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Fathers' opinions concerning parenting resources and practices: an exploration of culture and technology

Valentina Djelaj
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**FATHERS' OPINIONS CONCERNING PARENTING RESOURCES AND PRACTICES:
AN EXPLORATION OF CULTURE AND TECHNOLOGY**

by

VALENTINA DJELAJ

THESIS

Submitted to the Graduate School

of Wayne State University,

Detroit, Michigan

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK

2012

MAJOR: SOCIAL WORK

Approved by:

Advisor

Date

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DEDICATION

As with everything else I do in my life and in my career, I would like to dedicate my Thesis to my mother and my baby sister.

Kristina, everything I do is for you. If only you knew how much I look up you. Ironic, I know. Even though you are such a young girl, you may very well be the bravest person I know. I love watching you grow into a beautiful young woman. Your resiliency and motivation in life inspires me to pursue my dreams each and every day.

Mom, I would never be the person I am today if it was not for the strength and guidance you gave me for the first eighteen years of my life. Thank you for always looking after me and guiding me throughout life. Thank you for always encouraging me to get an education and supporting me in my efforts to “change the world”. Thank you for being both my “father” and mother. Your strength and empowerment changed my world. I hope to amount to half the person you once were. Your legacy will forever live on in all the work I do.

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Fathers' Opinions Concerning Parenting Resources and Practices: An Exploration of Culture and Technology

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to explore fathers' opinions about the parenting resources they receive or would like to receive, whether or not culture influences fathers' involvement in parenting and if technology can be utilized to lessen the gap and barriers that exist in fathers' access to parenting services. Few studies have examined fathers' perspectives on the availability of father specific parenting resources and fathers' willingness to participate in parenting programs.

Fathers and Parenting

Many non-residential fathers want to be involved in the lives of their children. Research has indicated that approximately 80% of unmarried fathers-both residential and nonresidential-provide support for the mother during pregnancy. Additionally, 70% of fathers also visit the mother and baby while they remain at the hospital (Mincy, Garfinkel, & Nepomnyaschy, 2005). Although fathers, particularly nonresidential fathers, are more likely to be involved in their children's lives within the first year, this involvement tends to wane over time for various reasons (Center for Research on Child Wellbeing, 2011).

One factor for the decline in fathers' involvement is the quality of the mother-father relationship diminishing over time. An additional barrier that currently exists for fathers' is that of "maternal gatekeeping". This occurs when fathers are unable to see their children due to biological mothers acting as "gate-keepers" and monitoring the time fathers have with their children (Fagan & Barnett, 2003). Thus, the status of the mother-father relationship often times determines whether or not the fathers remain involved in the child rearing process. If the mother-

father relationship is not a positive bond, mothers are more apt to decline or entirely reject paternal involvement in the lives of their children (Roy & Dyson, 2005; Fagan & Barnett, 2003).

Although there are presently many barriers that may make it difficult for nonresidential fathers in particular to stay involved, their involvement in child rearing is extremely beneficial to children (Bayley et al, 2009; Caldwell, Rafferty, Reischl, De Loney, & Brooks, 2010; National Child Welfare Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice, 2002). Positive paternal engagement in children's lives is strongly associated with the successful maturing of children. According to the National Child Welfare Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice (2002), children without fathers present in their homes are more susceptible to be suspended from school, drop out, commit suicide, be victims of abuse or neglect as well as be treated for emotional or behavioral problems sometime in their lifespan. The Center also highlights that paternal involvement positively impacts healthy child development, gender identity, responsible sexuality, emotional and social commitment, and financial security. In a study conducted with African American fathers in low-income, urban communities, children interacted more and had more receptive language skills and behaviors when fathers were attentively participating in their lives (Black, Dubowitz, and Starr, 1999).

Parenting Services

Fathers, including adolescent fathers, have acknowledged the importance of parental training services (Hendricks, Howard, & Caesar, 1981). Although fathers acknowledge that they would like to be involved in these types of services, not many father specific parent-training services exist. In general low-income fathers do not have access to services. However, low-income fathers do somewhat have access to some programs such as Early Head start, Information and Insights about Infants, Minnesota Early Learning Design, and few others.

Additional programs are available for low-income fathers as well, such as Los Angeles Jobs-First Gain, Men as Teachers, Non-custodial parent choices, Parents' Fair Share and various other programs (Avellar, Dion, Clarkwest, Zaveri, Asheer, Borradaile, Angus, Novak, Redline, Zukiewicz, 2011). However, these programs do not specifically address father-parenting practices. Though some programs specific to paternal child rearing do exist, not much evaluation has been conducted on these programs to guarantee their effectiveness either.

Although fathers affirm the importance of parental training services, a lack of father specific parent training services and resources are available that are specific to fathers (Raikes, Boller, vanKammen, Summers, Raikes, Laible, Wilcox, Ontai, Christensen, 2002). However, for the parenting services that currently do exist, there are many reasons for the lack of involvement of fathers' in these services. Bayley, Choudhry, and Wallace (2009) state that barriers that currently exist for fathers seeking out parenting resources are as follows: lack of awareness, work commitments, female-orientated services, lack of organizational support and concerns over program content. These barriers do not permit fathers to obtain specific parental training and resources. In order to make services more accessible to fathers, Bayley et al. (2009) suggest that the forms of best practices for involving fathers in services are: advertising and raising awareness, using more creative methods, flexible and alternative services, building relationships with fathers, father-focused organizational approaches, and consideration of program format. The authors state that in order for this issue to be addressed properly, a stronger emphasis needs to be placed on understanding father's perspectives and opinions' on involvement with parenting more adequately as well as how they envision support services for themselves.

Culture and Spirituality

Another important area to consider in fathering practices is the role of culture and spirituality. Specifically, does culture and spirituality have an influence on paternal involvement in parenting services and their involvement in child rearing? Examining values and principles within cultural traditions can help researchers understand the child-rearing practices that are instilled within any specific racial or ethnic group (Toth & Xu, 1999). Taking different cultural and ethnic perspectives into account can reduce the barriers that currently exist with fathers seeking out parenting services as well (Bayley et al., 2009). An additional important and often disregarded influence on paternal child rearing is spirituality or religion (Dollahite, 1998). Since culturally diverse individuals are being represented in the literature, it seems culture and spirituality could be incorporated into parenting programs to increase involvement of fathers in the child rearing process.

Research suggests that stereotypical portrayals of cultural minority fathers as “uninvolved” or disinterested in their children are not warranted. For example, in one study, African American fathers were found to invest much more time and energy into child rearing when compared to their white counterparts. (Toth & Xu, 1999; Black et al., 1999). This study found that both African Americans as well as Hispanic Americans spent much more time discussing race and ethnicity and cognitively preparing their children for the struggles they may encounter as members of a minority group. Due to the strong sense of cultural ties within African American communities as well as the beliefs of racism and economic suppression that exists in society, these fathers feel as though they must prepare their children for future societal tribulations (Caldwell, Bell, Brooks, Ward, & Jennings, 2011). This ideology supports the fact that culture increases the involvement of minority fathers within their children’s lives to some extent.

Not only does culture appear to have an influence on fathers' involvement in child rearing, it also seems to play a part in whether or not fathers' participate in parental training services. Harachi, Catalano, and Hawkins (1997) suggest that diverse and multicultural fathers are interested in parenting resources such as workshops or parenting training sessions when they are provided information and are recruited by liaisons within their own cultural communities. However, if parenting methods and practices are being taught that do not align with their cultural values, fathers are less likely to exercise those particular parenting strategies (Peterson, Gable, Doyle, Ewigman, 1997). African Americans have a strong sense of community and are less apt to seek outside parenting resources or services. Billingsley and Caldwell (1991) allude to the idea that in the African American community, churches have had a strong influence on the culture and parenting styles of the community in general. Therefore, increasing the level of involvement of the church leadership with outside service agencies could potentially increase the number of African American fathers who engage in parenting services.

One cultural group that has a very limited literature base on fatherhood engagement is the American Indian and Alaska Native population. American Indian and Alaska Native tribal groups have historically highly regarded the child rearing process. Many groups believe that the rearing process is so critical to the wellbeing of children that extended family groups (including grandparents) are regularly involved; parents are not expected play this role in isolation (Edwards & Edwards, 2003; Snipp & Saraff, 2011). Although many tribal groups highly value the parenting process, father involvement is still an issue of concern. Very few studies have been conducted to better understand the role of culture in reaching out to American Indian and Alaska Native fathers to participate in parent involvement programs (Whitbeck, 2006). Dionne, Davis, Sheeber, and Madrigal's (2009) implemented a cultural approach to evidence based parenting

interventions within American Indian communities. This study found that there were improvements in the child rearing process of both parents as well as the children's behaviors once a cultural approach was incorporated in the intervention. Although there is some literature pertaining to American Indian and Alaska Natives, little is known specifically about fathers and parenting within this cultural community.

Technology

Past research has stressed the importance of new creative methods for involving fathers (Bayley et al., 2009). One notable change that can already be recognized in the twenty-first century are vast improvements and the enhancement of availability of technologies such as cellular phones and text messaging both in wealthy and developing countries (Pew Research Center, 2011). Utilizing these advancements in technology for multiple tasks and various responsibilities has been beneficial for many individuals. Cell phones specifically have been exceptionally advantageous because they allow for untraceable individuals to be contacted with ease (Self-Brown & Whitaker, 2008b). These cellular devices have been used to contact parents via phone calls or text messaging when they have been inaccessible by all other means. Texting has been a rather newer technology that is being utilized in interventions as well. Therefore, examining technology and honing in on its effects on fathers will be observed in this study as well.

Although some research suggests that information and communication technologies can have negative consequences on the relationships between parents and their children that are in a "connected home" (Shepherd, Arnold, & Gibbs, 2006), other research points to the ways in which advances in technology could improve parent-child relationships (Self-Brown & Whitaker, 2008a; Bigelow, Carta, & Burke-Lefever, 2008; Feil, Baggett, Davis, Sheeber, Landry, Carta, &

Buzhardt's 2008; Calam, Sanders, Miller, & Carmont, 2008). The National Resource Center for Child Welfare Data and Technology (2011) suggests that cellular devices and other mobile technologies could potentially be utilized to offer a wide array of interventions to help families. Although little is known about technology in regards to specifically bridging the gap of paternal involvement in child rearing, various studies have been examining technology in the work with children, families, and parenting in general (Self-Brown & Whitaker, 2008a).

For example, technology has been used to prevent child maltreatment. In one study, cellular phone usage was utilized to enhance the Planned Activities Training intervention. This intervention has five sessions that are intended to improve parent-child interaction in high-risk families. Parent coaches utilized cellular phones to "check-in" with parents involved in this intervention and to ask a series of open-ended questions about the interaction and behaviors of the parents and children. Those parents that participated in this study rated the text messaging and cellular phone usage very highly and thought these were extremely helpful tools during the intervention (Bigelow, Carta, & Burke-Lefever, 2008). This study resulted in a 90% mastery level of the PAT intervention by those high-risk families that completed the program.

The Internet has also been used in interactive training tools for at-risk parents of infants. Participants rated that they were satisfied or very satisfied with this new intervention method that utilized technology to benefit families (Feil, Baggett, Davis, Sheeber, Landry, Carta, and Buzhardt, 2008). These parents felt as though technology was effectively and efficiently benefiting their parenting styles and increasing their knowledge base about child rearing in general. In Calam, Sanders, Miller, and Carmont's study (2008), the investigators explored the effects of technology and media in correlation with preventive parenting interventions. This study looked to improve dysfunctional parenting by utilizing media interventions. With media as

well as other technologies rapidly evolving, this study demonstrates how significant technological interventions can be within this current society.

Although the use of social media is one of the latest trends in the technology realm, this has also been brought up in discussion to be utilized in prevention and intervention programs as well. According to Saunders (2008), social networking technology could potentially be utilized in the child maltreatment field as well as other types of prevention and intervention programs.

All of these aforementioned studies have focused predominantly on mothers. Therefore, little is known specifically about fathers and parenting as it parallels with technology. Technology could possibly positively impact fathers' involvement in child rearing as well as increase their participation in parenting services. Technology may provide a new resource for bridging the gap between fathers and their children. This research is designed to build on the scarce literature available; therefore, the ideology that technology can possibly reduce or eliminate other social issues is promising and should not be disregarded. In this study we asked fathers about their use of technology mainly to understand if it might be a potential approach to reach fathers to deliver parenting information in the future.

Present Study

This study explored fathers' opinions about the parenting information and parenting resources they receive or would like to receive, cultural and spiritual components of child rearing, beliefs about child discipline within their communities, and whether technology can be utilized to lessen the gap and barriers that exist in paternal child rearing. The target population for this study was minority (African American and American Indian/ Alaska Native) fathers' and their opinions on various parenting practices within their own communities. This study utilized a qualitative method and was intended to be exploratory in design. Through this study, researchers

sought out answers in regards to gaps and barriers that currently exist for paternal child rearing and how to eliminate those obstacles in today's modern and ever-changing society.

Methods

Sample

Multiple focus groups (N=6) of male participants (N=32) were conducted. In order to participate in the group discussions, all males had to be directly or indirectly involved in some aspect of child rearing. In order to be inclusive of all family configurations, involvement in child rearing was defined broadly to include involvement in parenting children to whom one was not related or parenting one's biological nonresidential children. Demographic statistics for the various participants in all six focus groups are illustrated in Table 1. However, one individual did not provide responses to many of the questions on the demographic survey, therefore, some information is missing in the table. Participants ranged in age from 20-63. All participants recruited from the church setting self-identified as "Black/African American". Four of the participants recruited from the single non-profit social service agency identified as either "White American", or "Multiracial: Native/White, or Native American/American Indian", and two identified as "Other: Native American/American Indian" as well. The individual that identified with their culture being "White American" also identified that their spirituality was categorized as "Native American/American Indian". Therefore, some individuals interpreted culture and spirituality as being one component and others identified that their culture and spirituality were two entirely different components. The majority of the participants identified as having a "college degree or higher", "employed and working full-time" as well as earning and income "greater than \$60,000". More than half of the participants were married and approximately 90% of the participants had children; of the 90% that had children, just over half of them lived with

their children and were the primary caregiver as well. For a complete list of demographic characteristics, please see Table 1.

Procedures

This cross-sectional study employed a qualitative methodology with data collected in a semi-structured focus group format using a convenience sampling procedure. A semi-structure format allows for a true exploratory study to be conducted. Semi-structured interviews are able to provide a loose structure whereby researchers are able to gather their originally intended data as well as gain incite on new innovative ideas and information from participants that were not initially intended by the researchers. Focus groups were utilized in this study because they allowed the researchers to understand individual views and opinions as well as entire group ideology (Massey, 2011). This allowed for a more thorough examination of the perspectives and opinions of fathers. This method was considered appropriate because the study was exploratory in nature and sought to identify additional questions to form future hypotheses.

The men who participated in this study were recruited from one church and one social service agency in metropolitan Detroit. There were multiple strategies utilized for recruiting male participants for the five focus groups conducted in a church setting. A male research assistant who was also a member of the church sent email messages to fellow male congregants and made announcements during Sunday morning services soliciting men 18 years of age and older. Additionally, flyers were posted throughout the church. However, most of the recruiting was by word of mouth. The recruiters advised potential participants that they were being recruited for a focus group discussion about fatherhood and that they could forward the information to anyone that qualified as well.

The sixth and final focus group was conducted in partnership with the parenting program coordinator and an intern from a local family service agency to determine if any males at their organization were interested in participating in a father focus group. Flyers were posted at the agency and were distributed at organizational events. Interested males who contacted the research team were provided with more detailed information about the study. Researchers encouraged potential participants to forward the information to other men they felt qualified as well.

At each of the six focus groups, the lead researcher introduced the purpose of the study, answered participants' questions, and provided participants with a consent form detailing the information of the focus group. Both African American and White males facilitated the focus group sessions. These group facilitators were recruited, trained, and paid for the duration of the group sessions. Either one or two group facilitators led each group. Focus group discussions lasted approximately 1-1.5 hours. All focus group discussions were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The Wayne State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved all recruitment materials and the focus group semi-structured interview protocol.

These discussions were organized around ten semi-structured questions that queried fathers' opinions on parenting resources available, fathers' beliefs about parenting behaviors, their use of different types of discipline, their access to parenting resources in the community, their sources of parenting information (i.e., pastors, pediatricians, other male mentors), and fathers' perception of how culture influences their parenting, and their perception of whether technology-based approaches should be used to reach them in the community. Facilitators ensured accuracy of the data by frequently asking participants to clarify statements individuals made throughout the discussions. Once the group discussion was concluded, all the participants

filled out the Demographic and Technology survey (see tables 1 and 2 for data) and were given a \$20 gift card to thank them for the time spent participating in the study.

Data Analysis

All six focus group sessions were recorded, transcribed verbatim, analyzed for common themes (i.e., thematic analysis), and then coded to reflect those common themes (i.e., content coded). In the thematic analysis the author used the semi-structured focus group questionnaire as a guideline (see appendix A) and read each transcript at least four times. An exhaustive and comprehensive list of themes was created independently for each focus group and each question. Themes across the focus groups were compared and condensed to develop a set of content codes. During the content coding process, additional categories of themes emerged separate from the original questions. Two new additional questions that merged from the data included “What are some specific ways that men that don’t live in the home can stay involved in raising the child and in disciplining the child?” and “How would you, or any of you, use social media or try to find information on the internet or using your smart phones for instance to find information, or even to keep up with the children?” For the final focus group, various questions pertaining to culture, spirituality, cultural competence as well as whether or not fathers were currently participating in services, was added due to some of the themes that presented themselves in the first five focus groups (see appendix A).

The transcriptions were manually content coded and uploaded into NVivo (QSR International, 2008) software and individually coded using the established codes and sub-codes (referred to as “parent nodes” in the NVivo software). The researcher read each transcript multiple times to distinguish recurrent themes in order to identify whether there were common beliefs and opinions across the participants. Utilizing NVivo, the researcher was able to extract

specific nodes pertaining to key themes established throughout all six transcripts. Although themes pertaining to the anticipated exploratory topic existed, many additional themes presented themselves as well.

Results

Analysis indicated four major themes: (1) parenting, (2) discipline, (3) culture and spirituality, and (4) technology. Although the six focus group discussions centered on relatively similar themes, the sixth group was asked more specific questions pertaining to culture and spirituality, and thus culture and spirituality emerged more often in this group.

Within the first and most predominate theme of parenting, there were numerous sub-themes that emerged such as learning about parenting from family members, why fathers parent their children, parenting partnerships, and why fathers wanted specialized parenting classes that were targeted for them. From all six of the focus groups, receiving parenting information from a family member was mentioned a total of thirty times. One-third of these men received most of their parenting information from a male in their family. Many men stressed that only “male” role models could mentor other young males. They stated that if fathers were not present in their lives while being raised, they looked to other male role models such as clergymen, coaches, grandfathers, neighbors, and other various male community leaders.

The fathers in these focus groups also stated that they believed that father involvement in the child rearing process was crucial for their children for many reasons. However, the primary reason these fathers stated they wanted to be involved in paternal child rearing was to protect and guide their children. One African American father stated:

...We need to show him how to be raised so that he can raise his children when they grow up as well. And too we talked about-I don't want my son have to go off (into the

world) I want him to know what's right, what's wrong because I'm trying to prevent him from becoming a statistic.

Twelve other participants concurred with responses similar to the aforementioned reaction.

Another participant stated:

It's not hard to walk away so... You try to talk to them and teach 'em life lessons because we learned life and that's one of the things we do as parents is try to pass down the things that we learned the hard way [so] it won't be so hard for them.

Fathers discussed why they wanted to be part of the child rearing process; fathers from three out of the six focus groups discussed co-parenting and stressed the importance of children having both parents. When it came to disciplining and child rearing in general, fathers from one focus group stated, "Women are too emotional". An additional father stressed the significance of co-parenting by stating:

I think both parents should be involved. In a way there is no back and forth. It's said. It's set in stone. It's what is gonna happen. There is no back and forth.

The subsequent sub-theme that emerged was to the idea of parenting classes for men. A few men stated that they were not comfortable taking classes with women for various reasons.

One participant stated:

Everybody comes here and we see that we've got no women around, we are sitting around here talking and joking and doing our thing. We have women here, we're watching the words... we're a lot more careful and half of us wouldn't be laughing at all.

They'd be mad.

The next item discussed was whether or not men were participating in any type of parenting class.

A couple participants stated they were, but when prompted to discuss which types of classes,

they stated “this one”, meaning the parenting focus group they were presently involved in. However, a few participants from the family service agency stated that they had attended a class on parenting in the past through that specific agency. The majority of the participants did however state that they were not presently in a parenting class, nor have they attended a parenting class in the past other than Lamaze classes with their significant others. In regards to parenting classes that men were aware of, many fathers stated concerns similar to these: “There are not in my neighborhood” and “Yeah, zero, as far as I can tell”. Many men did state that they would attend classes if they knew they existed.

An additional overarching theme that emerged within the all six of these focus groups was child discipline. Many participants made statements similar to this: “there’s just a lack of discipline these days”. Some fathers emphasized that discipline was not utilized enough and others stated it was not used properly (i.e. inconsistency or parents are not “firm” in their discipline). Regardless of whether or not it was utilized enough, many fathers agreed that discipline was different for all children because all children are different. One father stated, “There is no playbook on being a parent”. Another father stated, “You can’t use a cookie cutter approach on each child, because children think different”.

A particular goal of these focus groups was to gain information about men’s preferred parenting practices, including their use of discipline towards children. We also asked questions about specific to spanking. As such, participants mentioned whooping, spanking, and beating quite commonly - approximately fifty times throughout the focus groups. Primarily within the African American group discussions, whooping, spanking, and beating was mentioned most of all types of discipline. However, half of those references also highlighted that physical discipline was not always effective and was not something that was utilized frequently. Spanking was not

deemed an appropriate form of discipline within the Native American/Alaska Native group discussion. Fathers in all of the six focus groups stated “Taking things away” from their children was an effective discipline option. Some examples of this are taking away video games, toys, T.V., not being able to shop, shortening curfew, losing other privileges they enjoy, taking the car, and taking away allowance. These fathers all emphasized that with modern technology and society moving forward, children perceived losing tangibles as a much more extreme consequence than physical discipline.

The next theme that emerged within most of the focus groups pertained to culture and spirituality. Although only focus group six was asked specific questions relevant to culture and spirituality and potential correlations with paternal child rearing, culture and spirituality was still a prevalent theme that emerged in many of the focus groups. Many participants in the focus group from the family service agency stated that culture did impact their child rearing. One participant stated, “Basically just living the culture. Put the culture into your daily life. Doing things that revolve around your culture”. Other participants stated that they enjoyed bringing their children around cultural practices, such as POW Wows, social gatherings, dances, and the Native American Indian Association (NAIA).

Fathers from the first five focus groups mentioned culture but not in the same context. A few fathers stated that parenting classes were frowned upon in the African American community. Some men also stressed that they were uncertain that parenting classes would be offered from a culturally competent perspective. One man in particular stated:

Well, first of all, I’ve never heard of another black man that’s been involved in it. I’m quite sure that there has been, but I’ve never heard friends or acquaintances mention it.
.... I might be reluctant to seek out that kind of assistance because I’m not sure that my

brother here is going to be in there to give me some insight from a black person's perspective. And I think you all know what I'm saying.

Many individuals in these groups stressed that raising children in African American communities was extremely different than raising children in Caucasian communities.

Fathers from all of the focus groups mentioned religion and spirituality in one way or another. A father from the sixth focus group emphasized that religion and spirituality was embedded in their parenting style. He stated:

Yeah I think like everyone the same. It's there all the time. It's part in one way or another. To me it's all about being in balance. The creator gave everyone instructions. All the different tribes got their teachings/ instructions on how things were supposed to be done. The creator gave his teachings to all the Europeans too. So he was like here are your instructions and follow the rules.

Many of the other fathers in this group agreed with this statement. However, some of the fathers addressed culture and spirituality as one in the same thing. Some men identified that being Native American/American Indian was both their religion and culture and was a strong part of who they were and how they parented. African American fathers emphasized that "church", "the word of God", "the Bible" and "religious structure" all play a crucial part in their child rearing and the child rearing of those within their communities.

The final theme that emerged throughout the six focus group discussions was that of "Technology". Throughout all of the focus groups, fathers emphasized that communication between their children was key to the child rearing process. Many participants stated that in order to maintain communication between their children, they utilize modern technology such as emails, Facebook, Skype and text messaging. Participants have stated that technology is

important to their child rearing because it allows for them to be involved when they are non-residential fathers. One father stated, “I text my daughter all the time”. However, not all fathers utilized technologies such as Twitter or Facebook. Four participants made statements like: “I’ll be honest with you, I’m not going to Twitter or Facebook nothing”.

A few fathers stated that they utilize TV personalities such as Oprah or Dr. Phil and online material for parenting information. When asked whether or not technology could be a useful tool for parenting information, many fathers were surprisingly open to this idea. One participant stated, “I think so; technology, I’m all for it, there is effective ways of using it. The All Pro dad that I spoke of earlier, I follow that on Facebook”. However, some participants were also cautious when answering this question. Some stated responses similar to this, “I think it could be...” and “If you partner up with the right companies”. In two of the focus groups fathers also stated that they thought technology could be a useful tool for services only if it was something used to introduce or advertise a class or resource. One father stated, “Good that you can have the social media to get the word out about different seminars or something like that, but I think that’s still, it still needs to be a face-to-face, one-on-one type of thing”. Many fathers seemed to agree with this statement as well.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to explore fathers’ perspectives and opinions about the parenting information and parenting resources they receive or would like to receive, cultural and spiritual components of child rearing, beliefs about child discipline within their communities, and whether technology can be utilized to lessen the gap and barriers that exist in paternal child rearing. This study sought to provide fathers and father figures with an opportunity to present their opinions concerning parenting resources and practices with a focus also on the cultural

aspects of parenting and with questions that examined technology. Without having to abide by a strict and structured interview, these participants expressed multiple concerns and issues from their perspective of fathers caring for children in an urban environment.

As studies have concluded in the past, not many parenting resources for fathers currently exist, and if they do, they are not advertised well (Bayley, 2009). The majority of the fathers in this study were not presently involved in parenting services and did not receive much parenting information in the past. Their preferred method of parenting information was from many sources other than family members and by word of mouth. This is consistent with another study that interviewed Early Head Start fathers, which suggested that fathers feel more comfortable around their friends and family members, and particularly other male peers (Raikes et al., 2002). Like the suggestions made in Raikes et al. (2002), existing interventions should be tailored to involve more paternal participation in programs. For example, hiring more male facilitators to provide services could increase involvement in father-targeted parenting classes. Another option is to work within a community and recruit in a way that will engage mothers as well as fathers, perhaps by suggesting to mothers that they can include their partner or their child's father in various programs being offered as well. Being culturally cognizant that both residential and nonresidential fathers may need referrals as well as additional resources or services besides the parenting class, is highlighted in this study as well.

Many fathers seemed to get their parenting resources from family members or friends. Consequently much of what they knew about parenting was passed on from one generation to the other or learned from a relative, not researched data and evidence-based practice. None of these fathers seemed to feel as though they lacked parenting knowledge. However, similar to Roy and Dyson's (2010) study, many of the men in this present study emphasized that they would have

liked and still would be keen on participating in father specific parenting resources and trainings. Father specific meaning that they would like to have parenting classes specifically for fathers only. These fathers stressed that they did not feel comfortable around women and would appreciate their own learning environment in which they could feel at ease while learning about child rearing. In addition, they suggested more father friendly programs such as activities and outings with fathers and children, or peer father mentor programs rather than traditional, didactic parenting courses to deliver parenting information.

An additional theme that emerged was the importance of discipline. Participants noted what they thought were effective and ineffective forms of discipline. The most effective and most significant form of discipline that emerged through these discussions was “taking things away”. Similar to other studies, this shows that fathers have been utilizing and have learned responsible parenting practices (Lee, Yelick, Brisebois, & Banks, 2011). Many fathers in this study agreed that times were changing, and taking their children’s most prized possessions was the most effective way to discipline their children. However, African American fathers in particular emphasized that spanking or physical discipline and timeouts were commonly utilized in their community as well. Fathers in this study noted that children were becoming more difficult to discipline each day, and that there was no single correct way to discipline their children. Fathers appeared to be at a loss for direction in how to properly discipline their children. Perhaps additional parent training sessions could provide fathers within this community more effective alternatives to discipline their children rather than physical aggression.

Culture and spirituality also emerged as important themes, especially in the groups where fathers were specifically asked about the role of culture and spirituality in their parenting. Some participants felt that culture and spirituality played some sort of role in their method of paternal

child rearing. However, it appeared that many also felt that their child rearing practices came from the way they were raised; which did not necessarily always have something to do with their cultural upbringings. Similar to the literature in this culture, most individuals that self-identified as Native Americans/ American Indians or Alaska Native, stated that culture positively impacted their child rearing practices (Edwards & Edwards, 2003; Snipp & Saraff, 2011). Although culture was mentioned within the African American focus groups, it did not seem to play as large of a role with the African American fathers. However, similar to the literature, spirituality did seem to play a great role within both the African American and American Indian groups (Billingsley & Caldwell, 1991; Locust, 1988). The American Indian group mentioned “the creator” and spirituality in general a vast amount of times throughout the session. Additionally, the African American fathers that participated mentioned the church, the bible, God, and made various other spiritual references. Although the additional groups of African American’s were recruited from a church, African Americans in general do tend to be close to their churches or congregations as opposed to other races. Perhaps creating more spiritual or culture programs or creating programs that are delivered in spiritual settings such as churches, could greatly benefit some of these communities. An example of a program that could be utilized is the Fathers and Sons Program (Caldwell, Rafferty, Reischl, De Loney, & Brooks, 2010). This program focused on the cultural issues within the African American community and had much positive feedback from those fathers that utilized the program. This study supports the idea that perhaps there could be more positive associations between culture or spirituality and paternal child rearing.

Technology was also discussed, in part because we hoped to gain a better understanding of how and when technology might be used to deliver parenting information to fathers. Similar to studies of mothers and their technology utilization, many fathers in this study also agreed with

the idea to utilize technology to increase paternal involvement in child rearing (Self-Brown & Whitaker, 2008a; Self-Brown & Whitaker, 2008b; Bigelow, Carta, & Burke-Lefever, 2008; Feil, Baggett, Davis, Sheeber, Landry, Carta, & Buzhardt's 2008; Calam, Sanders, Miller, & Carmont, 2008). However, these fathers emphasized that parenting and parenting education was something that must be done in a personal setting, using face-to-face instruction methods as opposed to primary methods of social media or technology. As Saunders (2008) suggested, and from the results of this study, utilizing technology such as social media to advertise paternal parenting resources could be best used to inform and recruit more fathers for participation in some of the scarce parenting programs and resources that do currently exist. An additional idea could be creating an application on smart phones to alert fathers about certain developmental stages in their children's lives, similar to those used by women during pregnancy. Smart phones could also be utilized in ways such as the aforementioned studies pertaining to at-risk parents and their children for reminders and checking in with parent coaches/mentors or human service workers (Bigelow, Carta, & Burke-Lefever, 2008). Little is currently known on the impacts of technology on paternal child rearing. However, this study alludes to the possibility of a new way of involving fathers in the child rearing process. It also provides more insight on how to approach this research area in the future. The possibilities with modern technology are endless. However, in order to utilize technology most efficiently and effectively, more researchers must begin asking fathers what they expect out of technology as a potential parenting resource.

Limitations

It is important to consider study limitations. As with many studies that use focus groups or other qualitative methods, the sample size was relatively small (N=32). A small sample size does not allow for generalizing of the results for the target population, which could pose as a

great limitation to any study. Additionally, focus groups should have 6-12 participants per group (Massey, 2011). However, these focus groups only had 5 and 6 participants per group.

Another limitation is that only fathers that consider themselves to already be involved in some type of service or in their children's lives participated in this study. Perhaps an even larger limitation is the idea that there is not one succinct way to define 'involvement', therefore, it is left to individual interpretation. Society may believe that fathers are not 'involved' in their children's lives; however, some fathers may feel as though they are being involved above and beyond their own expectations.

Since this was an exploratory study that employed a convenience sampling approach, generalizations from this sample should not be made (i.e. all fathers of one race feel one specific way about fatherhood). Although this study aimed to target a wide range of cultures and minority groups, only two types of minority groups were essentially examined. Only one of the groups examined was diversified from the rest of the primarily African American focus groups. The majority of this separate group identified as Native American or American Indian/Alaska Native. The limitation that presented itself was that the lack of diversity of these focus groups could not be generalized for all people of those cultures. This is also true of the other demographic characteristics that are presented in Table 1 (i.e. socioeconomic status, education level).

An additional limitation was the type of questions being asked throughout the group discussion. This focus group was purposefully semi-structured, however at times; these questions did not necessarily bring out specific responses that were inquired. An example of these types of vague questions was the culture and spirituality question set. The researchers did not specifically ask about the role of culture in the fathers' own upbringing. Therefore, whether or not culture

and spirituality were specifically part of their childhood and carried out into their current child rearing practices could not always be determined.

Another limitation that became known was the transcription process. On each transcription, there was no way of distinguishing one participant from the next. Names were not provided on the transcripts; therefore, it was difficult to accurately state whether or not all men or most of the men agreed with a particular point. This could have also impacted the results of this study by skewing the data either negatively or positively. However, this is the chance that researchers must take when utilizing focus groups as the primary research method.

Although focus groups are efficient and effective, group settings inherently run the risk of people's responses conforming to what the group defines as socially acceptable. There was also one small variation in the questions that were asked, such that members who were recruited from the church setting were not explicitly asked about culture or spirituality. When comparing data among similar focus groups, questions should be as similar as possible in order to extract the most accurate themes for all focus groups.

Implications for Future Research

Although this study explored the possibility of some associations between father involvement, culture and spirituality, and technology utilization, more research is needed. Perhaps employing a mixed methods procedure would more accurately address these issues and the aforementioned limitations of this study as well. For example, conducting quantitative forms of research such as surveys, for fathers that participate in parenting services can provide measurable evidence for future researchers to build on. In addition, having these same fathers participate in qualitative forms of research such as interviewing as well as focus group discussions can provide innovative exploratory information for future research as well. Therefore,

utilizing a mixed methods approach could be extremely advantageous when working with this target population. Larger sample sizes as well as several more culturally and spiritually diverse focus groups should also be utilized in future research studies. Additional questions pertaining to specific information about culture and spirituality and fathers' upbringings should also be inquired during these discussions as well.

Many more possibilities of utilizing technology for an increase in father involvement should be explored in the future. With the significant rise in technology usage as well as the noteworthy amount of responses from fathers in these focus groups promoting the idea of utilizing technology for father involvement, more studies pertaining to fathers and technology should be conducted in the near future. Perhaps even creating more specific questions addressing fathers and the potential of utilizing technology for more father involvement could be advantageous in future research studies as well (i.e. potentially creating smart phone applications for fathers). Although this exploratory study only examined a relatively small portion of ideologies surrounding paternal involvement in child rearing, implications for future research appears to be promising.

APPENDIX A

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS SEPARATED BY MAIN THEMES

- Parenting Information (10 Minutes)***
1. Where do men in your community [neighborhood] get information or advice about parenting and how to take care of children?
 - a. What kind of parenting information do you get from these sources?
 - b. Where else do you or other men you know get parenting information from?
 - c. If you had a parenting question or issue, who would you ask?
- Culture/Spirituality (5 Minutes)***
2. Explain in your own words, if culture is involved in your parenting style? How?
 - a. Is religion or spirituality involved in your parenting style? How?
 - b. What would it look like or mean to have more culturally appropriate services?
- Fathering Discipline (30 Minutes)***
3. What are common disciplinary practices that fathers in your community/culture use?
 - a. What are some disciplinary practices that are not frequently used by the fathers in your community? Why or why not?
 4. Do you think it's important for fathers to be involved in child discipline? Why or why not?
 5. In your opinion, what are effective ways for a father to discipline a child?
 6. In your opinion, what are ineffective ways for a father to discipline a child?
- Parenting Programs/Services (10 Minutes)***
7. Are you receiving services from any parenting classes now?
 - a. If so, which ones?
 8. Are you aware of any parenting programs in your community that are specifically for fathers?
 - a. What about other parenting programs that may not be specifically for fathers but you or other fathers might consider participating in anyway?
 - b. What kind of parenting programs would be of interest to you?
- Technology (10 Minutes)***
9. Do you have a smart phone? If so, how often do you use your smart phone to access the Internet?

- a. About how many text messages do you send each day?
10. Do you think that smart phones, twitter, or social media like Facebook would be an effective way to reach fathers? Why or why not?

Note: Question 2 and Question 7 were added for the final focus group discussion, but were not included in the first five focus groups.

APPENDIX B

Table 1.

Father Focus Group Characteristics and Demographic Data

Characteristic	Range	Average	Median
Age	20-63	42.25	42
		N	Percent
Race/ethnicity			
Black/African American		26	78.8
White American		1	3.0
Multiracial: Native/White		2	6.1
Other: Native American/American Indian/Alaska Native		2	6.1
Religion/Spirituality			
Catholic		1	25.0
Native/Christian		1	25.0
Native American/American Indian/Alaska Native		2	50.0
Education			
High school diploma or GED		4	12.9
Some College		9	29.0
Associates Degree		2	6.5
College degree or higher		16	51.6
Employment Status			
Unemployed		4	13.8
Employed working part-time		2	6.9
Employed working full-time		23	79.3
Income			
0-\$9999		3	9.7
\$10000-\$19999		4	12.9
\$20000-\$29999		3	9.7
\$30000-\$39999		4	12.9
\$40000-\$49999		2	6.5
\$50000-\$59999		1	3.2
Greater than \$60000		14	45.2
Relationship Status			
Single		7	22.6
Living with partner		1	3.2
Married		19	61.3
Divorced		4	12.9
Have Children?			
No		4	12.5
Yes		28	87.5

How many Children?		
1	4	14.3
2	17	60.7
3	4	14.3
4	3	10.7
Currently live with children?		
No	14	43.8
Yes	18	56.3
How many children do you live with?		
1	4	22.2
2	10	55.6
3	4	22.2
Are you the Primary Caregiver to any children?		
No	13	41.9
Yes	18	58.1

Note: This table depicts the data that was inquired for the demographic survey. Not all participants answered each demographic question. The Religion/Spirituality demographic question was added to the last focus group at the Family Service agency and was left in an open-ended format.

Table 2.

Technology Survey

Questions	N	Percent
Do you have a cell phone?		
No	1	3.1
Yes	31	96.9
If you have a cell phone is it a smart phone, like an iPhone or a Droid?		
No	12	37.5
Yes	20	62.5
Do you use a cell phone or smart phone for text messaging?		
No	1	3.1
Yes	31	96.9
Please estimate how many times per day you send text messages:		
0	1	3.1
1-10	17	53.1
11-20	4	12.5
21-30	2	6.3
30+	8	25.0
Have you ever used a cell phone or smart phone to view a video, for example on Youtube?		
No	13	40.6
Yes	19	59.4
Have you ever used a cell phone or smart phone to access the Internet?		
No	4	12.5
Yes	28	87.5
Have you ever used a smart phone "app" like on an iPhone or Droid?		
No	9	28.1
Yes	23	71.9
Do you think text messaging or smart phone technology would be an effective way to reach men to inform them about future focus groups?		
No	3	9.4
Yes	29	90.6
Do you think text messaging or smart phone technology would be an effective way for men to receive parenting information?		
No	7	21.9
Yes	25	78.1

Note: This technology survey was provided to all participants (N=32) to fill out simultaneously with the demographic survey.

APPENDIX C

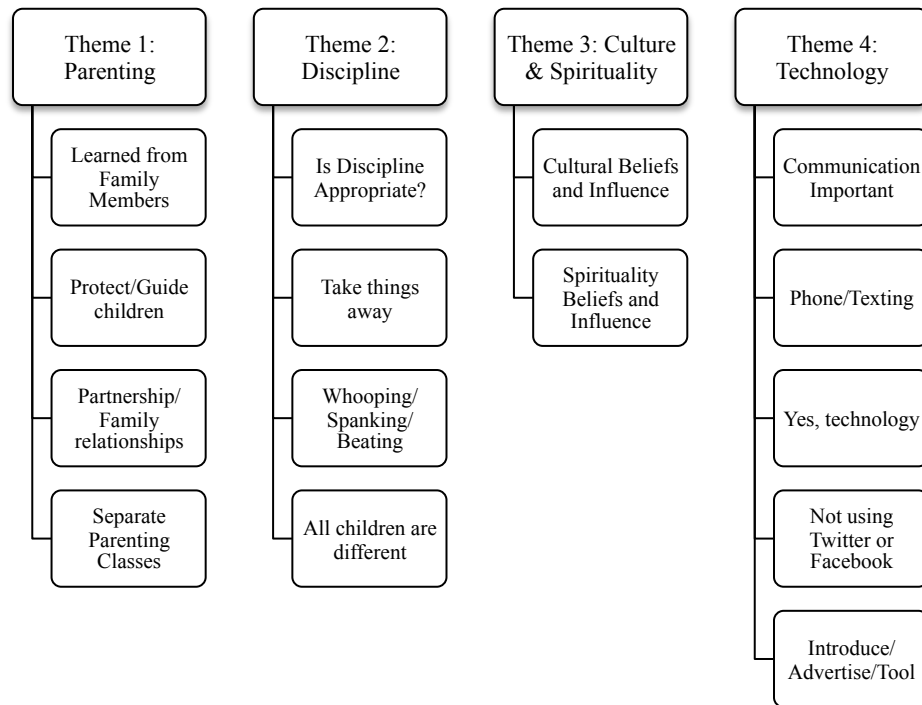
Figure 1 Overall Themes of Father Focus Groups


Figure 1. This figure represents the four major overarching themes of the father focus groups. Each theme has sub-themes that are also present within these focus groups.

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ABSTRACT**FATHERS' OPINIONS CONCERNING PARENTING RESOURCES AND PRACTICES:
AN EXPLORATION OF CULTURAL COMPONENTS AND TECHNOLOGY ON
PARENTING**

by

VALENTINA DJELAJ**May 2012****Advisor:** Dr. Shawna J. Lee**Major:** Social Work**Degree:** Master of Social Work

Fathers' involvement in child rearing is extremely beneficial to children. However, there are currently many barriers that exist, which do not allocate fathers to receive specific parental resources. For decades, fathers admit needing services and resources but are often denied for various reasons.

This study explored fathers' opinions about the parenting information and parenting resources they receive or would like to receive, cultural and spiritual components of child rearing within their communities, and whether technology can be utilized to lessen the gap and barriers that exist in paternal child rearing.

In this study, six semi-structured father-centered focus groups (N=32) were conducted and ran for approximately 1-1½ hours. These discussions were then transcribed, content coded, and analyzed. Themes surrounding culture and spirituality as well as utilizing technology for paternal child rearing were prevalent throughout these focus groups, as well as additional and unintentional themes. Implications for future research were also discussed.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

Graduate school has been an extensive but rewarding journey. However, completing this thesis has been gratifying in and of itself. Through this journey as well as working for the Wayne State University Center for Social Work Practice and Policy Research I have established that research is one of my primary callings in the field of Social Work. Throughout my lifetime I have come across numerous unanswered questions pertaining to social issues throughout the world. After embarking on this research experience I have concluded that it is actually possible to ‘answer’ my unanswered questions utilizing research tools and practices. Although this thesis is the first major input of my research career, it is certainly significant to me and will not be the last of my many future research contributions.