themes were repeatedly questioned and refined through peer reviewing.

Development of Themes

To capture the lived experiences of the participants the researcher performed three stages of data analysis of the interviews, interview observations, and the archival data. The first stage of analysis consisted of a researcher-generated list of codes to identify aspects of the data the researcher considered important to the study. These initial codes were derived from the study’s theoretical foundation – Theory of Planned Behavior – and the research literature on maternal gatekeeping and co-parenting categories. In the second stage of analysis the researcher organized and structured the codes from the first stage into parent codes and sub-codes, recognized in the qualitative data analysis software as codes. The third stage was the continued structuring of the data into themes that addressed each of the three guiding research questions. Figure 3 illustrates the three-stage analysis process of code development and a brief description of each process.

First Analysis	Second Analysis	Third Analysis
Peer Pressure Perceived Excuses Attitudes toward co-parenting Encouragement aside from parenting Maternal identity Standards and responsibilities Encouragement Discouragement Control Differentiated family roles Mixed Parallel Cooperative Conflicted Other	Parenting Styles: Mixed Parallel Cooperative Conflicted Parenting Responsibilities Differentiated family roles Maternal identity Standards and responsibilities Harm to children Excuses Discouragement Control Barriers Girlfriend Fight Drugs Violence Argue Communication Encouragement aside from parenting Support Encouragement	<u>Unappreciated effort:</u> Parenting Responsibilities Parenting Styles: Incarceration <u>Help Themselves:</u> Barriers Attitudes Father situation Relationship with child Finances <u>Expiration Date of Tolerance:</u> Excuses Frustrating father behavior Relationship between mother and father Unacceptable behavior <u>Maternal Support:</u> Communication Relationships Maternal situation Help Peer pressure

Figure 3 First Iteration of Analysis

The themes were generated through the observation of the codes. The codes were used to gather information from the data. NVIVO, a qualitative data analysis software, was used to facilitate this analysis. The organization feature of NVIVO allowed the researcher to convert codes to nodes. NVIVO nodes were containers in NVIVO that allowed the data structure to be observed. This process allowed the researcher to articulate the lived experiences of the mothers that explain in detail their interaction with the father of their child. It is these details that provide the researcher with the needed insight to address the research questions with the expectation of gaining an understanding of the reasons mothers will or will not facilitate the father-child relationship with the father of their child.

The researcher recruited a total of ten study participants for data collection. However, one participant was disqualified because she was a widow and did not meet the “never married” criteria. This information was discovered in the early stages of the interview; thus her information was not included in the analysis. Subsequently, another participant was recruited to fill her slot. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym and a number for use throughout the writing of the study findings to ensure confidentiality. In the instances where mothers had multiple children, the father referred to in the interview was that of the oldest child between the ages of 5 and 11.

First Stage of Analysis

The three codes representing the theoretical framework were peer pressure, perceived excuses, and attitudes toward co-parenting. Peer pressure, because it captured when participants discussed if they were influenced by people in their circle or what was going on in society. Perceived excuses captured when participants felt they were given

excuses from the fathers of their children. Perceived excuses represents perceived behavioral control of the Theory of Planned Behavior because the mothers never knew when they were going to get an excuse from the father not to keep obligations or not to be responsible. Attitude toward co-parenting represents the attitude toward the behavior because the decision to facilitate and the decision to impede both are the behavior center in this research.

There were six reference codes for “peer pressure” that captured participants when they felt pressured to succumb to societal pressure to co-parent with the father. The second code, “perceived excuses,” captured responses that reflected if the mothers felt they had control of the situation. The perceived excuses code collected nineteen references. The final code, “attitudes toward co-parenting,” reflected a mother’s attitude to co-parenting with fathers when they were not in a relationship. There were forty references to this code.

For the maternal gatekeeping construct, which reflects the amount of control a mother has over the accessibility of a father to engage with his children, six codes were identified. These were: maternal identity, control, discouragement, encouragement, standards and responsibilities, differentiated family role. The codes created to recognize both maternal gatekeeping, as introduced by Allen and Hawkins (1999), and the expansion of the construct to better categorize the behaviors of discouragement, encouragement, and control (Puhlman & Paisley, 2013).

The “control” code was used to capture statements that reflected a mother’s control of the father and child situation and consisted of twenty-one references. The “discouragement” code captured when mothers exhibited behaviors that seemed to

undermine a father's involvement with his child and consisted of one reference. The "encouragement" code captures responses that equated to the positive promotion of the father-child relationship by the mother and consisted of thirty-six references. The "standards and responsibilities" code was used to capture responses that appeared to limit a father's involvement with his child and consisted of one reference.

All the responses that reflected how much a mother felt threatened in her role as a mother when a father did chores she felt were her role, were identified as the "maternal identity" code. This code had only one reference.

The final group of codes in the initial analysis of the data included the co-parenting categories as discussed by Sullivan (2008). The four categories that the researcher converted to codes included conflicted, cooperative, mixed, and parallel. These codes allowed the researcher to understand the type of co-parenting style to which each of the participants belonged. For the conflicted code eight references were captured. This is a problematic co-parenting style for parents because they often operate from a place of anger, and it is difficult for them to solve problems that arise between them (Sullivan, 2008). There were nineteen references to cooperative co-parenting. This style is the most effective style because parents can communicate effectively and solve problems together (Sullivan, 2008). For the mixed co-parenting style, there were ten references. For these parents, they exhibit periods of working together like cooperative parents and times of frustration associated with a conflicted co-parenting style (Sullivan, 2008). The parallel co-parenting style yielded only two references. This co-parenting style reflects parents who have little conflict and little involvement because they tend to avoid each other (Sullivan, 2008).

The co-parenting categories were selected based on the number of references a participant had and the circumstances. For instance, out of the ten participants only one (MO1), had a mixed co-parenting style. Their co-parenting category is largely attributed to the emphasis the mother places on working with the father and the amount of support she receives. Of all the participants, only one (MO7) had a cooperative co-parenting style; incidentally, this participant also had the most children and the most fathers. The researcher questions whether the number of fathers factors into how, why or when MO7 facilitates the father-child relationship. Two participants had parallel co-parenting styles participants: M03 and MO4. Each of these parents has a circumstance that is conducive to the distance between them and the father. MO3's child's father is incarcerated, and MO4's child's father lives in another state. The remaining participants -- MO2, MO5, MO6, MO8, MO9, and MO10 -- are in conflicted co-parenting relationships. The difference between a participant being placed in a conflicted co-parenting category instead of a parallel co-parenting category was so close that arguably the two participants in parallel categories could have been placed in a conflicted category. For instance, MO4 and MO8 were in two different categories but had very similar situations. MO4's child's father lives in a different state which aligns with Sullivan's criteria of parallel co-parenting meaning they seldom communicate or come in contact with each other. The case is the same with MO8, because the father resides in a different state. However, the determining factor differentiating the two participants is that the father of MO8's child denies the child. This situation may mean that when, or if MO4, communicates with the father they can have a conversation from the place of co-parents. However, if MO8 were to have a conversation with the father, it is likely to be a difficult conversation because as

of the time of this interview the father denied paternity, and MO8 explains how difficult the conversations have been in the past. A similar situation exists between the other parallel participant MO3 and conflicted participant MO5 where both fathers are incarcerated. However, like the previous example, MO3's father does not deny the child is his, whereas MO5's father does not claim paternity of the child.

One other distinction between the co-parenting styles of the participants is MO6. This participant's situation is unique because ideally, this would be a parallel arrangement, whereas, Sullivan (2008) explains that a parallel co-parenting style is limited in conflict but only due to limited interaction. In the case of MO6, they have limited interaction but do work together some. This could even make an argument for the mixed co-parenting style. However, because the participant had the child while the father was married to another woman, there always seems to be an undercurrent of tension. This tension prevents MO6 from having a healthy co-parenting relationship with her child's father. MO6 also was reluctant to reach out for assistance in her support circle because she felt ashamed about the situation.

These categories, styles, and concepts were used to establish the initial codes; however, after the first interview, the researcher realized that additional codes were necessary to capture some information shared by the mothers. The codes recognized after the first iteration of data analysis had to be condensed. Otherwise, the data would be too thin to conceptualize themes that make sense. After condensing the codes, four themes emerged that comprehensively addressed the research questions. These themes - unacceptable behavior, help themselves, expiration date of tolerance, and maternal support - will be discussed in a future section of this chapter.

As analysis of the data continued, the researcher recognized a shortage of codes to capture relevant information from the participants. As a result, the researcher created an additional code, "other," to capture what the initial researcher-generated codes did not. The description of the "other" codes is explained in the Codebook (see Figure 4). The full study codebook is explained in Figure 5.

Name	Description
Help	Assistance the mother received from sources other than the father excluding relatives
Girlfriend	The father's mate at the time
Fight	Intense exchange between the mother and father
Drugs	Drug usage or drug dealing
Argue	Verbal exchange between mother and father
Schools	The children's education
Money	The father's financial situation when it was about monetary resources
Incarceration	Incarceration in any correctional facility or Involvement with the justice system
Child support	Monetary support for the child
Paternity	When fathers denied paternity of the child
Maternal support	Assistance the mother received from sources in the family
Maternal situation	The financial, education, living and employment status of the mother
Harm to children	Safety and well-being of children in jeopardized
Frustrating father behavior	Instances where the father annoyed the mother
Finances	Situations financial strain when it was about the children
Father situation	The financial, education, living and employment status of the father
Communication	When the mother was able to communicate with her support system
What mother would like to interact with father	How mother would like to interact with the father as opposed to their actual interaction
Support	Support from the father
Violence	Physical violence initiated by the father
Relationship with child	Father's relationship with his child
Relationship between mother and father	Father's relationship with the mother
Ambivalent	When the mother was neutral about the situation where she did lean to working with the father or not working with the father, but remained in the middle.

Figure 4 Study Analysis Codebook for "Other" code

Name	Description
Conflicted	High levels of conflict and high levels of engagement between co-parents
Cooperative	Low levels of conflict and high levels of engagement between co-parents
Mixed	High levels of conflict and low levels of engagement between co-parents
Parallel	Low levels of engagement and low levels of conflict between co-parents
Parenting	Captured the four categories in the co-parenting matrix
Incarceration	When fathers were in jail, penitentiary, or correctional facility
Parenting responsibilities	Captured the protection of the children, the adult interaction with other adults
Harm to children	When there is harm to a child from either the mother or the father
Maternal identity	Maternal gatekeeping construct
Standards and responsibilities	Maternal gatekeeping construct
Discouragement	Expanded Theory of Planned Behavior construct
Control	Expanded Theory of Planned Behavior construct
Excuses	Represents Theory of Planned Behavior perceived behavioral control
Unacceptable behavior	Captured when the participant was no longer willing to work with the father.
Frustrating father behavior	When the mother was frustrated with the behavior of the father
Relationship between mother and father	The interaction between mother and father
Attitude	Represents the Theory of Planned Behavior attitude toward behavior
Relationship with child	The father's relationship with his child
Father situation	The father's situation such as residence, and employment
Finances	Any reference made during the interview to money
Argue	Disagreements between mother and father
Fight	Intense discussions between mother and father
Barriers	Impediment to father involvement with his child
Drugs	Any reference to drug involvement use or sale
Violence	Physical displays of violence from the father to the mother
Encouragement aside from parenting	A reference often by the mother to encourage the father
Encouragement	Encouragement from either mother or father
Support	Support the mother receives except from the father
Communication	When participants discuss different methods to connect with the father such as text
Peer pressure	Represents the Theory of Planned Behavior's social norms
Maternal situation	The mother's situation such as residence and employment
Help	Any reference to the word help

Figure 5 Study Analysis Codebook

Second Stage of Analysis

During the second iteration of data analysis, the researcher took advantage of some of the powerful tools in NVIVO to conduct some queries to learn whether additional associations or deductions could be made from the data. In doing so some linkage was made that connected the data, research questions, and additional codes created after the first iteration.

It was during this time the researcher was able to condense the overall number of codes to generate sub-codes. However, it was also during this time the researcher had to condense further the number of codes into manageable themes based on associations, additional codes created during the first iteration, and connections made during the queries.

Some of the connections were logical associations derived from conducting NVIVO keyword searches. Many of the words were commonly found in the literature, words such as “help” are referenced a total of 225 times – thirty-four times by the interviewer, “schools” are referenced a total of 133 times – twenty-six times by the interviewer, and “argue” is referenced a total of 97 times – eleven times by the interviewer, returned high references within the data. The association then was linked, if possible, to initial codes. One example is that the codes “argue” and the co-parenting style “conflicted.” The researcher ascertained that, while it is probable that a response coded “argue” could fall in any category, there had to be some discretion since Sullivan’s research is based on divorced parents (Sullivan, 2008), and these parents have never been married.

Part of the second iteration included the exploratory phase of the analysis. In this phase, various queries were performed using NVIVO to capture associations that were not noticed during the first iteration of analysis. The NVIVO word queries made it possible to visualize the experiences of the participants in a word cloud. For instance, one of the queries made by the researcher was a word cloud consisting of a 12+ character word search. The rationale of the 12-character word search by the researcher was to bypass words that would not have been acceptable to add to the word “stop” but also select a character length that would capture words that were very selective by the participants during the interview. This process is subjective and based on the many options within the qualitative analysis data software. The visual assisted the researcher and associated different terms and ideas that otherwise may not have been created. A quick observation of the coding word cloud reflected that the word “relationship,” which in this example was part of a query of words with twelve plus characters, intertwined with words such as “responsibility,” and “communication,” and became part of the researcher’s consideration for the code, “parenting responsibilities.” Another consideration came from the word “disrespectful” that was part of the generation of the code, “unacceptable behavior.” The researcher made the association of a disrespectful essence to unacceptable behavior in the relationship between the mother and father which could cause a mother to give up trying to facilitate the father-child relationship with the father.

Another association made by the researcher with the word “relationship” was with the word “communication,” and a quote from a participant generated a new code. For example, MO2 stated, “...no ‘cause at this point I don’t think he cares how I feel. ...umm

and I don't think he particularly, think he cares how she feels either. ...cause if he did they would have some kind of communication going." From this association, the researcher generated a code, "frustrating father behavior," to include interactions with the father that frustrated the mother.

Other queries such as matrices show associations within coding. For instance, the results of a query to determine correlations between the Theory of Planned Behavior and maternal gatekeeping and shows a high correlation between attitude towards the behavior and the maternal gatekeeping construct, involvement. As MO1 stated:

"um, well we both have, we have two kids together, so he is the father of both of them. Um I mean he's cool, um, I think that sometimes he can do better, what do I mean by doing better? I mean as far as being a role model for her. You know, um he still wants to stick to doing the same things he used to do. You know she likes to read, so I'm like ok, well read to her a little bit, you know it's only a few minutes. I'm trying to think what else."

What this quote from MO1 suggests is she encourages the father to read to his daughter, which shows that her positive attitude toward the behavior of facilitating the relationship between the two. Additionally, the high frequency of the word "encouragement" mentioned during the interviews implies that exhibiting encouraging behavior is part of the mindset of mothers interviewed in this study.

With a frequency of 235 times, "help" was a major component of this research, followed by "parenting responsibility" at 135 times and "finances" at 97 times as codes with the highest frequencies. At the opposite end of the spectrum, "subjective norms" at six times and the "maternal situation" at twelve times were low frequencies. The codes

with few sources such as “co-parenting” or “maternal situation” reflect that few participants referred to these codes. However, “unacceptable behavior,” “parenting responsibility” and “help” are codes with a ten for sources. What this means is that all participants at some point of the interview provided insight for these codes.

Third Stage of Analysis and Theme Development

Theme development is the bulk of the third iteration. Theme development is the generation of the above themes from the data. As explained in the previous stages of analysis, codes were created to capture the mothers’ data. Qualitative data analysis software classified these codes as codes. Those codes capture the data in the software and allow the researcher easier management of the data (Creswell, 2013). For this research, the themes captured in detail why some of the mothers are willing to facilitate the father-child relationship, and some do not. The four themes that emerged from the data are 1) unappreciated effort, 2) help themselves, 3) expiration date of tolerance, and 4). maternal support. Situational information specific to each mother and her co-parenting situation with the father of her child were captured from the data to add to the development of the themes. For example, 6 of the participants had children whose father had some involvement with the criminal justice system. In most of these cases, the fathers had done time in a correctional facility. Involvement of a child’s father in the criminal justice system, for which in most cases a mother’s amount of control is intensified, led to the theme, unappreciated effort. Another example, the keyword search of the word “help” returned 235 references and later was used for the development of the “maternal support” theme.

In some instances, codes overlapped, in those case the researcher determined that no codes will be added to multiple themes. The code incarceration could have been listed under the barriers code which is under the “Help Themselves” theme. However, ‘barriers’ is comprised of situations that might stop fathers from being involved, but under the context of “Help Themselves” weigh is place on fathers accepting responsibility for their life addresses research question three. Another challenging code placement was the co-parenting categories listed under parenting styles. One approach would have been to place categories under different themes or place all categories. However, the parenting styles code reflects the four co-parenting categories which Sullivan defines as the interaction between parents. The category is about parenting which is why the co-parenting categories are placed under the parenting code. Interaction requires effort and this is a rational placement for the co-parenting category codes. Parenting responsibilities consists of the code harm to children and the two maternal gatekeeping constructs of maternal identity and standards and responsibilities. Harm to children may be an obvious categorization. However, maternal identity, which is a mother’s perception of if she thinks the father thinks she is competent as a mother and standards and responsibilities which not wanting her role as mother interfered with. Both the maternal gatekeeping constructs require effort which the mother might feel like is not appreciated.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Introduction

This study employed a qualitative methodology consisting of 10 semi-structured interview sessions with Black mothers. The fathers of the children did not reside in the home with the mother. This chapter provides the analysis for this study, including the demographic profiles of the participants, the themes that developed, and the resulting connections to participants to the four co-parenting categories. This research study exploring the maternal facilitation of father-child relationships was guided by three research questions:

Research Question 1: What is a mother's perception of her role in the facilitation of the father-child relationship? Participants were asked questions about how they saw their role in the facilitation of the father-child relationship between their child and the father of their oldest child. If a participant had more than one child between the ages of five and eleven, the interview focused on the father of the oldest child. For instance, MO1 had two children ages five and six, so the six-year-old was the child whose father is referenced in the interview.

Research Question 2: What is a mother's perception of a father's intent and ability to follow through on his intentions? Rooted in the Theory of Planned Behavior, this question explored the mothers' understanding of factors that may affect a father's ability

to have a relationship with his child, despite his intent. Additionally, whether or not that understanding impacted the mothers' facilitation of father-child relationship was explored.

Research Question 3: What are the factors that contribute to a mother's ability to facilitate father-child relationships? Participants shared their insight to when and how they facilitated the relationship between their child and their child's father. It is this knowledge with the co-parenting status that provides more information about what influences a mother's decision to facilitate the father-child relationship between their child and child's father.

Demographic Profiles

The participants provided a vast array of vantage points to connect their lived experience in order to tell the story of single mothers and their interaction with the father of their child. All study participants were English-speaking, primary custodian of their children, never married, head of household, Black women with children ranging in ages between 5-11 years of age, and with whom the father is a Black man. The participants resided in Louisville, Kentucky, and participants ranged in age from 26 to 43 years. The education ranged from not completing high school to earning a Bachelor's degree.

Fifty percent of participants earned less than \$20,000 annually. Only four of the ten participants, MO3, MO6, MO8, and MO10, reported their income exceeded \$30,000. MO9 made more than \$20,000 but less than \$30,000. Half of the study participants live below the poverty level, as indicated by the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services_USDHHS (2017), but they all self-identified as low-income. All participants who earned \$30,000 or more either had an Associate's degree (MO3 and MO8) or a

Bachelor's degree (MO6), with one participant nearing the completion of her Bachelor's degree (MO10). Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of participants' income relative to the current federal poverty level (USDHHS, 2017).

Table 1 summarizes the demographics of each participant and is followed by a brief synopsis of each participant involved in the study and their co-parenting category. The co-parenting category is comprised of levels of involvement and levels of conflict and is classified as cooperative, conflicted, parallel, or mixed (Sullivan, 2008). All participants self-identified as low-income. However, as Table 1 indicates, not all participants lived under the federal poverty level based on family size.

Table 1 Demographics of Study Participants

	Age	#Children in home with mother	#Fathers	Participant Education Status	Employment Status	Salary	Living under the federal poverty level by family size
MO1	36	2	1	Some College	Not employed	<\$20k	Yes
MO2	34	3	2	High School	Employed	<\$20k	Yes
MO3	34	4	2	Associates	Employed	>\$30k	Yes
MO4	26	3	3	High School	Not employed	<\$20k	Yes
MO5	43	3	2	High School	Employed	<\$20k	Yes
MO6	42	3	2	Bachelors	Employed	>\$30k	No
MO7	42	8	7	Associates	Not employed	<\$20k	No
MO8	32	1	1	Associates	Employed	>\$30k	No
MO9	37	2	1	Associates	Employed	>\$20k	No
MO10	31	2	2	Some College	Employed	>\$30k	No

Eighty percent of the participants were 25 years of age or younger when their first child was born. Three of the mothers had at most a two-year age gap between the birth of their children. Five of the participants had children whose age range gap is between four and seven years of age, and two of the participants have a 19-year age gap between the oldest and youngest child. Seventy percent of the participants interviewed had a child whose father had some involvement with the justice system. Two fathers were incarcerated at the time of the interview.

Participants were asked questions about how they saw their role in the facilitation of the father-child relationship between their child and the father of their oldest child. If a participant had more than one child between the ages of five and eleven, the interview focused on the father of the oldest child. For instance, MO1 had two children ages five and six, so the six-year-old was the child whose father is referenced in the interview.

Themes

There were four themes that emerged from the data. They are illustrated in figures 6 through 9. Each theme and the related parent codes are presented here.

Theme 1: Unappreciated Effort

For research question one the theme that developed was Unappreciated Effort. In this study many of the participants wanted the fathers to be involved with their children. Several of the participants explained how they went beyond what they felt is expected of a custodial parent. One instance is MO9 who after experiencing verbal and physical abuse by the father continues to facilitate the father-child relationship between him and her daughter.

...if there is something going on in the school, that um, that needs to be handled, I don't make the decision alone. I do ask him for his input ...uh, when they have to go to the doctor or something is wrong I call him to say, hey what do you think about going to the doctor with me to figure out what is going on with [child's name]?

Another instance is MO8, who even with the father denying her child is he she continues to facilitate the relationship. She explains how after she found her child's fathers number through a relative on his said she encouraged her daughter to call him.

...I gave her the number the other day and I was like, here's your daddy's number, and whatever [sic]. I asked her probably like 3 days later, I asked her, you called your daddy? ...and she was like not yet, and I was like okay, and I just left it at that.

MO3 shares an experience of reaching out to the father, which is a challenge because she does not have his phone number.

I've tried to get him to set a date and this is like back in April, to set a date, to where we were supposed to meet on [inaudible] park, he, and her, ... was gonna have his other children, you know, just so she could get acquainted and play, know who they are, get to know him a little bit, stuff like that.

However, the participants felt no need to continue when they felt the effort was not reciprocated by the father by spending time with the child. The parent codes for the Unappreciated Effort theme is Incarceration, Parenting Responsibilities, and Parenting Styles.

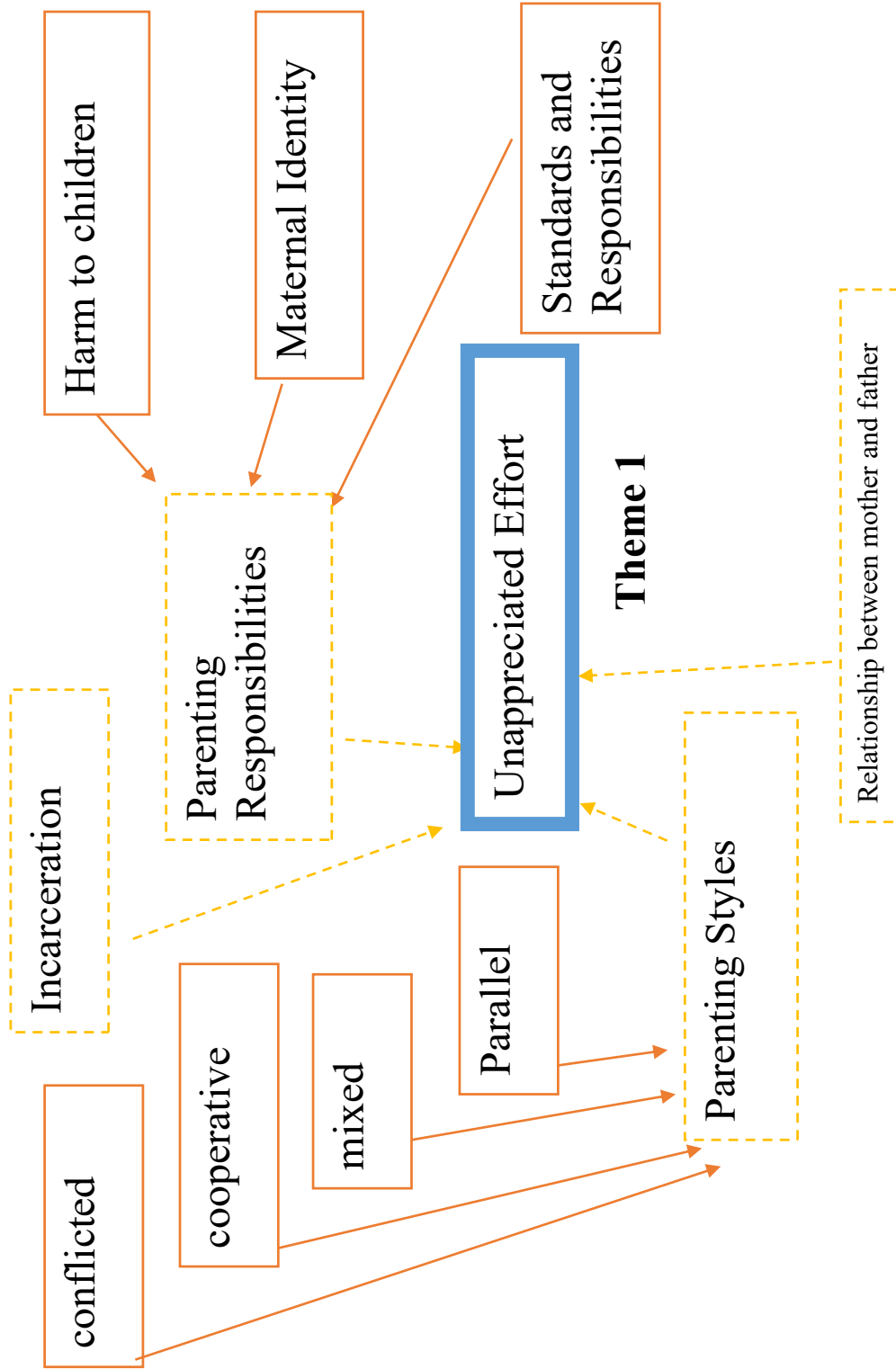


Figure 6 Theme 1 - Unappreciated Effort

Incarceration

Mothers in this study have experience when dealing with fathers who are incarcerated. However, the frustration with incarcerated fathers occurs after their release from incarceration when they do not live up to the mothers' parenting expectations. The incarceration sub-code captured responses that reflected when the father had some involvement with the justice system. Incarceration is captured under theme one because the mothers seemed to change the perception of their role when dealing with fathers incarcerated or involved with the criminal justice system. For instance, MO6 explained how she was not "dealing with that," which reflects she no longer sees her role as a facilitator between her child and her child's father.

and out of the four years I think it was like two and a half years that I was taking him and then that slowed up cause I did not have started working and ...And stuff ...and then he was being selfish minded too so I wasn't dealing with that

Participant MO6 facilitated the relationship between father and child by taking her child on visits to see his father who was incarcerated, but participant MO6 did not feel her child's father appreciated her effort. This seemed to be one of the reasons this participant felt it was no longer her role to facilitate the relationship between her child and his father.

In a different capacity MO10 explains when the father of her child was released she encouraged her son to see his dad but he did not want to. However, she still facilitated the relationship:

...the first six years of my son's life, he was incarcerated, so when he got out, that was an extremely difficult time for him. I knew his dad, but he didn't know his dad, so when I—I say, "Hey! You wanna go over there with him?" he did not

wanna go and it show—his dad seen him not wanting to go, I was—they had—when he first got out, they had like a party for him and he took him and they were all happy to see him, like, “Come on (child’s name), let’s go over to see your dad.” He did not wanna go, he was so uncomfortable. I’m trying to look back, he has an anxiety. I think anxiety is a part of ADHD, but he has anxiety really bad, I mean if you could see it, he did not wanna go. I would try to drag his arm with his feet stuck to the floor and he did not wanna go.

Participant MO7 even went as far as having a discussion with the father of her child about giving him money back or helping him to pay the child support if he got involved with their child.

...I told him well If you come and get [child’s name] and spend time with him, and I know you having a hard time and all, I probably help you pay some of that back, but I'm not going to do it if you're going to be nasty or mean you know, and all that, so he would never do it, he would never come and spend time with [child’s name] come and get him, he wouldn't do the things that the father should do, but he just wanted, he wanted the money back.

Parenting Responsibilities

Participants in this study take their parenting responsibility seriously. When the participants feel that fathers do not appreciate their efforts in raising their child, which they feel the father should appreciate, it causes frustrations.

MO10 explains that the parenting responsibilities at times can take their toll on her and that she feels she has to carry the full burden that should be carried by both parents to make things work.

It bothers me, it does, because a lot of times what I do is like my daughter's father, I'll use the money he gives me to pay daycare for both of my kids, so I shouldn't have to do that. He should be able to help me pay daycare for his kid, he should help me be able to pay the daycare for his kid.

Parenting Styles

During the research one of the important contributing aspects determining if a mother was going to facilitate the father-child relationship with the father was understanding the type of parenting style exhibited. The parenting styles code was listed under the "Unappreciated Effort" theme with the rationale that co-parenting requires effort. The co-parenting categories codes could have been placed under other themes but the effort require to co-parent made the "Unappreciated Effort" theme the best place. For instance, MO4 explains a situation in which she put forth an effort to communicate with the father with no success.

...um, possibly because we're not in the same household I don't know what he does and he doesn't try to plan events with me so I think he leaves it up to me as being the primary caregiver and if there's anything going on with her then I'll let him know. For instance, there was a father daughter dance at her school I told him well in advance he told me he will go so you know that you know if there's anything going on with her and I tell him then and I feel like it's important and he thinks that it's important he'll be there.

This illustrates one of the many ways a mother tries to co-parent with father to facilitate the relationship. The outcome of the effort leads to a mother feeling appreciated.

MO9, on the other hand, doesn't feel the need to suggest to the father ways he can see his child. He should take the initiative to see his child.

No. No, because like I said, you'll be able to make it up here for court, when you have to come to court and during that time, you could be like, well, since I'm already here. You know, can I stop by the school? Can I go to, you know, the daycare? It doesn't matter like I wouldn't have a problem if she was in school, going to...you have her in school, so you could see her. Or going to pick her from daycare or anything, going to the park. You don't have to—big money spent, it's just the time, it's what makes the situation. I mean that's just the real...

The unappreciated effort theme illustrates how mothers try to co-parent with the father by keeping fathers involved, consistently put forth efforts to communicate, and as some mothers of this study explained, take the children to see their father while he is incarcerated. However, the more mothers put forth an effort to co-parent with the father, the more they become frustrated when they feel the father does not appreciate them doing so. MO3 talked about not taking the father to court for child support, but that did not increase the time he spent with his child or the financial contribution.

No child support, no um- just out of pocket, you know, us doing our own thing outside of the system. I've checked different things, you know, um with us doing [inaudible] to where he can have her thing on receipt. ...or if he asks for something he keeps the receipt. ...or, um, if he takes her somewhere, keep the receipt, you know, just so you can have it on the open, you know. If he gets to the

whole child support thing that was before it got there, way back [inaudible] 2011. ...so let's say this was 2011. That's the way I did it then, and then it was like, he just didn't want to, you know, this is me figuring out who he was as a parent, I didn't understand it but for him, this is routine. So, I would just, you know, say if he's been shopping for her, I could count on my hands- the shame, it's embarrassing to kinda say, but I could count on one of my hands how many times he's done something for her financially.

When mothers feel unappreciated, this could lead to a reluctance to facilitate the father-child relationship.

Relationship between Mother and Father

These responses seemed to indicate that mothers believe that relationships play a role in their perception of their role to facilitate the father-child relationship. The relationship between the mother and father is one in which the more a father and mother had the ability to have a cordial relationship, the more that the mother felt that her role was to facilitate. This also had the inverse effect as the less cordial the relationship between the mother and father the less likely the mother felt the need to facilitate the father-child relationship. As reflected in a statement from MO2 expressing mommy time which emphasizes she does not feel the father is pulling his weight which causes her not to want to facilitate with him.

I felt like with me putting so much energy in her relationship with her father, instead of what we are in our relationship with each other cause... I just feel like it takes away from me. The fact that, I'm trying so hard to, you know, to push and push and push and push and get him to kinda be proactive, when it takes from me. You know,

it makes me upset and I gotta gather myself or have my mommy time, that takes from her. So I just now, in these recent months, these days I just leave him alone.

Interviewing the participants revealed many of them were dealing with fathers experiencing challenging situations that could make co-parenting difficult. Some of the fathers were in trouble with the law, and many of them did not have steady employment. The mothers in the study seemed to understand how challenging life was for some of the fathers. However, there appeared to be a willingness on the behalf of the mothers to work with fathers that were trying to improve their situations.

Theme 2: Help Themselves

Mothers shared experiences that stressed them because the fathers would not do all they could do to better their situation. This influenced the thoughts mothers had about the fathers. The codes of theme two are relationship with child, finances, father-situation, and attitudes.

Guiding Question 2: What is a mother's perception of a father's intent and ability to follow through on his intentions?

Theme 2

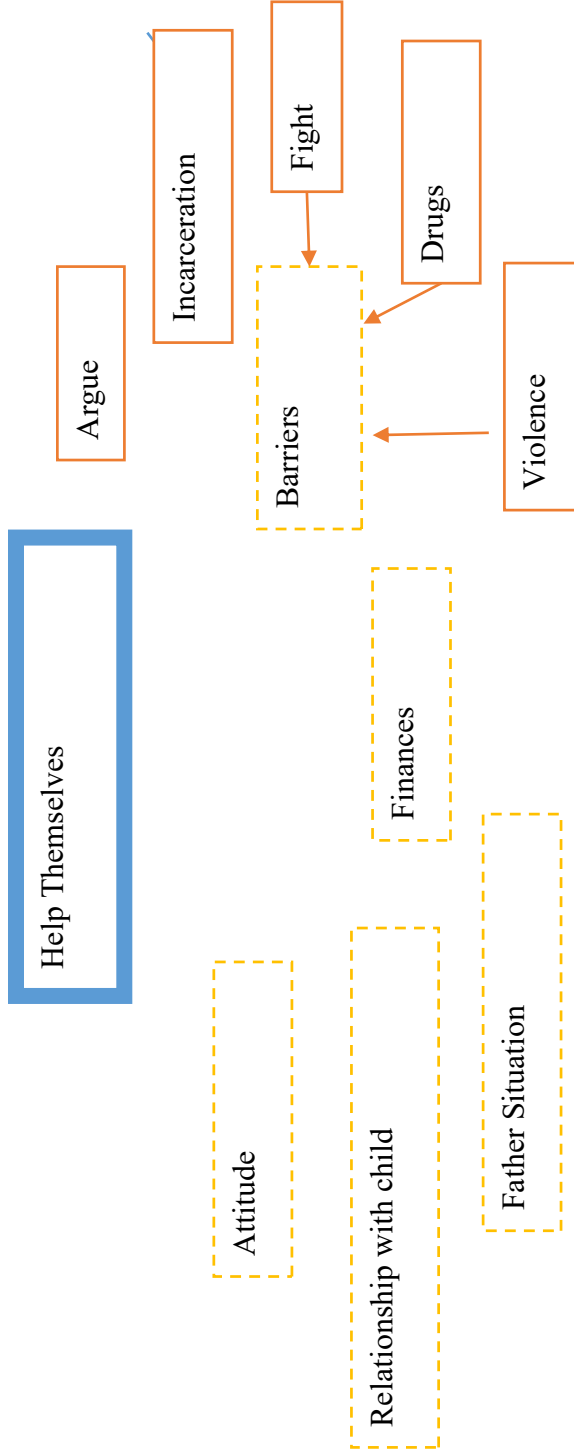


Figure 7 Theme 2 - Help Themselves

Relationship with Child

Many of the fathers of this study had complicated relationships with the child. In this example, MO6 explains the relationship between her child and her child's father.

I think it has, I also think that is the reason why he gives [child's name] as much attention as he does because he probably feels sorry for himself for the way that this situation came about so I think that he feels like that he has to pick up 100% because maybe his wife doesn't accept her or someone in his family doesn't accept her where as he feels like it doesn't matter what anyone else thinks that's my daughter and I'm still going to do what I need to do for my daughter but deep down I think that he possibly may feel some sort of way because of the situation and how it all happened so.

MO6's perception of the father is that he wants to be involved regardless of the situation.

Participant MO1 discussed how she feels the relationship between her child and her father could be better, especially in regards to how he disciplines her. The following example is when the participant asked the father of her child to attend a school function in hopes he would see how children behave and adjust his attitude when he's with his children.

Umm sometimes I think he might be too quick to get mad at them, you know. And I'm like, they just kids, they all act like that, you know. Umm which I learned that myself, when I went to sit in her class one day. And I was like oh wow, it's 20 of y'all. 20 six-year-olds, so this is different. So now I see that just with 2 it's not so bad, you know. But he was invited to come today, but he didn't

come, and we knew ahead of time so, I was trying to get him to come here to class too, but he didn't come.

Finances

MO10 shared an experience with the father of her child about paying for a school event when the father did not have the money and the problem that presented for her

There's times when we may need-- I need to pay for something to school and I didn't have it. So if I asked him and tell him that he needs it and he just doesn't have it, I can't make him have it. So he just might not able to go on that field trip or he might not be able to have does—those shoes at that moment though, like I said, life goes on.

MO9 explains that when the child's father does not have the financial resources to help with the needs of the children or keep his promise about helping financially, he starts an argument to deflect. MO9 explains what a deflection from the father looks like: "Well, yes maybe if he didn't have the money...but he can't just say I don't have the money so for him he stages a fallout... so he stages an argument to say so f**k it you get it."

Father-Situation

Many of the mothers felt the fathers of their children were in dysfunctional situations that negatively influenced their behavior. MO9 shared an example that highlighted one such situation. "He did not have a good example, he didn't have, his father died when he was five, his mother was a crack head so he (SG: crackhead?), yeah she smokes crack." Participant MO3 shared during the interview that the father does not

know she knows when he tells their daughter he is moving out of town that he is actually doing time in jail.

One of his oldest daughter and her mom, they have a court date and he doesn't know about this but, every time he says it's court date he says he's moving out of town. The moving out of town means he's going to be incarcerated. So, he says he's going to move out of town but really he's- while still here, but he's incarcerated.

Attitudes

A particular code that emerged through the study are mothers that held the attitude the fathers could do more even for themselves than they were doing. Here is a quote from MO1 explaining this.

um, well, he details cars, um he always talks about doing his mobile unit, trying to do that, so, if that's going to be extra money for you, go ahead and do it, so figure out a way

you can do it, um, instead of always sitting back and always saying, I wish I would have done this, I couldn't do this because of maybe something you did, you know"

In this excerpt the participant felt the father could do more, in this case what he told her he would do which is start a mobile detailing unit for detailing cars.

Theme 3: Expiration Date of Tolerance

This category explored a mother's patience when interacting with the father.

When the situation became too intense, mothers often resigned from the situation. In

other words, when a mother no longer could tolerate the behavior of the father they no longer attempted to facilitate the father-children relationship with the father. Once a mother resigned from the situation it is as if the time and effort they put into making it work expired. In some cases, mothers went as far as to articulate in words that a father had a specific amount of time before they would no longer put forth an effort to facilitate the father-child relationship.

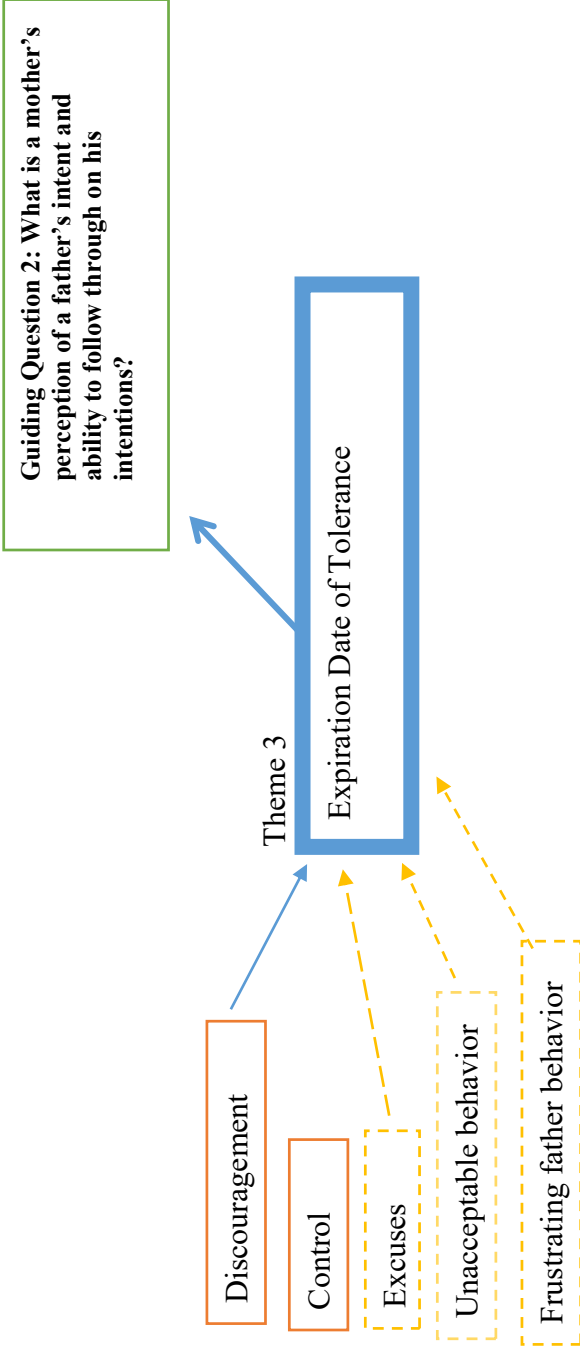


Figure 8 Theme 3 – Expiration Date of Tolerance

Perceived Excuses

To some of the participants in this study there seemed to be a frustration when situations appeared to out of their control, i.e., situations when the father was supposed to do something with the child or for the child and did not follow through. It was during these times that some of the mothers felt as if the fathers were not holding up their end of the parenting. They also felt there was nothing they could do when the father offered a reason for the misstep and many of the mothers believed it was just an excuse. Participants felt at times that the fathers used excuses for not being involved with their children. The following is a response for a participant about a father's excuse, but it also shows how the mother feels she has no control of the situation.

...this is the angry mom coming out because, now I have to tell my daughter, you know, she's here [inaudible], she got her hopes up, and know I have to deal with her heartbreak. So, I took it upon myself to pop up on his home and I'm like, you know, what happened to you yesterday? You know, he's got a house full of people, you know they're partying and everything and I'm like, what happened to you yesterday? I took it upon myself to go to him and talk to him. Every time is always "I got too much-", he got too much going on. That's his excuse for years.

This quote from MO3 reinforces a reoccurring sentiment by most mothers that they do not have control over the behavior of a father when he is not going to be involved. In this instance the father's rationale for not being involved as much as the mother would like him to be is considered an excuse, which the mom recognizes is out of her control. Similar sentiments echoed from MO4 follows.

Yeah probably about twice I have...and when ... (inaudible) I just stopped I didn't pressure him... I put it like this I am not going to pressure somebody to be in their child's life if they don't want to. I am just gone do what I got to do for her...for when she grows up and is older and she is able to understand she gone know who was there and who wasn't... she gone always know her mamma was there... with or without him I am gone still do what I have to do

Unacceptable Behavior

Many participants of this study seemed to want to work with the father to facilitate the father-child relationship. However, in certain situations the father's behavior went too far in the negative direction and made it difficult for mothers to facilitate. These moments are categorized as "unacceptable behavior." As explained by some of the participants the experiences that some of the mothers categorized as unacceptable in most cases were egregious. For instance, MO9 shared a situation where the father of her child was physically violent with her and resulted in the mother visiting the emergency room for treatment of injuries sustained during the altercation. This led MO9 to seek and obtain an emergency protective order against the father of her child.

....so we got into an altercation, but uh we got into ...I scratched my cornea...we got into an altercation...so I did get the police involved and we had an EPO and for months he wanted to see the kids and I couldn't because they were on the EPO as well because my daughter was with me when he hit me

MO9 also shared an instance that sheds context as to why she is apprehensive about the safety of her children when they stay with their father.

Yes, I talked to him about it all the time because at one point he had a heart attack. I was out of town and he had my children and he had a heart attack because he had been tooting powder (MO9).

This behavior seems to show the father's behavior can at times put the children's safety at risk. This is significant because it seems to show that mothers put their child's safety first and foremost.

This statement by MO1 explained why she was apprehensive about leaving the children with their father. The just of it is the father tends to leave his children with other people or alone when they are in his care.

Just little stuff like that, it makes me nervous, cause then I'm like you know. And you're not there, and you leave to go smoke. Or you leave to go you know hang out with your cousin or whatever; your momma might not even be paying attention to that kinda stuff. So from there, you know, that's just when they were little though, like 2 or 3 years old, I'd be like no, I'll just—I'll just—they'll just stay with me for the day. You know, cause you gonna leave anyway.

Frustrating Father Behavior

Some things that the father does do not sit well with the mother as expressed through a quote by MO5, and can lead to dissension between the mother and father.

It bothers me But it don't bother me because I know that he's [child's name] deep down inside so What I know is that he's really missing out on a good kid and uh, I know that um, You know to a certain extent I know he's just being, it, it, I'm just going to be honest, it doesn't bother me it don't I mean but I look at [child's name]

and It just makes me kind of mad because he's not dealing with [child's name] you know I'm kind of numb to that I'm being honest you know what I'm saying because I know, um, ah, I know that deep down inside he knows that [child's name] is his son and I know the reasons why he's saying it but [child's name] does uh...

Theme 4: Maternal Support

This category is comprised of parent codes societal pressure, communication, maternal situation, and help. This theme provides insight into factors that contribute to a mother's ability to facilitate the father-child relationship.

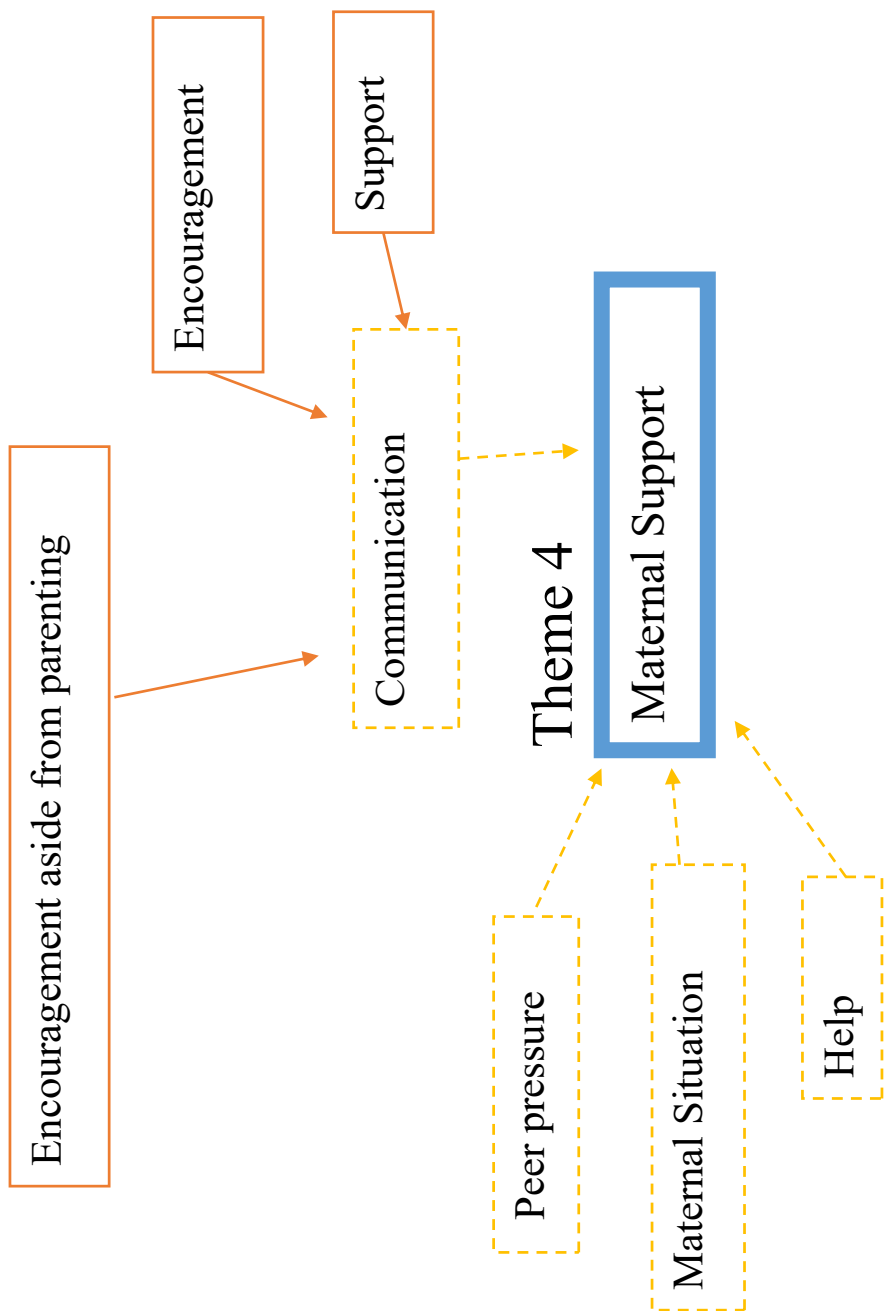


Figure 9 Theme 4 – Maternal Support

Societal Pressure

We often think of peer pressure from the perspective of children and young people but peer pressure can also influence adults. Sometimes peer pressure goes by a different name, and adults deal with societal pressure. The only differentiation between the two is that societal pressure is broader, consisting of pressures at work, in the community, and in our social lives. For this discussion, it is the influence of a mother to subscribe to what society says mothers should be doing as it relates to co-parenting with the father. In the following excerpt MO10 gives an example of how social pressure could possibly be influential if a mother works with the father.

when I say a village, I mean like, I still have my grandmother, she'll still help me up, my mom, I still have cousins that come, you know, when it gets to a point that I'm overwhelmed, I reach out to the because they understand me, so if I say "I can't take this anymore", they won't take it out of context, they'll go "oh my god, she's going to do something crazy", so, oh well, I see that you need help, they'll know that there are certain cue words that I use, they just need to worry.

This excerpt explains the mother may have family members that support her.

Communication

MO2 explains a situation illustrating that she does not have good communication with the father.

Yeah..if he would just communicate with me...well he really doesn't have to talk to memy daughter is 11 years old and she has a cell phone he can call her ..you know in the event he doesn't want to talk to me you know he doesn't have

communication with me...that's perfectly fine...you know she has a phone so he can contact her but if he gone be a mature adult you know co-parenting with a child that is the responsible thing to do is to communicate with the person you had the child with...you know...but I don't now how long it is going to take them to realize that but you know.

MO3 is a quote that emphasizes both the limited communication and that she felt disheartened that he was not concerned about the well-being of her, or at least their child.

Interviewee: I know, it's crazy. It's crazy but he called me and you know, and it wasn't- I didn't hear concern from his voice. He was more upset with the fact that he didn't know about it. You know, he didn't know of, he wasn't concerned about, you know, "is she ok?" you know, "does she have to go to therapy?". Or did it, you know, "did it scare her or she's scared of riding a car ever again?". You know, he didn't ask me none of those questions, the only question he said was "why didn't you tell me?"

MO4 shares a common thread with many of the mothers which is, they choose not to communicate with the father or they do not know how to get in contact with the father "Umm I don't know ...I don't communicate with him. I heard he's living in Atlanta."

Maternal Situation

This study took into account the situation of fathers for the purpose of assessing if it had any influence in the interaction with the mother. The same was considered for the mothers. Here one of the mothers talks about a situation that influences the interaction

between her and the father. MO6 talks about how she feels embarrassed about her situation and how it actually limits the support she receives from people around her.

one, there is still a level of embarrassment because he still married regardless of whatever the situation is the fact that you're still married and it's just like a stigma that I don't want to be known as or I don't want everybody to know.

Help

Interestingly many of the mothers had people in their support circle such as family and friends whom they could lean on in times of need. MO4 talks about one such person.

No, but there is ahhh, there is one dude, he's (inaudible), ummm... [child's name] (inaudible) ...he was always around me when I was pregnant being in the role of [child's name] father ...so if there was like an event, or if anything happen to [child's name], or something like that, he would be the person I would call. I would not call her biological father I would call him cause he has done more for her. He's actually stepped up with him being daddy, that who she knows as being her daddy, um, well I am not gone say she knows him as her daddy, that just like the person I call her daddy cause he stepped up. She knows her biological father, but she more into the other person that's been there for her than she would be her father so, ..so that is the person I communicate birthdays, cheerleading events, school. just anything having to do with her. I would communicate with him

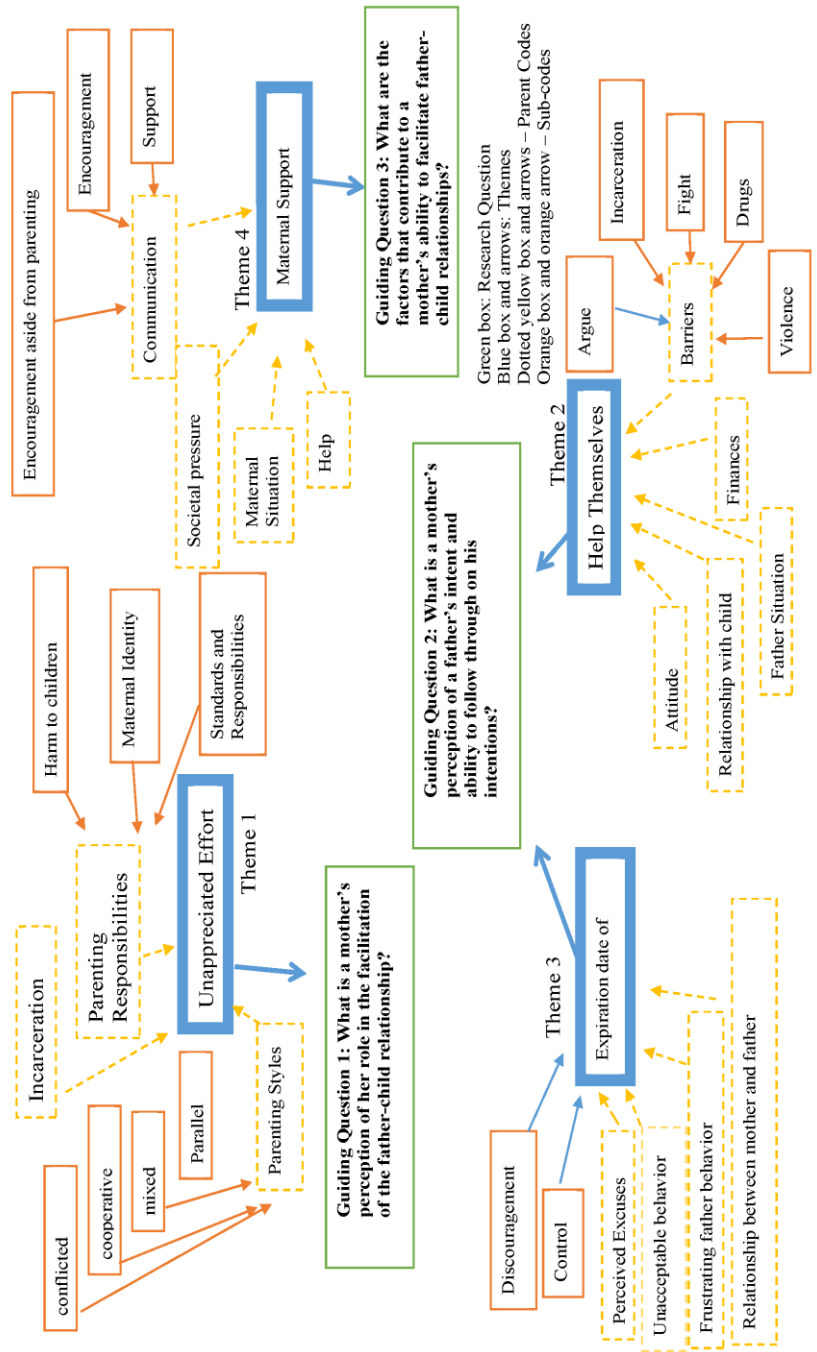


Figure 10 Guiding Research Questions and Themes

Participant Profiles

The ten participants of this study were categorized into the co-parenting matrix based on the number of references they have toward a style and their relative circumstances. Co-Parenting category 1 – The Parallel Co-Parenting Category - is represented by two participants (M02, M08). M02 will be built into a comprehensive participant profile while MO8 will be briefly described. Co-Parenting Category 2 – The Cooperative Co-Parenting Category - is represented by two participants (M01, M07). M01 will be built into a comprehensive profile while MO7 will be briefly described. Co-Parenting Category 3 – The Conflicted Co-Parenting Category - is represented by five participants (M03, M04, M05, M09, and M10). M09 will be built into a comprehensive profile while the others will be briefly described. Co-Parenting Category 4 – The Mixed Co-Parenting Category - is represented by one participant. MO6 is built into a comprehensive profile at the end. The profiles of the participants provide more detail about each participant's situation and offer insight into their experiences and points of view.

Parallel Co-Parenting Category

The parallel category in the co-parenting matrix explains a relationship where conflict exists between the parents but due to their sparse involvement with each other. Participants M02 and MO8 both have limited amount of conflict, however, the limited amount of involvement in each case is due to circumstances. M02's child's father is incarcerated and MO8's child's father resides in another state. M02 was selected for the

parallel co-parenting group because of the amount of effort M02 put into facilitation between her child and her child's father.

Participant MO2 is a 34-year-old mother of two children, ages 11 and 13, by two fathers. She had a cordial relationship with the father of the 13-year-old when he was incarcerated because she would take the child to the prison to visit him. When he was released, he was involved with his child, but he was arrested again and incarcerated for two years. Upon release, the second time, the father's communication with his child and the mother deteriorated. As of this interview, the father has since returned to prison for a third time. MO2 does not communicate with the father, and after several failed attempts to reach out to him on social media and to the father's relatives, she has decided to focus on herself and her family. "I was the number one cheerleader for the longest time and I think somewhere between him not caring and her [the child] stop asking made me like, made me chill out on it, ...so I am not asking anymore." MO2 is frustrated with the father, but she is open to him having a relationship with his child. She and the father are in a parallel co-parenting category. She is clear on wanting to co-parent with the father of her child. However, MO2 does not feel her desires are reciprocated with the father.

What is a mother's perception of her role in the facilitation of the father-child relationship?

MO2's perception of her role in the facilitation of the father-child relationship is that she should work with the father to connect him with his child. She demonstrated this by taking the child to visit her father in prison. If the father would now put forth an effort, the co-parenting category could change for them.

However, MO2 also felt the father did not appreciate the effort she put into coordinating opportunities for him to see his child. One example of her effort to co-parent with the father is to educate him about father his child but she felt it was pointless. As such, she stopped trying to facilitate in that way. She shared how she talked to the father about being responsible as a father when he was freed from incarceration after the first time.

I think he doesn't want to hear the reality ...he doesn't want to hear anything I'm gonna have to say; of course you can't be absent for 12 years ...11 years....okay maybe not 11 maybe 10 ...the one year he got out of prison he was okay but maybe being absent for 2 years like he spent the majority of her life in prison and then when you get out it's like you just... your acknowledgement... you not living for you anymore ...it's not about you ...you have a child.

What is a mother's perception of a father's intent and ability to follow through on his intentions to be involved with his child?

The Theory of Planned Behavior states that attitude toward behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control all shape an individual's behavioral intentions and behaviors. MO2 no longer feels she has control of the situation to facilitate the father-child relationship because the father's behaviors do not support or bolster her efforts. It is this nonexistent control of the situation with the father that explains why the mother no longer works with the father.

MO2 does not perceive the father has intentions of being involved with his child, although she does feel he has some control over his potential to being involved. MO2

after several failed attempts to connect with the father when he was free reached her expiration date of tolerance. She has exhausted her efforts to facilitate the relationship between her child and child's father and is at the point where if the child sees her father it will be the father making the effort. An instance of the father making the effort is him having his family members pick his child up for a visitation to see him. To explain how she feels she has tried all she can to facilitate the father-child relationship, she shares how she reaches out to her child's father's family since he is incarcerated.

I invite his family to everything...when it's birthdays...when it's you know graduation....5th grade graduation just passed. I invited them to graduation...I invite them to birthdays to holidays you now just to visit and spend time with her you know whatever, but do they accept is the question.

MO2 feels she reaches out to the family but she gets nothing back to let her know someone on the father's side cares about his daughter.

What are the factors that contribute to a mother's ability to facilitate father-child relationships?

In this case the mother has provided opportunities for the father to be involved. MO2 facilitated the relationship between the father and child by taking the child to visit her father while he is incarcerated and reaching out to the father his family members. Her belief that "...emotionally you know mentally and physically you know she needs her father you know that is with any child" seems to motivate MO2 when she reached out to the father and his family in the past. Another factor contributing to the mother's ability to facilitate the father-child relationship is her support circle. She has family members that

help her with her children. MO2's mother has the children often and keeps them when she has to work.

While mother MO2 expressed frustration with the father she did at times display a glimmer of hope about the future where she envisions the father free and involved as she ...I know that when he was around us he had a job you know he ...he didn't ...I don't know ...like I said...the street stuff ...he couldn't do any of that you know when he was around my child ...around us... when we do family things ...he had a job... he worked... then once he ...he had a clear mind...

However, during the interview the mother exhibited a dichotomous perception of belief that the father could be a responsible father but also a reluctance to believe he would change. The dichotomous feelings of the mother where she is exhausted with trying to facilitate the father-child relationship with her child's father and the small glimmer of hope she has that he could become a responsible father is reflected when she explains how the father of her child managed having a significant other and being a father.

...and once he got the girlfriend it was like he lost focus...and he...the girlfriend didn't have kids...so he like just took the focus and the fatherhood that he had...and he focused it on the boyfriend that he was...instead of trying to combine the both so then when he finally did get back on good track and combine them both and he had ...he could do the girlfriend and he could spend time with his child and she could go over the house and then it just came to the point where he was just leaving her over the girlfriend going out and doing whatever he's doing and she is calling me like mom come and pick me up ...I haven't seen my daddy since Friday and its Sunday.

In this example the mother explains that when her child went to visit to her father at his girlfriend's house the father would not spend time with her. As a result of the father not being present the child would call the mom and ask her to get her. This dichotomy of feelings the mother is experiencing and the amount of effort the mother put into working with the father is why the researcher choose this participant as the parallel selection.

The other participant in this category is MO8. MO8 is 32 years of age and has two children, but one child died at birth. The living child is eight years of age. The mother has a strained relationship with the father because she feels he treats her differently than the mothers of his other children. She has a health condition that gave her a five percent chance to have a child, so to her, the birth of her child is a blessing. The father resides in a different state and does not claim the child as a blessing. She and the father are in a parallel co-parenting category.

Table 2 Situational Summary for MO8

Situational Summary for MO8

Mother had a five percent change of having children, so she felt the child was a blessing, and her child's name translated means "blessing from God."

The father feels the birth of the child is a curse and does not claim her.

The father saw his daughter only one time, and that came about as a result of the mother reaching out to the father's sisters who were instrumental in the father and daughter visitation.

The father has two other children both boys.

Father has been incarcerated

The father's living arrangement consists of having a roommate that he is intimate with.

Cooperative Co-Parenting Category

Cooperative co-parenting is low level of involvement between the parents and low level of conflict, and of the 10 participants, MO1 and MO7 are placed in the cooperative category. MO1 has two children with one due at the time of the interview and MO7 has eight children. Both of these participants fall under this category but MO1's perspective of her relationship with the father of her child had more complexities than MO7. MO1's situation consisted of her child's father having involvement with the justice system, the father being homeless, and the awkward relationship that MO1 expressed as not involved, but during the interview the mother shared wanting to do couple-like activities with the father. Additionally, participant MO1 exerted more effort to facilitate the father-child relationship with the father.

The co-parenting category is largely attributed to the emphasis the mother places on working with the father and the amount of support she receives. In the case of MO1, she consistently facilitated the relationship of father and child with the father. The researcher asserts that the father's instability led to tension between him and the participant which led to arguing.

MO1 has two children, and at the time of the interview, she was six months pregnant with her third child. All of her children are by the same father. She is 36, and the father of her children is 43. Her oldest child is six years old, with the youngest being five. She and the father are not in a dating relationship but appear to interact as if they are. She is in college and part of a program where free housing is provided to eligible single mothers who attend college.

What is a mother's perception of her role in the facilitation of the father-child relationship?

Participant MO1 explained the many ways she facilitated the relationship between her child and her child's father. She believes it is important for her children to have a relationship with the father. All of the children she has birthed are fathered by the same man so she feels it is important they have a relationship. MO1 allows the father to visit the children whenever he chooses. The only time it seems the mother frowns on the father stopping by her apartment is when he stops by unannounced and intoxicated. Even then she allows him in because she does not want to risk having the police called on her for disturbing the peace. Too many occasions of the police being called to her apartment is against the policy of the program and she could be ejected from the program.

MO1's perception of her role in the situation as it relates to the Unappreciated Effort theme is reflected in her allowing the child's father to stop by whenever he chooses. The father was into drugs and often wanted to smoke his marijuana in the house against her wishes. The mom shared during the interview

He'll have his drugs too, like if he came over he'd want to do that and I'm like well, you know, you know, I really don't want that in the house. I've even got to the point I just tell him don't come in.

What is a mother's perception of a father's intent and ability to follow through on his intentions to be involved with his child?

Participant MO1 believes the father allows the adversity he faces to determine his outcome. He has a criminal record and often runs against hardship when searching for employment. She does not seem to have an expiration date of tolerance, but she does

appear to have a problem with the father not helping himself. She believes if he were to focus on his dream to start a car detailing company and stop blaming others for his situation he could be a better father. She thinks if he were to navigate his hardships better, it would allow him to be a better father.

This participant's intent to facilitate the father-child relationship is apparent in responses to the questions in the interview. When associating the theoretical framework to this participant it seems she would be able to follow through with her intent with the exception of perceived behavior control. It is obvious she does not have control to facilitate but it is questionable if she perceives she does. An incident that highlights this control is when she needed to take her grandfather to the hospital and needed someone to watch the children. The first person she called is her child's father:

...my grandfather is in the hospital so he's on the next pickup list, so before I go to the emergency pickup list, who's my sister, my auntie, I hit first, I'm like, I need you to pick him up from school. So, but I mean if he's working, and can't do it, then I go the emergency list. But I try to make him do it first, because then he won't do it, he'll try to sit out. So I'm like, no, I need you to pick them

In this situation the mother was able to persuade the child's father to assist her with their children in that moment.

It is the researcher's assertion she does not subscribe to societal peer pressure because she continues to support the father when he does not do what she feels he should as a father. This goes opposite of what society says about black fathers and how much effort a mother should put into working with them (Hattery, 2012). She continues to be optimistic.

...but, I mean it is, because we do work together sometimes. When I wish that he would do more, because more for them, you know? As far as, even just taking them somewhere umm, you know, I don't necessarily have to go.

It is her attitude about the behavior of facilitating the father-child relationship that is important for this participant. She believes the father should be in the life of her children. It is this belief that allows her to facilitate the father-child relationship. However, this belief, is also in tandem with her behavior that suggests she subconsciously sees herself in a committed relationship with the father.

What are the factors that contribute to a mother's ability to facilitate father-child relationships?

The factors that contribute to MO1's ability to facilitate the father child relationship are her ability to see beyond the father's faults, her approach to interacting with the father is similar to a woman in a committed relationship, and the support she receives from her network.

Participant MO1 has a support network of aunts, her sister, and her mother. In addition, to the support she has with her relatives, she is a participant in a social service program that provides housing to college students. The program is unique in that it takes mothers of children in low income communities and provides them housing, stipends, and assistance with college. The only stipulations to being in the program is to attend college and not have a live in boyfriend.

MO7 is 42 years of age and has the most children of all the participants. She has a total of eight children by seven fathers. She says she has a cordial relationship with all the fathers. The oldest child is 19 with the youngest child 22 months. The child whose father

is the focus of the interview is 9. The father of the child discussed in her interview is involved with the child. The mother feels like he can do more, but says his help is appreciated. She and the father are in a cooperative co-parenting category.

Table 3 Situational Summary for MO7

Situational Summary for MO7

She has a strained relationship with the father because she feels like he treats her differently than the mothers of his other children. The relationship is also strained because she feels he is a good father as it relates to being a provider. However, she feels like he has much room for growth as it relates the mental and emotional support of his children.

The father works all the time.

The father has two other children, sons, in their twenties.

Conflicted Co-Parenting Category

The conflicted co-parenting category is high levels of involvement and high levels of conflict between the parents. An aspect of this category is parents unable to co-parent without arguing and disagreement. Participants MO3, MO4, MO5, MO6, and MO10 all make up the conflicted co-parenting category in this study. Participant MO6 however, had the most complicated situation, when her child was born the father was married to another woman and throughout the interview MO6 expressed how she felt the situation cause her problems at times.

What is a mother's perception of her role in the facilitation of the father-child relationship?

MO6 sees her role as a facilitator of the father-child relationship. In the interview it seems she does what she can to ensure the father has a relationship with his children.

However, the drama between her and the father of having a child with a married man is problematic for her. The weight of having a child with a married man weighed on MO6 from the beginning of the birth of the child. She explained the dilemma she faced about deciding what to do when she was pregnant:

I contemplated giving my daughter up but the more and more I thought about it and I prayed about it I knew that giving my daughter up would be a way to help him get out of the situation that he was in and that's not her fault So I continue with my pregnancy because at that time I had to face what I have been in and he needed to face what he had been in you know that's not the child's fault and had you been honest we wouldn't have been in that situation.

As with the other participants in the profiles she does attempt to facilitate the relationship between father and child. One way she does this is by keeping the father abreast of decisions that need to be made with the child. Another way she facilitates the relationship between the father and child is to include him when she needs someone to watch her.

...One, that's her father, two, who else would I call? If I got to do something you should be the one to pick up the slack, normally, most of the time he is the person that I call, if I'm in a bind and need him to do something I'll call him.

What is a mother's perception of a father's intent and ability to follow through on his intentions to be involved with his child?

The mother believes the father's intent is to be more involved with his child but the mother seems to be leaning toward an expiration date of tolerance. Her expiration

date of tolerance is in regards to her perception of the father's excuses. She also feels he can do a better job of helping himself. While she knows he is married, she also knows he does not live with the wife and they might be in the process of a divorce. She knows he lives with his mother.

Participant MO6 is interested in facilitating the father-child relationship but her perceived behavioral control of the situation a difficult challenge to navigate. In this situation her perception is she has no control of the situation. MO6 makes this point when she talks about the father attending their daughter's track meet: "I mean if this is what she wants to do then I'm going to keep on doing it, if you come you come if you don't you don't."

What are the factors that contribute to a mother's ability to facilitate father-child relationships?

The primary factor contributing to the mother's challenge to facilitating the father children relationship is the lack of external support. It appeared during the interview the mother has a limited support network but that is largely attributed to her reluctance to ask for assistance. She is apprehensive to ask for support because she feels a negative stigmatism for having a child with a married man.

The follow are the remaining participants in the conflict co-parenting category:

MO3 is 34 years of age and the mother of four children, with two fathers. Three of the children comprise a set of triplets. The triplets are 11, and the youngest child is five. She has a conflicted relationship with the father. The bulk of the tension is their strained communication. The father does not have a phone, so it is a challenge for the mother to connect with him. His support is sporadic, and she indicates the father wants to

interact on his terms. One example is stopping by the mother's home uninvited. She and the father are in a parallel co-parenting category.

Table 4 Situational Summary for MO3

Situational Summary for MO3

Communicating with the father is a challenge, one reason is that he does not have a phone. As a result of not having a phone, the mother has no way of getting in touch with him when there is a matter concerning his daughter.

The mother has four children, with three being the same age.

She has a significant other that lives in her house.

MO4 is 26 years of age and the mother of three children with three fathers. The mother is bi-racial, but she identifies as a Black woman. As of the interview, the child in reference is six years of age and the oldest child of the three, with the youngest child age 2. The father lives in another state, and they do not communicate. She and the father are in a parallel co-parenting category.

Table 5 Situational Summary for MO4

Situational Summary for MO4

The father had seen his child two times, once when she was four and again when she was five.

The father denied the child is his and paternity was only established after he failed to show three times to the child support office to refute the claim the child is his.

The mother is frustrated that he denies her child but does not deny his other children. MO4 know this because when she was pregnant she would have conversations with his girlfriend and the mother of his other children and she would indicate that.

Another challenge to this nonexistent co-parenting relationship is that the father resides in a different state than the mother and child.

MO5 is 43 years of age and the mother of three children with two fathers. The oldest child is 19, and the youngest is 11 years of age. The 11-year old's father is the focus of the interview. As of the interview, she is expecting her fourth child. The father of the child discussed for the interview has been in and out of prison and currently is incarcerated. In the past, the mother would take their son to visit him while he was incarcerated but this time she has not taken the child to visit him because she feels he does not appreciate the visit. She has a strained co-parenting relationship because the father denies being the father of the child. She and the father are in the conflicted co-parenting category.

Table 6 Situational Summary for MO5

Situational Summary for MO5

The father has been incarcerated for three years. While he was incarcerated, the mom took their child to visit him. However, stopped when he no longer seemed to appreciate the visits.

Mother is stressed because the father questions if the child is his, but will not test for paternity.

The father is incarcerated.

MO10 is 31 years of age with two children by two fathers. The elder child is 11 years old, and whose father is the focus of the interview. The younger child is 6. The mother has a cordial relationship with the father of her child. They often talk about the child, and when they do, he tends to defer to her when making decisions regarding the child. He is proactive in financial support. He has been incarcerated and, according to

MO10, often makes bad decisions. One such decision, the mother feels, is the company he keeps, which interferes with him being a father because the mother does not like the children to go around him when he hangs with the company he keeps. She and the father are in the conflicted co-parenting category.

Table 7 Situational Summary for MO10

Situational Summary for MO10

The first six years of the child's life the father was incarcerated.

The father is a provider financially, but not much for emotional well-being.

Mixed Co-Parenting Category

The mixed co-parenting category includes participants that have relationships with the father of their children that have the same attributes as the conflicted category. The primary difference between the conflicted group and the mixed group is the conflict between the mother and father is public.

MO9 is a 37-year-old mother whose two children are by the same father. The older child is 13, and the younger child age 11 is the child whose father is the focus of the interview. The mother has been physically assaulted by the father. He is on drugs and also deals with mental health issues. They have a mixed co-parenting situation in which they seldom talk, and when they do, it is complicated by only communicating through text. This is because when they communicate in person it has gotten violent.

What is a mother's perception of her role in the facilitation of the father-child relationship?

The mother's perception is to facilitate the father-child relationship. She puts forth effort in a multitude of ways. One way is to allow the father to have the first right of refusal when she needs someone to watch the children. She explains she is not opposed to the help "...helping me would be, helping me sometimes picking them up to and from practices, sometimes helping me you know, picking them up from school practices um."

The mother facilitates the relationship between the father and child so she allows the father access to his child. In the interview it seems the only time denied the father access to his child is when assaulted her in the presence of his daughter. As a result, the mother had a restraining order against him. However, it seemed from the interview that even with the EPO, she was reluctant to keep the children from their father.

What is a mother's perception of a father's intent and ability to follow through on his intentions to be involved with his child?

In regards to the participant's perception of the father's intent to be involved with his child through the interview it appears she believe he can be a better father. As she shared when talking about what she would like to see the father do better, it was spend more time with their daughter "It could be better – um she loves her dad... he loves her I just wish it could be better – I just wish he could spend more time that's all." However, her frustration with his antics seems to put her in a place where there is an expiration date to her tolerance. One such antic is the father not helping purchase the summer clothes and using child support to justify his decision

...he still didn't, uh, ...he still wasn't helping me, so he wanted me to ah, [pause]
...hold on, ...and instead of giving me the money to help my kids, he said he was
just going to child support, ...right here, this argument he wanted. ...oh, and on
here ...wow I am messing ...it up in here, I was asking him to help me with their
summer clothes.

She also feels he can do a better job of helping himself. He has a drug abuse problem and
mental health issues, both she feels he can do a better job managing.

In this case the mother has very limited perceived behavioral control of the
situation. She feels this is partly because of the father's bouts with substance abuse and
mental health issues. During the interview MO9 explained a time that his drug abuse
could have had disastrous outcomes with the children "he had a heart attack. I was out of
town and he had my children and he had a heart attack because he had been tooting
powder." It is because of incidents such as this the mother feels she has no control when
it comes to getting the father to do better as a father.

She does not appear to subscribe to societal peer pressure when it comes to
working with the father. This seen through her continuous efforts to work with the father
when it comes to their children. In the past they have had success working together

When it is concerning them yes but as far hmmm... well... we have been out to
lunch together with the kids.... um.... it's been a while.... we used to ...when we
got pass the initial break-up uh in a lot of the hurt - we did start to plan and do
things with the kids we would go to events with the kids and their games and
maybe after their games or something like that we would go to lunch or dinner.

Her attitude toward facilitating is she is willing to do it. During the interview she gives examples of how she does. The challenge is the behavior of the father which cause her problems. This causes her to have a dismal attitude about the situation.

What are the factors that contribute to a mother's ability to facilitate father-child relationships?

In the interview she does talk about the support she receives from her mother to help her with the child. At the time of the interview she had a childhood friend and a cousin that lived in her home at the time of the interview that pitched in to help at times. This suggests the mother has maternal support outside of the father.

Participant MO9 suggested that she has facilitated the relationship in the past but felt like she was doing the work for her child's father and he needed to learn how to be a father "...I would tell him her likes and dislikes...ummm...what she ...you know what she liked to do...or even if he didn't know what to do with her when he had her you know it was me that planned there weekend..."MO6 is 42-years of age, has three children by two fathers. The father of the nine years old child is the focal point of the interview. The nine-year-old is the youngest of the three children of the participant. The oldest child is 16.

Participant MO6 is the only participant in the study who has a completed a four-year college degree. She is also one of four participants that earns over \$30k a year.

The mother has a strained relationship with the father. The strained relationship is due to the father being married when the child was born. He did not tell her, and she felt he manipulated her while they were together. She and the father are in a mixed co-parenting category.

It is important to note the researcher places MO6 in the mixed co-parenting category because of the openness of the situation. This causes problems that lead to the participant having difficulty communicating with the father.

Table 8 Situational Summary for MO6

Situational Summary for MO6

The father of her child is married and was married when their child was born. The mother feels she was manipulated by the father because she did not know he was married and only found out when the wife calls her one evening when the father left his phone laying around.

As a result of the marital status of the father the mother is reluctant to seek support raising her child because she is embarrassed by the situation.

Summary

The willingness to facilitate the father-child relationship seemed to permeate the interviews. All ten participants at some point expressed interest in working with the father as co-parents. In some cases, taking their child to visit the father while they were incarcerated. In other cases, it was informing the father of activities the child was involved in. Regardless of how they made the effort, in some respect, all participants attempted to facilitate the father-child relationship with the father.

While the participants attempted to positively co-parent with the father they each seemed to have a threshold, in the sense that at some point their frustration with the father brought an end to their effort to facilitate. MO2, MO8, and MO4 expressed no desire to continue to facilitate the father-child relationship after the fathers constantly did not increase their involvement with their children.

Unappreciated efforts were prevalent in many of the participant's interviews. Their unappreciated efforts became another factor that made facilitating the father-child relationship a challenge. Participants MO3 and MO4 each took the initiative to take their children to see the fathers who were incarcerated. Each participant discussed how doing so was something they felt they were not responsible for doing but felt their children needed to see their father. However, as the participants shared, the fathers seemed more interested in other things. The perception on the behalf of the mothers that the fathers did not appreciate their attempt to bring their children to see them generated feelings of frustration and anger.

All of the participants, with the exception of MO4 and MO8, had children's fathers that were experiencing some form of barrier that affected their ability to financially help themselves get to a better quality of life.

CHAPTER V DISCUSSION

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to understand the reasons mothers do or do not facilitate the father-child relationship in Black fragile families by exploring a mother's perceptions of her role as a gatekeeper, her perception of the father's intent and ability to be involved with his child, and the factors affecting a mother's facilitation of the father-child relationship. The existing literature on fatherhood and many of the tenets attached to it discuss how mothers process working with fathers while demonstrating encouraging behaviors. However, there is limited research on why these mothers choose to facilitate the relationship between the father and the child in the first place. In this chapter, the researcher provides an in-depth discussion and analysis of the study findings and connects the findings to the literature, the research questions, and the theoretical framework. At the conclusion of this chapter, the researcher discusses study limitations, recommendations for future research, and implications for positive social change.

Facilitation of father and child relationship by the mother in ways such as maternal gatekeeping is presented in the fatherhood literature. Co-parenting is another subject area that addresses facilitation. Co-parenting literature explains facilitation, such as the father facilitating a relationship with his child, or one parent facilitating the

relationship with the other parent. However, this current research is intentional about exploring the willingness of mothers to facilitate father-child relationships.

Interpretation of the findings

All of the mothers in this research, to some degree, explained the adverse situations of the father of their children. The adversity the fathers were dealing with, at times, negatively influenced the father's involvement with their children. Stories about the father's unstable living arrangements, unemployment or lack of desire to work, and resulting failure to pay child support are some of the examples from this study's participants. This could be what the literature suggests are the struggles attached to non-residential fathers with low wage jobs who claim that not having a job is better than working to pay child support and their struggle paying bills (Acs et al., 2013). The justice system is another social determinant that mothers see as increasing the challenge to work with the father and is echoed in existing literature to explain the hardship that incarcerated parents have on the non-incarcerated parent (McLanahan & Garfinkel, 2000). This study adds to the literature by further shedding light on the plight of Black families in particular.

In this study, six of the mothers revealed that the father of their child had some involvement with the criminal justice system for various offenses. The most severe of the offenses was manslaughter. The mothers explained how the father's involvement with the justice system added to their stress. They either took the children to visit the fathers while they were incarcerated, or empathized with the hardship the fathers with a criminal record faced when seeking employment. However, many of the mothers did not feel as if their support of the fathers while they were incarcerated led to a father's involvement with

their child after they were released. The amount of time fathers spent with their children after release from incarceration aligned with current literature that discussed struggles that fathers face after release and the amount of involvement fathers have with their children upon release (Perry & Bright, 2012).

Another aspect of this study that is echoed in existing literature are the four fathers who claim that they are not the father of the children and are reluctant to take a paternity test. It is conceivable that these mothers would experience stress and disappointment, as evident from their interviews. None of the mothers in the study shared concerns relative to the paternity of the fathers. They welcomed the opportunity for the fathers to establish paternity, but tensions rose when the fathers declined for various reasons to establish paternity. This aligns with the maternal identity confirmation construct of maternal gatekeeping, which suggests that mothers seek external validation of how they are performing as a mother (Allen & Hawkins, 1999).

This study's findings reflected the differential family role construct of maternal gatekeeping, in that many of the mothers felt they were doing all the work. When mothers feel all the child-rearing responsibility and workload falls on them, maternal gatekeeping is emphasized and determines the amount of accessibility a father has to his child (Allen & Hawkins, 1999). When mothers feel they are required to do more as a parent than the father, their willingness to facilitate the father-child relationship may decrease.

Fathers in low-resource families face barriers that challenge their intentions of being involved with their children (Acs et al., 2013). All the fathers in this study experienced at least one barrier compromising their capacity as engaged fathers. In some

cases, fathers had multiple barriers. For instance, MO9's child's father is a substance abuser, a drug dealer, suffers from mental illness, has a criminal record, and lives with his mother. With many of the mothers in this study experiencing barriers, it is apparent that both parents have a challenge dealing with their respective internal struggles. This in turn makes it highly unlikely that they can focus on improving difficult external relationships.

The following provides context as to how the study results align with the research questions. Each question is explained by the theme as described in the research analysis of this study. The major themes identified from the analysis of this research were: Expiration Date of Tolerance, Unappreciated Efforts, Help Themselves, and Maternal Support. The guiding research questions for this study were:

1. What is a mother's perception of her role in the facilitation of the father-child relationship?
2. What is a mother's perception of a father's intent and ability to follow through on his intentions to be involved with his child?
3. What are the factors that contribute to a mother's ability to facilitate father-child relationships?

This study explored single, low-income, never-married, Black mothers' perceptions of their role in the facilitation of father-child relationships and the fathers' intent to follow-through on being involved with his child. It also explored mother's perceived factors impacting their ability to facilitate those relationships. By approaching the interviews and data analysis using the Theory of Planned Behavior and constructs of maternal gatekeeping, the researcher was able to highlight a range of beliefs and factors

affecting mother's intent and ability to co-parent and facilitate the relationship between their child and the child's father. These beliefs and factors should be taken into account when designing interventions to promote successful co-parenting and developing policies to encourage and possibly incentivize, rather than penalize, father's involvement with their children.

This study is the first to apply the Theory of Planned Behavior to the maternal facilitation of the father-child relationship by giving context to the experiences of mothers and taking into account not only their intent to facilitate with the father of their child but their ability to do so. The only other study using the Theory of Planned Behavior as the theoretical framework in mother and father interaction explores the fathers and their intent to be involved with their children.

Much of the fragile family research blames fathers for their lack of follow-through on society's perceived roles of fathers. While this study confirmed that some of the responsibility of co-parenting lies with the father, it also revealed how significantly the mother's understanding of her role in facilitating that father-child relationship may affect the father's ability to co-parent in the first place. A recent co-parenting pilot study (Fagan, Cherson, Brown, & Vecere, 2015) educating mothers about fathers began to address the issue of a mother's facilitation. This study provided additional evidence that strengthens the need to work with the mother in parenting classes to improve co-parenting. The insight gained will allow future development of parenting programs to classify the perspective of moms and use that information to resonate with participants in those classes. The researcher believes this will resonate with mothers because their voice will be heard. Additionally, the development of the themes illustrate why some mothers

might be apprehensive about co-parenting with fathers. This will encourage future research to remain solution-based and not blame-based (the notion mothers maliciously do not want the fathers to have access to their children).

This study used the co-parenting after divorce matrix to categorize the never-wed participants of fragile families. This matrix sufficed for the purpose of explaining how the parents interacted, but additional insight would have been useful, especially in situations that do not fit traditional norms. For instance, one challenge was how to categorize parents who have conflicted interaction when the father denies the child. The denial, by default, adds conflict. Anomalies such as this not previously considered in the research should provide context for the evolution of the co-parenting matrix, specifically for never-wed fragile families.

Third, by allowing the mothers in this study to have a voice and share their experiences, this study strengthens the argument for a focus on communication between the mother and father as a factor affecting father involvement with his children. The communication between the mother and father can be affected by several influences. One example is the mother's recognition of supportive services in transition to becoming self-sufficient for herself, but not necessarily for the father. All the participants in the study self-reported as being low-income. However, one participant acknowledged participation in a self-sufficiency program while simultaneously voicing frustration with the father who was experiencing similar barriers but didn't have access to similar types of assistance. Her inability to recognize that this lack of support for the father to improve his situation contributed to his lack of participation with his child negatively influenced her communication with the father as well as her willingness and actions to facilitate the

father-child relationship. If mothers could better recognize and understand the discrepancies in types of assistance that are offered to custodial parents but not to non-custodial parents, they might be able to approach their maternal facilitation role from a perspective that is more tolerant, patient, and communicative.

Unappreciated Effort

The perception of the mothers in this study in relation to their role in facilitating the father-child relationship were influenced when they felt their efforts to do so were unappreciated. This influence was heightened when it came to incarceration, parenting responsibilities, and parenting styles. When mothers in the study were faced with the barrier of interacting with a father incarcerated, they would take the children to correctional facilities to visit the father and accept collect calls from the fathers when they could. When mothers advocate for visitation of children with the father, it is considered a form of facilitation (Puhlman & Paisley, 2013). When the father of her child was released from incarceration, MO5 went as far as contemplating giving some of the child support money back to the father or helping him pay back child support in hopes it would prompt him to be more involved with their child. The mother did this because she understood the challenge the father was going through trying to gain employment with a criminal record. The main parenting styles between the parents were intertwined with conflict which caused for strained communication between the mother and father.

A mother's perception of her role in the facilitation of the father-child relationship seems to be, in this study to facilitate. This conclusion is drawn from the occurrences shared by the participants as discussed that show the mothers made an effort to co-parent with the father. For instance, as explained using the Theory of Planned Behavior,

intention and perceived behavioral control must correspond (Ajzen, 1991). In other words, it is plausible to suggest the efforts of mothers in this study, such as taking children to see fathers who are incarcerated and assuming additional parenting responsibilities as the primary custodian of the child, taking place in the midst of conflict demonstrates the mothers' intention to facilitate. However, the action of the fathers who do not follow through when they are released from incarceration with being involved with their children is perceived by the mother as being unappreciative. The fathers that do not spend quality time with their children through the lopsided distribution of the parenting responsibilities leave mothers feeling as though they have no control of the father's involvement with his child. This means there is a gap between the mothers' intention of facilitating and their belief they have control of the situation. In this event, mothers facilitating the relationship is less likely. This also means the mothers in this study seemed to their role as facilitators to not seeing their role as facilitators because they no longer feel they have control of the situation. The feeling associated with lack of control of the outcome is also attributed to the instability of the situation. As Ajzen (1991) explained, intention and perceived behavioral control must remain constant to predict the behavior.

Help Themselves

Many believe that a father's lack of involvement with their children is less about barriers and more about excuses that reflect a father's inability to accept responsibility for his actions (Baskerville, 2008). During this study, many of the mothers felt like fathers could do better, and when they did not do so, it was because they chose not to.

When considering a mother's perception of a father's intent and ability to follow through on his intentions, the theory of planned behavior, which Ajzen (1991) explained "intentions are assumed to capture the motivational factors that influence behavior; they are indications of how hard people are willing to try, of how much of an effort they are planning to exert, in order to perform the behavior" (p. 181). When considering a mother's perception of a father's intent, the perception is layered both as to how she sees a father's exertion of effort and the amount of effort she is willing to put into the situation. In other words, when the mothers felt as though the fathers would help themselves, their perception of the father's intent would vary depending on how the father worked to better his situation. On the other hand, when fathers failed to demonstrate to the mothers they wanted to be involved with their children by keeping their word when they said they were going to do something with the child, and using what she perceived as excuses, the mother's perception of the father's intent to be involved diminished.

Expiration Date of Tolerance

Many of the mothers in the study reported that the fathers of their children struggled with managing adversity in their life. Some of the mothers in the study show discouraging and controlling behaviors when they felt fathers made excuses instead of accepting responsibility for life decisions. These excuses caused the mothers to become frustrated and lose interest in dealing with the fathers.

Additionally, when the fathers exhibited what the mothers felt to be unacceptable behavior, (e.g., domestic violence, or drug use), their low tolerance limited their ability to facilitate with the father. In tandem with unacceptable behavior from the fathers, the mother's tolerance to work with the father dropped when they were frustrated by the

father's behavior. Meaning, when fathers continually demonstrated routine negative behavior like no shows to pick the child up when they said they would, it became a problem for the mothers. It makes sense for the mothers to limit their facilitation because it aligns with the literature that suggests mothers feel they act in the best interest of the child (Allen, & Hawkins, 1999). This frustration was also reflected in the relationship between the mother and father. When the mothers grew tired of dealing with the conflict in the relationship between them and father, their attitude to co-parent with the father shifted from trying to facilitate the relationship between father and child to not doing so.

These conflicts between the mother and father permeated into almost a zero tolerance mindset with the mothers. In their defense, the participants in this study seemed to exhibit some constraint, but once their tolerance pool was depleted, they no longer were interested in trying to make something positive happen with the father in regards to the father-child relationship.

Maternal Support

Existing literature points out that peer pressure from other mothers and the influence of societal norms at times can influence a mother's decision to work with the father (Allen & Hawkins, 1991). Maternal support is defined in this study as support other than from the father. Many of the mothers in this study seemed to have some form of a support circle. However, in this study it did not adversely influence their decision to facilitate with the father. It turns out that in this study the more support the mother had from her peers, the more she would opt to facilitate the relationship with the father.

When interviewing the participants many factors were recognized that could inhibit a mother's ability to facilitate the father-child relationship that encompassed both

mental and physical roadblocks. Regarding mental factors, one mother had a mental block when it came to seeking support because she had a child with a married man. The psychological strain negatively impacted her ability to work with the father of the child, not to a full degree but sporadically, probably in situations where memories of negative interactions between her and the father were triggered. Regarding physical roadblocks, some of the mothers dealt with the physical barrier of fathers residing in a different state.

Many of the mothers in the study were in situations that were not conducive to them putting energy into facilitating the relationship between the father and child. For example, MO6 had a complicated interaction with the father because he was married to another woman when he fathered her child. MO6 received support from her mother, and this seemed to help her adjust to the relationship with the father of her child. Another instance is MO2 whose child's father is incarcerated but she was able to get support from her mother. For MO8, the abusive relationship with the father made it a challenge to co-parent with him, but she got support from people living in her home with her.

The four themes generated from the experiences of the mothers in this study share a commonality of effort. In each of the themes there was evidence that the mothers put forth an effort to facilitate the relationship between the father and his child. This effort was a contrast to the expectations of the researcher. The emphasis of this effort by the mothers in the study is unique because it shows they are human, that they do try, and the father-child relationships, for the participants in this study, was important.

Limitations of study

All the mothers in the study, despite their relationship with the father, appeared to want a positive co-parenting relationship. The study has transferability limitations to

other single mothers that may have children by men with more diverse backgrounds. This study gathered the lived experiences of ten mothers, and while it is assumed that each participant shared an accurate depiction of their situation, it is still their depiction.

Another limitation of this study is to rely solely on the narrative of the situation as shared by the mothers. Due to time constraints the researcher was unable to compare analysis with other researchers to ensure for reliability and trustworthiness. Another limitation is the study did not get the perspectives of the situation from the children. Some of the children in the study were at an age where they could have been asked questions to gain more insight. The missing perspectives of the father is another limitation of this study. Fathers could have provided additional information about the co-parenting relationship and insight to the perspective of the corresponding participant.

Another limitation was the purposive sampling method. This method was ideal for gathering a very targeted population, but that also limits the amount of randomness for finding participants. This limitation is also a reflection of researcher bias in finding participants that are ideal for the research. Sample size was a limitation. For this study, 10 participants were interviewed, however, opening up the interviews to additional participants might produce additional insight. For instance, more participants with various ages and assess differences among the participants by their age to see if the analysis yields the same outcome for different ages of participants.

The personal as well as societal stigma attached to the specific issue such as domestic violence probably prevented some mothers from taking part in the study. Only one participant, MO9 mentioned a domestic violence situation but also took measures to protect herself with an Emergency Protection Order (EPO). The researcher believes the

complexities of dealing with domestic violence, like the violence of an abuser, prevented potential participants from taking part.

This research did not include any women who may have children, but not consider themselves mothers. The recruitment method of purposive sampling created a selection of mother who could provide insight to the research but occurred through the mothers that were open to sharing their experiences. However, there are reasons that mothers may have chosen not to sign up for my study because they did not want to talk about their experiences of being a single Black mother raising their child, potentially creating limitations for the range of responses of mothers included in this study.

Finally, a limitation of this study is the capacity of the researcher to remain neutral and not to be internally moved by some of the experiences of the mothers during the interviews. The researcher is someone who works with families and is a father who has experienced the challenges of co-parenting with a custodial mother. On many occasions the researcher had to collect his emotions after the interviews. The researcher felt he understood some of the frustrations of the mothers, while he has never been a single mother, he has been a single parent.

Future Research

This study presents several key recommendations for future research. Future research should explore the facilitation of the father-child relationship in a broader context. This broader context could include research with divorced mothers to determine how the dissolved relationship between the mother and father influenced communication post marriage. The selection of all participants regardless of race could help determine if race plays a role in maternal facilitation. Also, selecting participants based on age ranges

could explain what impact the age of the participants has on their willingness to facilitate. Exploring parental facilitation for children of different ages than those identified in this study may reveal differences in co-parenting efforts. The age criteria could also look at age differences between participants and fathers that have a ten year plus age gap between them to determine if generation gaps influence engagement.

There is certainly room to explore the perspectives of the fathers and the children, in order to capture a more complete picture of the whole family story. An offshoot of this might include interviewing adults who did not have good relationships with their father when they were minors but do as adults. This could provide insight when mothers explain how the father is not involved and how the child perceived it. Researchers have conducted extensive research with the perspective of mothers on co-parenting. Future research could explore the association between the perceptions of fathers and the perception of mothers and explore correlations with the adults who have a good relationship with their father but did not have one when they were minors. Future research could compare and contrast the relationships of a mother with children by two or more fathers.

Implications

This study allowed single mothers to be heard. Many of the mothers became more comfortable and animated as the interview progressed. However, it also may suggest simply that the opportunity to share their story allowed them a moment to exhale. Several of the mothers appreciated the study by expressing their positive feeling about being invited to participate. Being able to participate allowed the mothers' voices to be heard; they often feel they are not heard by their circle of family and friends. If their input could

change the situation for other mothers, they were glad to contribute. Their appreciation for being heard should not go unnoticed. It might be beneficial to develop family support groups for single, Black mothers. If not a support group, then perhaps discussion groups for them would have value. Whatever the label, an avenue for mothers to share their experiences with other mothers in similar situations facilitated by a skilled moderator may be beneficial as they navigate their situation with the father of their child.

In tandem with the discussion group as suggested, prior peer mentoring may assist mothers as they deal with the situation. While mothers in this study had support to help them at times, it seemed they lacked feedback beyond the surface issue. For example, MO7's support circle advised her not to worry about what the father is doing. While that may be good advice, additional input from a past participant in a mentor's role may add depth to the advice.

Often the participants in a custodial situation did not address it at all or only when the mother and the child's father were in court. However, the situation may not reach that latter, critical phase if families had an opportunity for a mediation-type process before going to a family court. Ideally, this process could occur through church auspices, because the church is the most neutral, trusted and respected site within this demographic (Roberts et. al., 2014).

Ninety percent of the participants in this study have a child whose father is involved with the justice system. For incarcerated fathers close to release or as a pre-requisite for release, a pre-release training might be beneficial to the co-parenting arrangement. Such a training could assist fathers with communication and conflict management skills to assist their co-parenting efforts. The pre-release training could

provide paternity testing and if need be, on the front end, accountability training for fathers who are reluctant to establish paternity. Research shows fatherhood can be a challenge for many fathers to wrap their heads around (Baskerville, 2008). If the fathers are not seeking paternity for fear of becoming a father, the training could provide the skills to aid in their self-efficacy. This in turn could address the issue facing twenty percent of the participants who were in situations with fathers who would not establish paternity.

Other researchers may find these results and the study methodology informative as they design studies to explore how to increase the number of mothers that facilitate the father-child relationship and their effectiveness to do so. Curriculum developers working in the co-parenting and family science field may use these findings as they develop new programs. People working in family court settings may use these findings to develop new family court mediation practices for families on paternity dockets needing effective strategies to negotiate arrangements of visitation with their children. Another area is healthy relationship programs that could be useful as a preventive measure before the child is born. As this study revealed many of the participants did not have a healthy relationship with the father to begin with, and it only eroded with the addition of a child.

A final recommendation is to advocate for policies that include the plight of the non-residential father in family strengthening programs. As it stands most social policies and programs supporting families only allow the custodial parent assistance such as subsidized housing, child tax breaks, and employment training (Sylvester, & Reich, 2001). This tends to imply the only parent that can benefit from the assistance is the mothers; however as the mothers in this study express, many of the fathers are struggling

to deal with life issues. The assistance could also help the father which might improve the co-parenting relationship, and in turn benefits the child (Marczak et al., 2015).

Summary and conclusion

This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of single, low-income, Black mothers to ascertain why some mothers facilitate the father-child relationship while others do not. The mothers ranged in age from 24 to 36 and were from Louisville, Kentucky. The selection criteria for the participants were as follows: a) never married; b) identify as a Black woman; c) have a child fathered by a man that identifies as Black that did not reside in the home with her and the child; d) have a child between 5 and 11 years of age; e) be the primary custodian of the child; and f) identify as being low-income. The participants shared their stories and lived experiences.

This study was conducted to explore the maternal facilitation of father-child relationships. The participants of this study were a targeted group of single mothers selected based on race, age, and marital status. This small study provided some additional insight into a very complicated world of co-parenting in fragile families. All the participants expressed their eagerness to work with the father but also their frustration when they felt the father was not holding up his end of the bargain.

The literature supports the notion that mothers recognize fathers as nurturers and are good for the development of the child but often did not realize their amount of control over the accessibility of the father to spend time with his child. This study helped to explain how a mother's perception of the situation led to her willingness to facilitate the relationship between the father and child.

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APPENDIX A
RESEARCH FLYER

Black Mothers Let's Talk

A Study About Black Fathers Involvement



You are invited to take part in a research study about the thoughts and beliefs of single mothers. Hearing from you about your concerns, experiences, and joys of motherhood as a single parent is important! If you are a single a black single mother with a child betwen six months and 11 years of age you are invited to participate and share your voice.

Participation is voluntary and all information is confidential.

Research conducted by Shawn Gardner a Mississippi State University Graduate Student.
If interested please call Shawn 502.627.0356 or email slg507@msstate.edu

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APPENDIX B
CONSENT FORM

Maternal Facilitation of Father-Child Relationships

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

Shawn Gardner
School of Human Science
Mississippi State University
255 Tracy Drive, Box 9745
Mississippi State, MS 39762
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PURPOSE OF STUDY

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please read the following information carefully. Please ask the investigator if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information.

The purpose of this qualitative research study is to understand the factors affecting maternal facilitation of father involvement with their children, raise awareness to possible rationale as to why they exist, and lay the foundation for future research in effective co-parenting strategies and healthy relationships practices.

STUDY PROCEDURES

You will be asked pre-determined questions. This session will be recorded for transcription after the interview. The recording and transcription will be stored in a secured computer password protected with access by the principal investigator and advisor. At the start of the interview, you will be asked if you have any information you brought with you to share. During the interview you will be asked about the information you brought to share. At the conclusion of this interview you will be thanked for your participation.

RISKS

No risk of harm or discomfort are anticipated in this proposed research.

BENEFITS

There are no benefits for participating in this study.

CONFIDENTIALITY

For the purposes of this research study, your comments will not be anonymous. However, every effort will be made by the investigator to preserve your confidentiality including the following:

- Assigning code names/numbers for participants that will be used on all research notes and documents
- Keeping notes, interview transcriptions, and any other identifying participant information in a locked file cabinet in the personal possession of the investigator.

Participant data will be kept confidential except in cases where the investigator is legally obligated to report specific incidents. These incidents include, but may not be limited to, incidents of abuse and suicide risk.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions at any time about this study, or you experience adverse effects as the result of participating in this study, you may contact Mr. Shawn Gardner (662.325.5862 or slg507@msstate.edu) or Dr. Marina Denny (662.325.1175 or mdd269@msstate.edu). If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, or if problems arise which you do not feel you can discuss with the Principal Investigator, please contact the Mississippi State University Institutional Review Board at 662.325.3294

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part in this study. If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to sign a consent form. After you sign the consent form, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. Withdrawing from this study will not affect the relationship you have, if any, with the investigator. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

CONSENT

I have read and I understand the provided information and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and without cost. I understand that I will be given a copy of this consent form. I voluntarily agree to take part in this study.

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

Investigator's signature _____ Date _____

APPENDIX C
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Protocol

Maternal Facilitation of Father-Child Relationships

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee code:

Participant criteria: The interviews will obtain the perception of black fathers from single mothers of children five to eleven years of age. The children live in the home with the mother, and the father does not.

[Introduction]

Hello, my name is Shawn Gardner **[shake hands]** I am 3rd-year graduate student at Mississippi State University working on my Ph.D. in Agriculture Education and Extension. Agriculture Education and Extension is about finding ways to make the community better.

...to share a little information about who I am. I am a father of four daughters and grew up here in Louisville, KY.

[The purpose]

Determine what would help parents communicate with each other better.

[Participation]

This interview is voluntary. You can quit the interview at any time, and refuse to answer any question you choose not to.

This interview is confidential. The only time I use your information is to schedule this meeting, after today, your name is coded something different than what your name is, and that is what I will use for that point on.

[When interview is over]

After I interview you and others, I will review the information and then generate a report.

[The interview]

I will ask you some questions about your experiences with the father of your child, the relationship between your child and the father, and other thoughts you may have about the situation.

The interview should take about 60-90 minutes and will be recorded for transcription later. After analysis I may require a second interview for clarity.

Periodically, I may take notes while you are talking so that I do not interrupt you.

If you have more than one child that meets the criteria the interview will be about the oldest child living with you.

[Consent]

I want to reiterate this is a voluntary study after we start you can change your mind and opt out at any time. I also need to inform you that during the interview if you disclose any information that poses an imminent threat or danger to you or others persons I am obligated to report to the authorities. Now that you have all the information about this study do I have your consent to interview you about your child, your child's father, and your experience as a single black mother not living with the father of your child?

Do you have any questions about the interview process?

Great, please sign the two consent forms. They are identical, one is for me and one is for you.

OK [if they have questions answer them]

[Questions]

Questions	Probes
1. Tell me about your child.	
2. Tell me about the relationship between you and the father of your child.	[non-existent] Has it always been that way? How do you feel about that? [sporadic] Was it ever better than now? What do you feel brought about the change? How do you feel about that? [good/great] What do you attribute to the good/great relationship?
3. How would you explain the relationship between your child and his/her father?	[non-existent] Has it always been that way? How do you feel about that? [sporadic] Was it ever better than now? What do you feel brought about the change? How do you feel about that? [good/great] What do you attribute to the good/great relationship?
4. If there was anything that could improve the relationship between you and the father for the well-being of your child what would it be?	How would it improve? Is there anything you think you can do to improve the relationship?
5. Do you and the father plan events together or plan to attend special occasions together with the child?	[yes] Can you give some examples? [no] Can you share what prevents you and the father from planning events together?

6. Can you tell me more about the type of father the father of your child is?	
7. If you wanted to go somewhere but needed someone to keep your child would you call the father?	[no] Can you share the reasons you would not consider the father? [yes] Can you share the reasons you would not consider the father?
8. What do you feel is the best advice you have ever received to help you in your co-parenting relationship with the father of your child.	Did you try? [yes] how did it work? [no] what caused you to decide against it?
9. What can you tell me about the living arrangement of the father?	
10. How would you define your responsibilities as a single mother?	
11. Have you encouraged father to be involved with your child?	[yes] what ways do you encourage the father to be involved [no] what stops you from encouraging the father to be involved
12. What expectations do you have of the father of your child?	
13. Do you talk to the father about decisions regarding your child?	
14. What does an ideal co-parenting situation look like to you?	Describe your co-parenting relationship.
15. What is a good situation you can think of with the father of your child to explain why you do facilitate the relationship with him?	
16. What is a not so good situation you can think of with the father of your child to explain why you do not facilitate the relationship with him?	
17. If participants brought archival data:	Why do you feel it is important?

Please tell me about the information you brought with you.	
--	--

[Closing Question]

I understand the sensitive nature of this interview and I appreciate your courage and willingness to share with me. Is there anything I did not ask or you did not have a chance to share that you would like to share? Any information you think is important to this research?

[Conclusion]

Thank you for your time and consideration; this information should be all I need but if I have some additional questions I might call you for a possible follow-up interview. Is that ok?

END TIME: _____

APPENDIX D
PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC FORM

Participant Demographic Form

1. What is the **highest** level of education that you have? Check one:
 - Do not have high school degree
 - Completed high school or GED
 - Some college
 - 2-year college/Technical school degree
 - 4-year college degree
 - Post-college degree (e.g., Master's, Ph.D., M.D.)
2. Who lives in your house with you? (Check all that apply).
 - your child(ren)
 - your stepchild(ren)
 - your boyfriend/girlfriend
 - your partner
 - your father
 - your mother
 - your stepfather
 - your stepmother
 - your sister
 - your brother
 - Other (Please list): _____
3. If you are in a couple relationship (*non-married*), how long have you been with your current partner?
_____ Years _____ Months
4. If you are currently living together and are not married, how long have you lived together?
_____ Years _____ Months
5. How many biological children, including the current child, have you mothered?

6. With how many partners did you have the above children? _____
7. What is your annual income?
 - \$20,000 or less
 - \$20,001 - \$30,000
 - \$30,001 - \$40,000
 - Greater than \$40,001
8. Are you employed?
 - no
 - one year or less
 - one to three years
 - three to five years
 - five or more years
9. Please provide the following information about your children (use the back of this page if more space is needed).

Child	Sex	Age	How is this child related to you?	Who does this child live with?
Youngest	M F	_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Biological <input type="checkbox"/> Stepchild <input type="checkbox"/> Adopted <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Just me <input type="checkbox"/> Other biological parent/guardian <input type="checkbox"/> On his/her own <input type="checkbox"/> Both biological parents <input type="checkbox"/> Me and partner/stepparent <input type="checkbox"/> Other biological parent and partner/stepparent <input type="checkbox"/> Joint Custody <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____
2 nd to youngest	M F	_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Biological <input type="checkbox"/> Stepchild <input type="checkbox"/> Adopted <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Just me <input type="checkbox"/> Other biological parent/guardian <input type="checkbox"/> On his/her own <input type="checkbox"/> Both biological parents <input type="checkbox"/> Me and partner/stepparent <input type="checkbox"/> Other biological parent and partner/stepparent <input type="checkbox"/> Joint Custody <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____
3 rd to youngest	M F	_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Biological <input type="checkbox"/> Stepchild <input type="checkbox"/> Adopted <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Just me <input type="checkbox"/> Other biological parent/guardian <input type="checkbox"/> On his/her own <input type="checkbox"/> Both biological parents <input type="checkbox"/> Me and partner/stepparent <input type="checkbox"/> Other biological parent and partner/stepparent <input type="checkbox"/> Joint Custody <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____
4 th to youngest	M F	_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Biological <input type="checkbox"/> Stepchild <input type="checkbox"/> Adopted <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Just me <input type="checkbox"/> Other biological parent/guardian <input type="checkbox"/> On his/her own <input type="checkbox"/> Both biological parents <input type="checkbox"/> Me and partner/stepparent <input type="checkbox"/> Other biological parent and partner/stepparent <input type="checkbox"/> Joint Custody <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____

5 th to youngest	M F	_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Biological <input type="checkbox"/> Stepchild <input type="checkbox"/> Adopted <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Just me <input type="checkbox"/> Other biological parent/guardian <input type="checkbox"/> On his/her own <input type="checkbox"/> Both biological parents <input type="checkbox"/> Me and partner/stepparent <input type="checkbox"/> Other biological parent and partner/stepparent <input type="checkbox"/> Joint Custody <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____
6 th to youngest	M F	_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Biological <input type="checkbox"/> Stepchild <input type="checkbox"/> Adopted <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Just me <input type="checkbox"/> Other biological parent/guardian <input type="checkbox"/> On his/her own <input type="checkbox"/> Both biological parents <input type="checkbox"/> Me and partner/stepparent <input type="checkbox"/> Other biological parent and partner/stepparent <input type="checkbox"/> Joint Custody <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____

APPENDIX E
OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

Observation Protocol Questions

1. Where did the interview take place, and if at a participant's residence, what were the conditions?
2. If children were present during the interview, how was their behavior?
3. Was anyone else present during the interview?

Connection between Observation and Research Questions

Category	Includes	Researchers should note

Observation

Date:	Time:	Location:
Observation		Comments

Reaction questions after the observation

- (a) (What did I observe?)
- (b) (What did I think?)
- (c) (What adjustments can be made?)
- (d) (What could be done differently?)